

ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

Race, Blood, and Soil: Viscount Lymington and Britain's Homegrown Agrarian Fascism

Kian Aspinall 

University of Cambridge, Katoomba, Australia
Email: kianaspinnall2@gmail.com

Abstract

In the late 1930s Viscount Lymington—born Gerard Wallop, and from 1943 the 9th Earl of Portsmouth—emerged as a vocal champion of an “authentically English expression of fascism” rooted in the countryside and agriculture. An aristocrat and Conservative member of Parliament (MP; 1929–1934) turned dissident, Lymington railed against the perceived decline of Britain and the empire from an agrarian vantage point. His most famous work, *Famine in England*, published in 1938, warned that Britain's overreliance on imported food and its neglect of the land had pushed the nation to the brink of catastrophe. On the surface, this text was a passionate call for agricultural revival in the face of looming war. Yet at its core, *Famine in England* was far more than a rural policy manifesto. It was a statement of fascist blood and soil philosophy in which race operated as the grammatical structure ordering ideas of food, land, and national renewal. In Lymington's vision, the health of the soil and the health of the “British race” were inextricably entwined. Saving one meant the salvation of the other. Race, in other words, was the invisible architecture—the grammar—underlying his prescriptions for Britain's agrarian crisis.

Introduction

Graham Macklin has noted “a glaring structural imbalance within the historiography of British fascism itself, which is virtually synonymous with the politics and personality of Oswald Mosley.”¹ This is because studies of British fascism have focused largely on what Richard Thurlow calls its most “mature” form, the British Union of Fascists (BUF).² Because it has focused on the BUF, this work has tended to cast British fascism as an imitation of continental and thus foreign political movements. Recent scholarship, however, particularly the work of Liam Liburd, has reoriented our understanding of British fascism by emphasizing the role of white supremacy and imperial ideologies within the homegrown movement.³ It has thus forced a reconsideration of how fascist ideas germinated on home

¹ Graham Macklin, *Failed Fuhrers: A History of Britain's Extreme Right* (Routledge, 2020), 4.

² Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (I. B. Tauris, 1998), 61.

³ Marc Matera, Radhika Natarajan, Kennetta Hammond Perry, Camilla Schofield and Rob Waters, “Introduction: Marking Race in Twentieth Century British History,” *Twentieth Century British History* 34, no. 3 (2023): 407–14; Liam Liburd, “The Politics of Race and the Future of British Political History,” *The Political Quarterly* 94, no. 2 (2023): 244–49; Liam Liburd, “Turn Again, Fascist Studies: New Perspectives on British Fascism,” *Twentieth Century British History* 32, no. 3 (2021): 462–66; Liam Liburd, “The Lost Pillar of British Political Culture: Black Constructions of British Fascism, 1930s–1970s,” *Journal of British Studies* 64 (2025): 1–21.

terrain and what solutions they purported to offer to specifically British national and imperial problems. This turn towards understanding the role of race within British fascism requires not only revisiting the movement's ideologies but also its influencers and ideologues, recentering historical actors who have been obscured by the long shadow cast by Oswald Mosley.

Viscount Lymington⁴ rarely figures as a central player in histories of the British fascist movement. Although he founded several organizations, none was intent on standing for Parliament, unlike Mosley's BUF. Lymington's cultural fascism, with its focus on mystical qualities of leadership, British agriculture, and racial renewal, was pursued through other forms. His 1938 text *Famine in England* was influential.⁵ It was well received upon publication, attracting the attention not only of other fascist leaders and thinkers but also of prominent lords, politicians, agriculturalists, academics, and even the BBC. Much more than merely an eccentric outlier, a nostalgist, or an "extremely interesting" but marginal character,⁶ Lymington was a significant node in a wider network of British fascist, radical Right agrarian, and established political thought.

Martin Pugh and Dan Stone have identified Lymington as peddling an "indigenous" variant of fascism, one drawing on British national and imperial traditions of aristocratic conservatism.⁷ Philip Conford, the author of the most extensive biographical study of Lymington to date, similarly situates him within traditions of agricultural revival and reactionary rural anti-modernism, noting that *Famine in England* "sealed his reputation" as an expert on pressing agrarian issues.⁸ In tracing continuities between the environmental politics of the Right during the interwar and postwar periods, Beth Bhargava has acknowledged that for Lymington, "racism, the doctrine of overpopulation, and settler colonialism sat on the same ideological continuum."⁹ That racial ideology was the axial principle around which Lymington's agrarian concerns were structured, and the ramifications of this for a fuller understanding of British fascism, however, have not been fully explored. Written in the context of economic depression, imperial anxieties, and rural collapse, *Famine in England* constructed a potent and influential narrative: that English land, English blood, and English leadership must be reintegrated to avert national disaster. His solution to Britain's crisis was not a departure from Britain's imperial-racial order, but an extreme reconfiguration of it—a bid to "restore" an imagined racial hierarchy, the basis of which was land, nation, and empire. Lymington's career exemplifies how fascism in Britain was less an alien import than a radicalization of domestic traditions, a reorganization of empire's racial hierarchies for domestic use. Britain's fascism was in effect an imperial logic turned inward.¹⁰

⁴ Martin Pugh, "Hurrah for the Blackshirts": *Fascists and Fascism in Britain Between the Wars* (Pimlico, 2006), 71.

⁵ Viscount Lymington, *Famine in England* (Witherby, 1938).

⁶ Bernhard Dietz, *Neo-Tories: The Revolt of British Conservatives against Democracy and Political Modernity, 1929–1939*, (trans.) Ian Copestake (Bloomsbury, 2012), 24.

⁷ Pugh, "Hurrah for the Blackshirts", 71–73; Dan Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain, 1933:1939: Before War and Holocaust* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 159.

⁸ Philip Conford, "Organic Society: Agriculture and Radical Politics in the Career of Gerard Wallop, Ninth Earl of Portsmouth (1898–1984)," *The Agricultural History Review* 53, no.1 (2005): 78–96.

⁹ Beth Bhargava, "The National Front and Environmental Politics, 1967–90," *Modern British History* 36, no. 1 (2025): 1–17, at 2.

¹⁰ This accords with recent calls to consider Black radical theses on fascism, which often portrayed fascism as imperial practice turned inward to the metropole or emerging organically through the racial state itself. For more, see Alberto Toscano, "Incipient Fascism: Black Radical Perspectives," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 23, no. 1 (2021): 1–11.

Agrarian Crisis and Aristocratic Revolt

Lymington's politics were rooted in the soil. British farming's long decline provided the immediate canvas on which he painted his radical ideas. By the early twentieth century, agriculture in Britain was in steep relative downturn.¹¹ The share of agriculture in Britain's GDP fell from roughly 20 percent in the 1870s to just 7 percent by 1914.¹² Landed estates, once pillars of economic power, saw their revenues and influence wane as "the land was no longer much of a source of wealth" in industrial Britain.¹³ Many among the rural aristocracy felt besieged by this transformation. As one historian notes, the Conservative Party had by the 1920s become "less the party of the land and more the party of property in general."¹⁴ For the landed gentry, this represented a loss of pride and primacy. Even before the First World War, aristocratic discontent had spurred right-wing ruralist movements. Lord Winchilsea's National Agricultural Union (NAU) in the 1890s, for example, campaigned for a patriotic "defence of the national industry of agriculture" and a return to a "traditional rural society" populated by sturdy village communities.¹⁵ The NAU's platform, being anti-urban, protectionist, and suffused with a racist and imperial chauvinism, in many ways anticipated Lymington's later worldview. Such groups testify that the seeds of a racialized "back-to-the-land" politics were present in Britain well before fascism became a named ideology.¹⁶

The dislocations of the First World War and its aftermath intensified these currents. Wartime exigencies had forced Britain to bolster home agriculture, but the return of free trade in the 1920s exposed farmers to brutal global competition. By the interwar years, the UK was heavily dependent on imported food. Between 1920 and 1939, fully 45 percent of the nation's imports by value were foodstuffs. Between 1920 and 1939, if combined with tobacco, food and beverages accounted for 45 percent of UK imports. As Paul Brassley has noted, 1937–38 saw the importation of 76 percent of the nation's wheat supply, 60 percent of its barley, and 81 percent of its sugar. Half of the UK's beef, "62 per cent of mutton, 53 per cent of pigmeat, 21 per cent of poultry meat, 91 per cent of butter, 76 per cent of cheese, 39 per cent of eggs and 88 per cent of wool supplies" were all imported.¹⁷

This cheap imported food benefited urban consumers and financiers of imperial trade, but it spelled ruin for domestic agriculture.¹⁸ Grain prices collapsed after 1920, and throughout the 1920s and 1930s farmers endured a continuing agricultural depression.¹⁹ Rural employment plummeted and villages emptied out.²⁰ The "deserted village" emerged as an

¹¹ For extended studies on this topic, see Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside since 1900* (Routledge, 2003); John Martin, *The Development of Modern Agriculture: British Farming since 1931* (Macmillan Press, 2000); Paul Brassley, "Output and Technical Change in Twentieth-Century British Agriculture," *The Agricultural History Review* 48, no. 1 (2000): 60–84.

¹² E. H. H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002), 25.

¹³ Paul Thompson, *The Remaking of Edwardian Society* (Routledge, 1977), 15.

¹⁴ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, 71.

¹⁵ Paul Readman, "Conservatives and the Politics of Land: Winchilsea's National Agricultural Union, 1893–1901," *English Historical Review* 121, no. 490 (2006): 25–69.

¹⁶ Thomas Linehan comments that Oswald Mosley and much of British fascism besides "took up many of the intellectual arguments of the Edwardian radical right." See Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918–39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester, 2000), 17.

¹⁷ Paul Brassley, "British Farming between the Wars," in *The English Countryside between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline?*, ed. Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson (Boydell, 2006), 188. See also Chris Otter, *Diet for a Large Planet: Industrial Britain, Food Systems, and World Ecology* (Chicago, 2020).

¹⁸ Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of the Global Order* (Penguin, 2015), 359; John Beckett and Michael Turner, "Land Reform and the English Land Market, 1880–1925," in *The Land Question in Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman (Palgrave Macmillan, 20120), 219–36.

¹⁹ Howkins, *The Death of Rural England*.

²⁰ Howkins, *The Death of Rural England*, 77.

iconic image. Thus, as the 1930s unfolded, British agriculture appeared both a humanitarian problem, with tens of thousands of farmers bankrupt or barely subsisting, and a strategic vulnerability, with national food security dangerously compromised. The question of how to “reconstruct” British agriculture was thus on the political agenda, engaging not only social reformers but also authoritarian and nationalist thinkers who saw an opportunity to fuse rural crisis with radical right solutions.²¹ Viscount Lymington was one such reformer on the radical right who understood “racial health” and agricultural investment to be inextricably linked. As Philip Conford has argued, Lymington identified that “a substantial section of the population was in poor physical condition and ate food of limited nutritional value.” If the British were to avoid becoming “a nation of sub-standard physical specimens,” Lymington conjectured, “it was literally vital that they should adopt an improved diet.”²²

Viscount Lymington stood at the center of this moment when agrarian crisis met aristocratic revolt.²³ Born Gerard Wallop in 1898 to an old landowning family and raised on a horse ranch in the United States, Lymington fought in the First World War and was later educated at Oxford. Lymington thus inherited both the privileges and the anxieties of the interwar British aristocracy. In the mid-1920s he took over management of the family estate at Farleigh Wallop in Hampshire, gaining a firsthand education in the woes of farming during the Agricultural Depression. He proved a skilled and innovative farmer, experimenting with new techniques on his land, but was also a man imbued with what he considered a feudal sense of duty to the soil and his tenants. In 1929, at just 30 years old, Lymington was elected Conservative MP for Basingstoke. In Parliament, he quickly earned a reputation as an outspoken authority on agricultural policy,²⁴ and as a diehard with a reactionary stripe.

Lymington openly yearned for a pre-democratic social order and believed the decay of Britain had set in with the curbing of monarchical power in 1688. In 1931 he published *Ich Dien: The Tory Path*, a manifesto of sorts for “true” Toryism. There he declared, “Toryism cannot be democratic in the political sense of the word,” condemning mass democracy as anathema to England’s monarchical and hierarchical traditions.²⁵ This ultra-reactionary stance blended high Toryism with a clear anti-democratic streak. Importantly though, this was not uncommon. As Martin J. Wiener has argued, these values did not disappear but rather were “merely put in the closet,” brought out repeatedly in strategic moments throughout the twentieth century.²⁶

Lymington’s first major break with the Conservative leadership came over the issue of tariff reform. He was a fervent protectionist at a time when his party’s establishment, under Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, wavered on imposing tariffs.²⁷ Having lost the 1929 election, this compounded anxiety among Conservatives. In 1930, as Britain’s economic depression deepened, Lymington joined a backbench revolt advocating “Imperial Preference” and steep tariffs to shield British farmers and industry. He found powerful allies outside Parliament: press barons Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Rothermere had launched a high-profile Empire Free Trade campaign, even running their own candidates against

²¹ Dan Stone, “The British Far Right and the Back-to-the-Land Movement,” in *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, ed. Julie V. Gottlieb and Thomas P. Linehan (I. B. Tauris, 2004).

²² Conford, “Organic Society,” 80.

²³ John Beckett and Michael Turner, “Land Reform and the English Land Market, 1880–1925,” in *The Land Question in Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 219–36.

²⁴ A local paper wrote that Lymington held a “high reputation in the House of Commons and in the country as an authority on agriculture”: see *Bucks Herald*, 21 November 1930, 6.

²⁵ Viscount Lymington, *Ich Dien: The Tory Path* (Constable, 1931), 12.

²⁶ Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980* (Cambridge, 1981), 99.

²⁷ E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880–1914* (Routledge, 1995), 11.

official Conservatives on the tariff platform.²⁸ Lymington kept some distance from the newspaper magnates personally, but he wholly endorsed their cause. He wrote scathingly in his diary that Baldwin's indifference to agriculture was "more lamentable than words can say."²⁹ He was shocked to discover Baldwin's ignorance of basic rural issues such as the burden of tithe payments on farmers.³⁰ In late 1930 Lymington took the extraordinary step of speaking in a party meeting in favor of a no-confidence motion against his own party leader, due to Baldwin's free-trade stance. The motion was an overwhelming failure, leaving Lymington isolated and despondent. That evening he scribbled in his journal, "Awful moment."³¹ It was at this juncture, at the end of 1930, that Lymington's trajectory turned decisively toward the radical right.

In December 1930, shortly after his failed rebellion, Lymington met William Sanderson, a figure who for a short time became his mentor in murky radical right politics. Sanderson was a London barrister and fervent anti-Semite who was already active in Britain's shadowy ultra-right circles.³² Sanderson envisioned a transcendence of class conflict and the unity of all Britons in a common racial nationalism. By 1930, Sanderson had founded a quasi-secret group known as the English Mistery (the archaic spelling of "Mystery"), dedicated to an esoteric blend of royalist authoritarianism, rural revival, and anti-Semitism and comprising aristocrats, intellectuals, and army officers bound by a shared loathing of modern democracy. Lymington was immediately captivated, noting in his diary of Sanderson "I like him all the time I see him."³³ As he later reflected, the English Mistery "colored all my political thought" from that point onward.³⁴ He formally joined the Mistery in 1931, effectively allying himself with the growing movement for "organic-fascism" in Britain.³⁵

The English Mistery served as Lymington's bridge from High Toryism to fascism. It preached a return to an idealized "Merrie England" under strong monarchical leadership, with a rigid social hierarchy and "the land" revered as spiritual bedrock.³⁶ Importantly, the Mistery's ideology was explicitly racial and anti-Semitic. Members saw England's ills as stemming from a dilution of Anglo-Saxon blood and the corrupting influence of an "alien" element. Chief among these scapegoats were Jews and cosmopolitan financiers. The group vowed to "eliminate every vested interest."³⁷ They also exalted the rural village

²⁸ For more on this, see Stuart Ball, "The Conservative Party, the Role of the State and the Politics of Protection, c.1918–1932," *History* 96, no. 3 (2011), 280–303; Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2008).

²⁹ The majority of primary sources here have been drawn from the Hampshire Record Office, Winchester, England (hereafter HRO). *Diary of Viscount Lymington*, 4 March 1930, 15M84/5/13/11, HRO.

³⁰ See *Diary of Viscount Lymington*, entries on 20, 21 and 23 March 1930, 15M84/5/13/11, HRO. For a history of tithe in Britain, see John Bulaitis, *The Tithe War in England and Wales, 1881–1936: A Curious Rural Revolt* (Boydell and Brewer, 2024).

³¹ *Diary of Viscount Lymington*, 30–31 October 1930, 15M84/5/13/11, HRO.

³² Sanderson had by this point a history with the British radical right. He was previously a member of the anti-Semitic quasi-mason group, the Order of the Red Rose. In 1912, Sanderson published a text advocating for tariffs and the restoration of "English stock" through the aristocracy. The text was intended for "all who prize the ideals of the British race: To all who believe in the spirit and Character of the English people: And to all who love honor and fair dealing." He insidiously espoused a cleansing of those of "bad stock." Importantly, Sanderson looked to create racial unity and transcend class struggle through racial nationalism. This was a key mechanism of inter-war fascism. In other words, he looked for a "great national revival." See William Sanderson, *The Industrial Crisis* (Siegle, Hille & Co, 1912).

³³ *Diary of Viscount Lymington*, 31 October 1930, 15M84/5/13/11, HRO.

³⁴ Lord Portsmouth, *Knot of Roots* (New American Library, 1965), 126–33.

³⁵ Stone, "The British Far Right," 149.

³⁶ The English Mistery, "Order of 1930," No. 1 (London: The English Mistery, 1930), 15M84/F396, 1, HRO; The English Mistery, "Order of the English Mistery 1930," No. 7 (London: The English Mistery, 1933), 15M84/F396, 1, HRO.

³⁷ The English Mistery, "Order of 1933," No. 8 (London: The English Mistery, 1933), 15M84/F400, HRO.

as the crucible of racial health in contrast to diseased urban centers. Lymington seamlessly fitted in. Within the Mistery, he mingled with notable right-wing intellectuals such as Anthony M. Ludovici, a Nietzschean eugenicist. Ludovici inveighed against “the illegitimate Jew,” the dangers of “indiscriminate cross-breeding,” and sought to restore the aristocracy as the leading body of Britain.³⁸ On this he and Lymington found common cause and they remained close throughout the 1930s. Ludovici’s materials were disseminated regularly throughout the Mistery membership. Ludovici envisioned, along with much of the Mistery (including Lymington), a dire threat to the white race. In one of his texts Ludovici prophesied that this threat would continue until “the best and highest race is in complete possession of the world.”³⁹ The white race, he believed, was destined to rule the world and yet its traditions were being eroded. Ludovici advocated for a particularly sinister response to this threat—the right to, in the words of Dan Stone, “slaughter.”⁴⁰ Ludovici’s eugenic outlook contained within a notion of sacrifice, the elimination of lesser “stocks.” He argued that “a brave and great nation, will not hesitate to abandon all such suicidal notions as homosexuality, heterosexual vice, birth control, infanticide, emasculations” and would “distribute the burden of sacrifice over inferior races, and inferior products in all classes at home.”⁴¹

The Mistery, with its eugenic, reactionary, and racial predilections, connected Lymington to broader fascist currents.⁴² In 1936, for instance, Lymington and Ludovici travelled as Mistery delegates to Berlin, where they met Nazi leaders Heinrich Himmler, Joseph Goebbels, Baldur von Schirach, and Hermann Göring.⁴³ This visit was part of the Mistery’s attempt to cultivate ties with the ascendant Nazi regime, and it surely reinforced Lymington’s favorable view of German fascism. As war loomed, Lymington became an energetic appeaser and Nazi sympathizer, arguing that Britain’s true enemies were not Hitler or Mussolini but the internal forces of decay at home. There was clearly traffic between Lymington and the agricultural strains of Nazism, enhanced by his friendship with the pro-Nazi agriculturalist Rolf Gardiner. Both men were influenced by Nazi discourses of blood and soil, typified in the work of Walther Darré.⁴⁴

By 1933–34, Lymington had grown frustrated with semi-clandestine agitation. He wanted to shape British policy and public opinion more directly. This led to a radical career move. In early 1934, he resigned from Parliament in the midst of debates over reform in India, which he staunchly opposed, walking away from his secure Conservative seat, to devote himself fully to extra-parliamentary activism.⁴⁵ His resignation coincided with an internal crisis in the English Mistery. Lymington had increasingly clashed with Sanderson over strategy and personality. In late 1935 their relationship soured and the following year Lymington dramatically split from the Mistery, taking several of its leading members

³⁸ Anthony Ludovici, *A Defence of Aristocracy: A Textbook for Tories* (London, 1915), 107, 302. See also Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool, 2001).

³⁹ Anthony Ludovici, *Violence, Sacrifice and War* (The English Mistery, 1934), 1–3.

⁴⁰ See also Stone, *Breeding Superman*, 33–61, 115–34.

⁴¹ Ludovici, *Violence, Sacrifice and War*, 15.

⁴² The Mistery’s literature is populated with racial “floating signifiers,” such as “taste,” which they said was “the capacity to choose between good and evil in breeding, diet, habit and direction of energy. In essence it springs from the maintenance of perfect balance of instincts.” See The English Mistery, “Orders of 1933,” No. 3 (London: The English Mistery), 15M84/F397, HRO, 2.

⁴³ Anthony Ludovici, *Confessions of an Anti-Feminist* (San Francisco, 2018), 104–10.

⁴⁴ For a broader view of this, see Dan Stone, “The Ultimate Cross-Cultural Fertilizer”: The Irony of the “Transnational Local in Anglo-German Rural Revivalism,” *European Review of History* 26, no. 6 (2019): 996–1012. See also Corinna Treitel, “Nature and the Nazi Diet,” *Food and Foodways* 17, no. 17 (2009): 139–58; Corinna Treitel, “Triumph of the Till: The Organic Movement’s Nazi past,” *World Policy Journal* 35, no. 2 (2018): 83–87.

⁴⁵ In the process he turned down the position of parliamentary private secretary to Minister of Agriculture Walter Elliot: Lord Portsmouth, *Knot of Roots*, 110–20.

(including Ludovici) with him. Almost immediately he formed a successor organization, the English Array, through which he hoped to advance his vision of a regenerated England.

Across several essays and manifestos for the English Array, Lymington laid out a program that was at once mystical and concrete. He described his royalism as a “practical mysticism” grounded in the monarch’s “pure bloodline” and the ancient organic unity of king and people.⁴⁶ It looked to form resistance to “attacks on our national strength,” invigorate “loyal service to king and country,” ensuring the “survival of the best types of Englishmen,” and to preserve the racial “identity of the nation.”⁴⁷ The Array’s platform called for authoritarian corporatist governance of the economy (especially agriculture), the reversal of urbanization, and the inculcation of a fierce patriotic consciousness in the populace. In one circular, Lymington expounded that the monarch and aristocracy must resume their roles as paternal guardians of the nation, binding all classes together in the service of national resurgence.⁴⁸ According to Lymington, liberal democracy had betrayed the English folk and only a hierarchical, spiritually united society could save the country.⁴⁹

In many ways, the Array was a continuation of the Mistery, but was molded more directly by Lymington. It dispelled much of the mysticism of the Mistery and obtained a stricter political outlook. Lymington formed a new publication, the *Quarterly Gazette of the English Array*, which espoused the group’s promise to ensure the “survival of the best types of Englishmen” and the preservation of “the identity of the nation.”⁵⁰ Retaining a fascistic politic that mirrored the blood and soil thinking of its founder, the Array maintained an agricultural focus. It organized weekend camps, inviting members from its different “musters” to attend and contribute. One such camp was held September 1938. It included speeches from Dr Arbour Stephens on industrial diseases; Rolf Gardiner on the early national work camps in Nazi Germany; and Reginald Dorman-Smith MP (the future governor of Burma) on the state of the National Farmers Union, of which Dorman-Smith was formerly president, and farming across the British empire.⁵¹ There were initiations of new “yeoman,” working parties on the uses of chalk, fencing, weed cutting, and the building and turning of compost heaps. Ludovici gave an extensive talk on the rise of liberalism, and the regional officers were called to report on the year’s activities and administrative changes. Lymington organized executives like himself to be interviewed by members, and the camp concluded with songs and dances led by the Morris dancing Rolf Gardiner. Although its membership was drawn from across England and Wales, it is likely that the Array never attracted more than 200 members, even if many of those were figures of social significance.⁵²

If Morris dancing and lectures on Nazi work camps were an eccentric pairing, Lymington was not a lone crank. He and his circles were part of a broader “neo-Tory” revolt of the upper classes in interwar Britain.⁵³ As Bernhard Dietz notes, a segment of British Conservatives in the 1930s rejected parliamentary democracy and “political modernity,” gravitating instead to authoritarian and fascist alternatives. Lymington’s trajectory from backbench Tory rebel to fascist ideologue paralleled that of other aristocratic dissidents disillusioned with the Conservative Party’s accommodation of mass politics. These neo-Tories yearned for a return to an older order of “kith and kin” paternalism and imperial grandeur,

⁴⁶ Viscount Lymington, “An Essay on English Royalism,” (1938), 15M84/F179, 1–15, 1, HRO.

⁴⁷ The English Array, “Circular of 1937,” No. 1 (The English Array, 1937).

⁴⁸ Viscount Lymington, “The English Array and Policy,” (Undated memorandum), 15M84/F179/2, 1, HRO.

⁴⁹ *Quarterly Gazette of the English Array*, September 1937; *Quarterly Gazette of the English Array*, December 1937, 1–5.

⁵⁰ The English Array, “The Order of the Working of the English Array” (London, 1937).

⁵¹ *Quarterly Gazette of the English Array*, October 1938, 2–5.

⁵² Warden’s Report for Presentation to the Keepers of the English Array, April 1939, 15M84/F179/13, 1–4, HRO.

⁵³ Dietz, *Neo-Tories*, 3–8.

but they were also influenced by newer ideologies—orbiting ever closer around the magnetic field of fascism—that promised to modernize traditional hierarchies in the face of socialism and liberalism. In Lymington's case, his network of associates connected him to virtually every strand of Britain's far-right ferment. He was friendly (even at a distance) with Oswald Mosley, leader of the BUF, which praised Lymington's writings. He maintained correspondence with the BUF's chief ideologue A. K. Chesterton (cousin of G. K. Chesterton) who contributed to Lymington's late 1930s magazine *New Pioneer* and was later co-founder of the postwar far-right League of Empire Loyalists. Fascist intellectual J. F. C. Fuller, a former British general and prominent BUF member, attended English Array gatherings and saw Lymington as an ally in the cause.

Perhaps most importantly, Lymington's ideas ran in tandem with those of Jorian Jenks, the BUF's agriculture advisor and principal rural theorist. Like Lymington, Jenks was an ex-Oxford agriculturist alarmed by the decay of British farming. In fascist journals and in his own 1938 pamphlet *The Land and the People*, Jenks advocated for self-sufficiency in food as the cornerstone of national revival. He too extolled the farming community as the wellspring of English culture and the antidote to urban ills.⁵⁴ BUF policy under Jenks's influence called for a sweeping agrarian reform: protective tariffs, guaranteed prices for farmers, a state Agricultural Corporation to plan production and stockpile food, a national Agricultural Land Bank to relieve farmers' debts, and even a "Voluntary Land Army" to resettle unemployed urban workers onto smallholdings.⁵⁵ Strikingly, BUF plans envisioned the gradual transfer of landownership from any "backsliding" landlords to their tenants, with the ultimate goal of an "independent peasantry" as the backbone of Britain. Traditional landowners would be retained only if they fulfilled their function as responsible stewards, otherwise the fascist state would not hesitate to expropriate neglected estates.⁵⁶

Lymington, himself an aristocratic landlord, did not share the BUF's willingness to dismantle the landed elite. He was, unsurprisingly, a staunch defender of the aristocracy's role on the land, writing that "good landlordism is a development of all that was best in feudalism" and had long provided "responsible leadership," and should be "of the most honorable duties in modern life."⁵⁷ He argued that attacks on landlords were misplaced "scapegoating" for the sins of industrial capitalism, and that the decline of feudal estates was actually a cause (not just a symptom) of rural decay. Nevertheless, the convergence between Lymington's and Jenks's visions is notable. Both saw the restoration of farming as a spiritual and racial imperative.⁵⁸ Both scorned laissez-faire economics: Lymington lambasted "vested interests" and free traders who treated food as mere commodity, while Jenks ridiculed "sound finance and good economics" as false idols when set against the wellbeing of the folk, a view he held into the postwar years.⁵⁹ Each imagined a corporatist state that would subordinate profit to the national interest in agriculture, Jenks through formal state planning bodies and Lymington through aristocratic and royal authority guiding a regenerated rural society. And crucially, both framed their agrarian crusade in racial terms. Jenks, for example, coupled his calls for "Back to the land" with warnings that the cosmopolitan finance system was controlled by rootless foreigners, and that only a rooted, rural, Anglo-Saxon populace could safeguard "the only freedoms worth having." Jenks maintained that the "British Union is determined that Britons, wherever they live, must no longer be the

⁵⁴ See Jorian Jenks, *The Land and the People: British Union Agricultural Policy* (London, 1938).

⁵⁵ Richard Moore-Colyer, "'Towards "Mother Earth": Jorian Jenks, Organicism, the Right and the British Union of Fascists," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 3 (2004): 353–71, at 361.

⁵⁶ Jenks, *The Land and the People*, 2–6.

⁵⁷ Lymington, *Ich Dien*, 82–83.

⁵⁸ For a biography of Jenks, see Philip Coupland, *Farming, Fascism and Ecology: A Life of Jorian Jenks* (Routledge, 2016).

⁵⁹ Stone, "The Far Right," 163.

slaves of usury.”⁶⁰ Lymington went even further in making race the bedrock of his agrarian ideology. *Famine in England*, published in 1938, not only “sealed his reputation” as, in Conford’s assessment, “something of a national celebrity,”⁶¹ it solidified Lymington’s place in history as a theorist of British “blood and soil” fascism. Indeed, race functioned as the organizing grammar of Lymington’s vision for Britain.

Famine in England: Land, Race and the Fascist Imagination

When *Famine in England* appeared in early 1938, its ominous title immediately grabbed attention. The very phrase suggested an upheaval almost unimaginable to most Britons. Famine was a horror associated with distant colonies or half-forgotten Irish history, not with modern England. James Vernon observes that the politics of hunger in the modern British Empire often cast famine as the shame of colonial misrule and a fate from which the English mainland was ostensibly exempt.⁶² Lymington’s blunt warning that England itself could starve broke a cultural taboo, but it served his rhetorical purpose. It shocked the public into recognizing the urgency of Britain’s agrarian and geopolitical predicament. Lymington declared that “England is no longer self-sufficient” and “in the next war she will starve,” warning that Nazi Germany was “far more self-supporting” than Britain “could ever hope to be.”⁶³ Although Britain then presided over the world’s largest empire, he argued that imperial wealth and markets had perversely left the home nation vulnerable, a nation of consumers increasingly unable to feed itself. Because “nutrition is synonymous with existence,” Lymington argued, “it is the foundation of sanity and morale and the only medium in which it will be possible to regenerate the failing stock of sound types which once made England the world’s leader.”⁶⁴

Lymington’s core thesis was that free trade and industrial urbanism had mortally undermined Britain’s food security and, by extension, the vitality of its people. If another great war came, as appeared likely in 1938, he predicted that Britain’s maritime lifelines would be cut and Britain’s “racial enemies” would “swarm” the Empire. Neither “the yellow races nor Islam would be sorry to see European war which brought them nearer to recovering mastery of the world,” Lymington theorized. A “weakened England would be for them of all things most desirable.” The Empire, he warned, “would fall like ripe plums into their hands.”⁶⁵

Underpinning this argument was a potent mix of economic analysis and pastoral nostalgia. On one hand, *Famine in England* marshalled statistics and practical examples to show Britain’s overreliance on imports, not unlike contemporary critiques by agricultural experts and figures such as H. J. Massingham, who imbued his rural Englishness with Christian thematics and Guild Socialism.⁶⁶ Lymington pointed out, for instance, that Britain imported around three-quarters of its grain and vast quantities of meat and dairy. He cited the depressed prices and bankruptcies of the 1920s–30s to illustrate the collapse of domestic farming. He approvingly noted that both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy had managed to raise their degree of food self-sufficiency despite resource shortages, evidence to him that

⁶⁰ Jenks, *The Land and the People*, 7. See also “Precious Acres,” *British Union Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1937): 41–50.

⁶¹ Conford, “Organic Society,” 83.

⁶² James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (The Belknap Press, 2007), 44–50.

⁶³ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 17.

⁶⁴ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 72.

⁶⁵ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 19.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Clare Palmer, “Christianity, Englishness and the Southern English Countryside: A Study of the Work of H. J. Massingham,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 3, no. 1 (2002): 25–38.

strong nationalist leadership could triumph over laissez-faire fatalism.⁶⁷ Yet Lymington's prescriptions went far beyond technocratic fixes. The remedy he envisioned was nothing less than a spiritual and racial regeneration of Britain through a return to the land. Throughout the book, Lymington evoked the mythic image of "Merrie England," a harmonious rural nation of yeomen farmers, sturdy peasants, and benevolent squires, living in organic community with each other and with the landscape. This pre-industrial idyll, in his telling, had been destroyed by the twin forces of cosmopolitan finance and mass urbanization. Factories and cities had drained the countryside of its best "blood" and "genuine pedigree," while international merchants grew rich by flooding the market with cheap foreign produce.⁶⁸ Lymington exhibited a deep-seated anti-urbanism, verging on what one might call agrarian fetishism. Modern cities were portrayed as dens of disease and degeneracy, whereas the village represented health, authentic Englishness, and was "connected with the soil."⁶⁹ In his vision, women belonged in the home. Julie Gottlieb and Martin Durham have pointed out that British fascist ideologies of rebirth and regeneration often constructed the ideal fascist mother as the breeder of race and nation, conflating birth function with the spiritual and corporeal rebirth of the nation. According to Lymington, "Traditional" ways of life had been destroyed and British women had been forcefully removed from their "rightful" place in the home. Consequently, they should be re-educated in the "forgotten arts of housecraft."⁷⁰

What truly set Lymington's tract apart, however, was the insidious undercurrent that ran beneath his ruralist complaints. As the narrative progresses, *Famine in England* pivots from practical policy discussion into a conspiratorial and racial polemic. Lymington identifies a singular, malevolent force that he claimed was orchestrating Britain's decline. He describes a monolithic force, comprising all the elements he despised: the "urban-minded industrialists," international Jews, the "Brown and Yellow races" of the colonial world, and communists.⁷¹ In Lymington's worldview, these were not disparate actors. Rather, finance-capitalists, non-white colonial subjects, Jewish people, and Bolsheviks were intertwined elements of a single "enemy" working (whether knowingly or not) in concert to bring Britain to its knees. The English farmer starving or the unemployed ex-farmworker in a slum were, he argued, victims of this global plot against the British race.⁷² Here Lymington gave voice to a classic fascist "stab-in-the-back" narrative tailored to British circumstances.⁷³ Like many on the radical right, he saw Jewish financiers and communists as two sides of the same coin, twin agents of an international conspiracy to erode national strengths.⁷⁴ But Lymington added a further twist by also blaming colonized peoples: the Empire was faced "with the menace of teeming yellow and brown races," and these races were "land hungry" he warned, suggesting that non-white populations eagerly awaited a chance to reclaim world dominance if white nations destroyed each other.⁷⁵ He asserted that communists were deliberately fomenting unrest in the Empire, specifically

⁶⁷ Lymington found much to be praised in the "service to race and soil" exhibited by Germany and Italy. See Lymington, *Famine in England*, 20.

⁶⁸ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 190.

⁶⁹ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 262.

⁷⁰ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 74. See Julie V. Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement* (I. B. Tauris, 2000); Martin Durham, *Women and Fascism* (Routledge, 1998).

⁷¹ There are consistent references throughout to "the enemy": see Lymington, *Famine in England*, 34, 35, 38, 41, 83, 86, 89, 118–19.

⁷² "Any sound Englishman who still believes in his race desires its future. He is only bewildered, wrongly fed and led, and without hope": Lymington, *Famine in England*, 148.

⁷³ One such example provided was the repeal of the Corn Production Act in 1922; see Lymington, *Famine in England*, 51.

⁷⁴ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 139.

⁷⁵ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 201.

citing “trouble in India” as driven by communist agitators to weaken Britain: “We are in a very grave position in India...Trouble for Britain in India is the communists’ desire.”⁷⁶ In this vision, the impending war appeared as a vast racial-racial confrontation: a potential “civil war” within the “white race” (Britain versus Germany/Italy) that would only benefit the non-white world and the hidden string-pullers of international finance.⁷⁷

Lymington’s racial Manichaeism was thus on full display. He cast the Anglo-Saxon and kindred Nordic “white European” peoples as an embattled nobility of mankind, the “finest representative” of human “stock,” whose global supremacy was being undermined by both external rebellion and internal decay. Key to his argument was the idea that the British Empire itself was the material proof of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority.⁷⁸ Britain had conquered and ruled a quarter of the globe not by accident, Lymington maintained, but because of the inherent qualities of the “Anglo-Saxon” race.⁷⁹ Empire, in his view, was both the reward for racial vigor and the guarantor of Britain’s world status. Now, however, both race and empire were imperiled by Britain’s own policies. Free trade had weakened the “racial stock” at home, by impoverishing farmers and driving the best rural blood into the cities or abroad and leaving the Empire undefended economically. Worse, the drive to war with Germany, which Lymington opposed, was seen as racial suicide. Should war break out, he wrote, “white civilization” would enter a stage of “civil war,” from which only the non-white races would profit.⁸⁰ In Lymington’s eyes, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were not Britain’s foes at all. Rather, they were natural racial allies and exemplars.⁸¹ Essentially, Nazism was not the enemy, he argued. The true enemy was the cabal of liberal and leftist forces in Britain disseminating “sinister” propaganda to stir up hatred against the European fascist regimes.⁸² He lamented that “the average Englishman” was being manipulated into a need-less “consuming hatred” of Hitler and Mussolini, when in fact a “prosperous Germany” was something any sensible Briton should welcome.⁸³ Lymington had been arguing this appeasement line for years—he was active in late 1930s Anglo-German fellowship circles—but *Famine in England* tied it directly to the agrarian-racial thesis.⁸⁴ War with Germany, he insisted, would not only be fratricidal, but would seal Britain’s doom by severing food imports and opening the Empire to revolt.

What solution, then, did Lymington propose? In the stirring final chapters of *Famine in England*, he issued a call for what can only be described as a racial-national revolution in

⁷⁶ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 201.

⁷⁷ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 198–203.

⁷⁸ This was a frequent declaration of British fascists: see Paul Stocker, *Lost Imperium: Far Right Visions of the British Empire, c.1920–1980* (Routledge, 2021), 32–35.

⁷⁹ Interestingly, we see here a clear tension in Lymington’s thinking, wherein he adopts the Nordic racialism of the Nazis that then must be amalgamated with his racial Anglo-Saxon nationalism. Britain should “limit our cross-breeding to kindred Nordic stocks” because “These stocks, with our own, are the remnants, somewhat mixed, alas! of the Nordic race which was the begetter of western civilization and achievement even in the halcyon days of Greece.” See Lymington, *Famine in England*, 202–03. On Anglo-Saxonism, see Paul A. Kramer, “Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires,” *The Journal of Contemporary History* 88, no. 4 (2002): 1315–53.

⁸⁰ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 20.

⁸¹ “So it is a question of re-education and leadership; it has happened in Germany and Italy”: Lymington, *Famine in England*, 187.

⁸² Lymington, *Famine in England*, 21.

⁸³ Lymington, *Famine in England*.

⁸⁴ For work on these broader networks, see Richard Griffiths, *What Did You do During the War? The Last Throes of the British Pro-Nazi, 1940–45* (Routledge, 2017); Richard Moore-Colyer, “A Northern Federation? Henry Rolf Gardiner and British and European Youth,” *Paedagogica Historica* 39, no. 3 (2003): 306–24.

Britain, though one clothed in bucolic imagery rather than the overt militarism of continental fascists. Britain, he wrote, must “recover the real strength of our people.”⁸⁵ This would require a profound spiritual awakening akin to that which he (romantically) attributed to Nazi Germany. “Germany has had a spiritual awakening” and obtained a “new race,” Lymington observed in admiration, and “Britain must match it.”⁸⁶ The British would have to prove themselves “worthy of [their] empire” by renewing the racial vitality that had built that empire.⁸⁷ Crucially, Lymington believed this racial rebirth could only be achieved through an agrarian renaissance. “The health of the race,” he asserted, was maintained through the health of agriculture.⁸⁸ The degeneration of England’s farms and the degeneration of its people were co-constitutive, one fed on the other. Therefore, the act of restoring cultivation to the soil was inherently an act of racial restoration. He encapsulated this in a resonant dictum: service to the land was service to the race.⁸⁹ In Lymington’s cosmology, the English soil itself almost took on a sacred character; it was the nurturing mother of the Anglo-Saxon race, the stage upon which the drama of racial renewal must unfold. Idle land or imported food were not merely economic problems but racial sins, a squandering of the God-given terrain that had shaped the English character.

To realize this vision, Lymington sketched policy ideas that blended modern technique with reactionary idealism. He did not reject modern agricultural science. In fact, he lauded pioneers like Sir George Stapledon, a prominent agriculturalist and scientist, and embraced mechanization where it could improve productivity.⁹⁰ Like many fascists, Lymington exhibited something of a fascist-modernist paradox, simultaneously critiquing modernity’s effects while harnessing modern means to achieve a palingenetic vision.⁹¹ Lymington invested in innovations on his own estate, from new plowing techniques to breeding improvements, to demonstrate how yields could be raised. But these technical measures were always framed within a larger organicist philosophy. He advocated national agricultural planning—for example, controlling imports and encouraging crop rotations—not simply for efficiency’s sake, but to re-establish a national equilibrium between people and land. Some of his proposals echoed those of the BUF and contemporary reformers, albeit with extra aristocratic verve. They included tariff protections for farmers, guaranteed markets for home-grown food, and possibly a network of agricultural land banks to oversee land use.⁹²

Yet Lymington’s preferred agent of change was not a bureaucracy or a syndicate of farmers, it was a rejuvenated elite. He believed the “leadership of the countryside” must be restored to those with breeding and, as property owners, an inherent stake in the land. In practice this meant men like himself: “The landlord system ... is the one way of keeping responsible leadership on the land,” he wrote, arguing that where the great estates had fallen apart, social cohesion and soil stewardship also collapsed.⁹³ Of course, Lymington had

⁸⁵ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 22.

⁸⁶ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 84.

⁸⁷ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 39.

⁸⁸ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 39–42.

⁸⁹ Lymington states at the beginning of the tenth chapter, “Throughout the preceding chapters it has become clear that the restoring of agriculture means more than the mere increase of production to the nation, and that it means more to agriculture than bigger returns. Without care and wisdom in its service, we can do no more than make the soil a vehicle for the false values of the marketplace”: Lymington, *Famine in England*, 153.

⁹⁰ Stapledon confirmed in a review of *Famine in England* that his views were “in harmony” with Lymington’s: see *The Spectator*, 8 April 1938. For work on Stapledon, see Richard Moore-Colyer, “Sir George Stapledon (1882–1960) and the Landscape of Britain,” *Environment and History* 5, no. 2 (1999): 221–36.

⁹¹ For more on this, see Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁹² Moore-Colyer, “Jorian Jenks,” 360.

⁹³ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 171.

personal reasons to defend large estates, but he couched this as a matter of principle. Only a stable hierarchy of “service” and “loyalty” to king and country, reminiscent of the “best” of feudalism, could bind together the rural community and prevent selfish exploitation of land.⁹⁴ Here again, race was central to this logic. Lymington implied that the traditional “English aristocracy” was itself a product of racial evolution, with centuries of selection for leadership, thus uniquely suited to guide the nation. This echoes the sentiment of his colleague Ludovici, who insisted on reinvigorating an “hereditary aristocracy” as the eugenic apex of society.⁹⁵

Lymington looked beyond Britain’s shores in outlining its agrarian destiny. He approvingly cited historical empires that were built on agricultural prowess, notably invoking ancient Rome. In a revealing passage, he praised Mussolini’s recent colonization of Ethiopia, romanticizing it as an agrarian revival. The Italian Fascists, he wrote, were heroically trying to reclaim the “Northern Sahara,” which “was once the granary of Rome,” wresting it “inch by inch from desert.”⁹⁶ Lymington conspicuously omits the brutal oppression of actual Ethiopians in this colonial venture. What mattered to him was the symbolism of restoring fertile land to (white) European control. The silence on colonized peoples’ suffering is telling and reflects the racial calculus that underlined his worldview. Agriculture was not just about economics or even British domestic health, but about the rightful domination of productive land by the “superior” race. He clearly saw Britain’s own colonial empire through this lens: the empire had to be held and managed in line with racial hierarchy, with white Britons at the helm. If Britain failed to remain “worthy of its empire” through racial decline, he feared the empire’s riches would simply be taken by other races or powers. This fear of imperial eclipse, combined with envy and admiration of the agrarian-autarkic strides made by the Axis powers, suffuses *Famine in England*, rendering it a manifesto of British *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) fascism. In his own words, “It is blood and soil which rule at last; but if they fail only anarchy and slavery succeed.”⁹⁷

The phrase “blood and soil,” coined by the German *völkisch* movement, encapsulated the Nazi ideal that a people’s racial essence is bound to its “native” land.⁹⁸ Lymington essentially articulated a British version of this idea: that Anglo-Saxon “blood” would only stay pure and strong if rooted firmly in English “soil.” He stopped short of explicitly using Nazi jargon, but the concepts are unmistakable. For instance, he spoke of “the soundest of our stocks” needing to set a “new standard” for the nation, a thinly veiled eugenic reference to improving racial quality. He regarded the exodus of rural folk to city slums as a biological tragedy, lamenting the loss of hearty country genes and the physical degeneration of those uprooted. Conversely, reviving rural life was to him a way of both breeding and strengthening the populace. The English peasantry, if revitalized, would breed healthier children, and the nation would regain its “muscle.” In one passage Lymington even argued that investments in armaments and stockpiled food were mere short-term insurance policies, “immediate disaster” measures, and that only the long-term agricultural and racial regeneration and resistance to “international finance” could give those measures any real meaning.⁹⁹ It was a striking claim: national defense ultimately rested not on bullets or butter alone, but on biological and cultural renewal. In effect, Lymington was urging Britain

⁹⁴ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 43.

⁹⁵ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 121.

⁹⁶ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 89.

⁹⁷ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 208.

⁹⁸ For more, see Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler’s “Green Party”* (The Kensal Press, 1985); George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (Schocken Books, 1981), 218–33.

⁹⁹ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 141.

to fight an internal war for racial fitness instead of an external war against the fascist powers. If Britain won this internal struggle, by reshaping itself as a self-sufficient, racially rejuvenated “farmyard Empire,” it would both avoid external war and be strong enough to withstand any challenge.¹⁰⁰

It is worth briefly considering Lymington’s message alongside the equivalent Nazi exponent, Walter Darré, the National Socialist minister of agriculture and a contact of Lymington’s. *Famine in England* and Darré’s texts on blood and soil represent similar articulations of fascist agrarian ideology.¹⁰¹ Both Darré and Lymington saw in the peasant not only an economic actor but the racial reservoir of the nation, which was constantly threatened by industrial modernity, urbanization, and international commerce.¹⁰² While Darré rooted his argument in a biologized *Volk*, Lymington translated a similar grammar of race into the idiom of English aristocratic paternalism and imperial decline.¹⁰³

At the heart of Darré’s work lay the proposition that the peasantry was the eternal source of the nation’s strength.¹⁰⁴ The hereditary farmer, bound to the soil, embodied racial continuity. In contrast, the “rootless city-dweller” was castigated as parasitic, severed from nature and history.¹⁰⁵ Lymington, though less biologically explicit, advanced a congruent argument: “The decay of our soil is the decay of our people. A people divorced from the land will lose not only its health but its soul.”¹⁰⁶ For both, the soil was not merely a material substrate but a medium of racial vitality.

Darré’s framework, like Nazism’s *Lebensraum*, was explicitly expansionist. Land was finite, and the “racially healthy” were entitled to secure fresh territory for cultivation: “A people that ceases to seek new land condemns its blood to decline.”¹⁰⁷ Lymington, by contrast, lamented the excesses of empire. England, he argued, was importing food-stuffs at the expense of cultivating its own soil, thus risking famine. “Our dependence on foreign wheat and meat is not a sign of prosperity but of decay.”¹⁰⁸ Where Darré legitimated conquest, Lymington called for imperial retrenchment and a re-rooting of the nation in its own countryside. Both, however, converged in their critique of modernity. Darré described “mechanized civilization” as “gnawing” at the organic body of the nation.¹⁰⁹ Lymington likewise condemned “mechanical civilization” as an agent of disintegration, severing Englishmen from “the rhythm of the seasons and the obligations of stewardship.”¹¹⁰ These organicist metaphors framed the nation as a living organism in need of racial and ecological purification.

¹⁰⁰ For work on the settler-colonial thinking of British fascism, see Evan Smith, “The Pivot of Empire: Australia and the Imperial Fascism of the British Union of Fascists,” *History Australia* 14, no. 3 (2017): 378–94.

¹⁰¹ Richard Walther Darré, *New Nobility of Blood and Soil*, (trans.) Augusto Salan and Julius Sylvester (Antelope Hill, 2021 [1930]); Richard Walther Darré and Johann von Leers, *Foundations of Blood and Soil* (GVB, 1940).

¹⁰² In the early twentieth century a wave of romanticist agrarianism was sweeping Europe. For a continental view, see Frank Trentmann, “Civilization and Its Discontents: English Neo-Romanticism and the Transformation of Anti-Modernism in Twentieth-Century Western Culture,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994): 583–625; George Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Wisconsin, 2023 [1961]), 263–76.

¹⁰³ For background on Darré, blood and soil, and Nazi agriculturalism, see Peter Staudenmaier, “Organic Farming in Nazi Germany: The Politics of Biodynamic Agriculture, 193–1945,” *Environmental History* 18, no. 2 (2013): 383–411; Clifford R. Lovin, “Blut Und Boden: The Ideological Basis of the Nazi Agricultural Program,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967): 279–88; Johnpeter Horst Gill, “The Nazi Party’s Rural Propaganda Before 1928,” *Central European History* 15, no. 2 (1982): 149–85.

¹⁰⁴ Walther Darré, *Foundations of Blood and Soil* (Blut und Boden Verlag, 1940), 34.

¹⁰⁵ Darré, *Foundations*, 77.

¹⁰⁶ Lymington, *Famine in England*, 42.

¹⁰⁷ Darré, *Foundations*, 112.

¹⁰⁸ Lymington *Famine in England*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ Darré, *New Nobility of Blood and Soil*, 88–93.

¹¹⁰ Lymington *Famine in England*, 57.

Yet the divergences are revealing. Darré grounded his agrarianism in pseudo-scientific eugenics, elevating blood as the determinant of national destiny.¹¹¹ Lymington instead clothed his argument in the idioms of Anglican morality and aristocratic duty, invoking the “natural leadership of the countryside” rather than the Nazi Volk.¹¹² Both nevertheless articulated a vision in which race served as the grammatical structure of agrarian politics, binding soil, blood, and nation into a fascist critique of modernity. In juxtaposition, *Famine in England* and *Blood and Soil* show how fascist agrarianism traveled across borders while retaining distinct national accents. Each positioned agriculture as the site where race and nation were materially reproduced. Darré’s biologized *völkisch* doctrine and Lymington’s paternalist Englishness converged on the same point—that the survival of the nation depended on rooting its people, racially and spiritually, in the soil.

The radicalism of Lymington’s prescriptions should not be understated. He was calling for a complete reorientation of British society: economically, to reject the liberal free-trade model; politically, to overturn parliamentary-democratic norms in favor of authoritarian stewardship; socially, to reverse urban-industrial trends; and ideologically, to transcend class conflict with racial-nationalist organicism. This was fascism in all but name. As historians have noted, British fascism often took idiosyncratic forms that differed from the paramilitary spectacle of continental movements.¹¹³ When asked by a Dutch observer what he thought of the BUF, Lymington replied: “I think at present the Mosley movement, though it recognizes the necessity of the land as a prime factor in regeneration, is still too town-minded to grasp the full philosophic import of Blut und Boden (blood and soil).”¹¹⁴ Instead of the black-shirted street theatre of Mosley, Lymington’s brand of fascism draped itself in tweed and invoked the ancestral village and the throne. Nonetheless, it was fascism. It espoused the palingenetic ultranationalism at the heart of the fascist genus, a vision of national rebirth that placed the racial nation above all, demanding total unity and regeneration. By defining the English nation in racial terms and promising a regenerated nation through a return to racial roots, Lymington’s ideology fits Roger Griffin’s influential definition of fascism’s core myth.¹¹⁵ However, we must be attentive to the specific workings of race within this myth. Lymington’s writings make explicit what was often implicit: that the “mythic core” of his fascism was fundamentally racial and was a direct response to what he perceived as the fracturing of Britain’s racial and imperial order.

Lymington’s case confirms that race was the modality through which crisis was “lived” and resolved in the British fascist imagination. The agricultural depression, the threat of war, and the decline of aristocracy were diverse crises, but Lymington articulated them into a single narrative by using race as the binding logic. His grammar of politics always came back to Englishness defined by blood, who “we” (the English) are, who was a threat, and how must the race be regenerated. Lymington articulated disparate elements—economic grievance, nostalgia, geopolitical fear, anti-Semitism, scientific farming ideas—into what Stuart Hall has called a “structured unity” by anchoring them in racial ideology.¹¹⁶ Lymington did not invent a new racial worldview so much as he rearticulated

¹¹¹ Gesine Gerhard, *Nazi Hunger Politics: A History of Food in the Third Reich* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

¹¹² Lymington, *Famine in England*, 75.

¹¹³ See, for example, Steven Woodbridge, “History and Cultural Heritage: The Far Right and the ‘Battle for Britain’,” in *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism*, ed. Nigel Copsey and John E. Richardson (Routledge, 2015), 27–48.

¹¹⁴ See Viscount Lymington to H. J. Van Houten, 2 August 1939, 15M84/F182/1, HRO.

¹¹⁵ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Routledge, 1991), 26. For further discussion, see David D. Roberts, Alexander De Grand, Mark Antliff and Thomas Linehan, “Comments on Roger Griffin, ‘The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies,’” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 2 (2002): 259–74.

¹¹⁶ Stuart Hall, “Marx’s Notes on Method: A ‘Reading’ of the ‘1857 Introduction,’” in *Stuart Hall: Selected Writings on Marxism*, ed. Gregor McLennan (Duke University Press, 2021), 24.

Britain's existing "racial regime" under new conditions.¹¹⁷ His glorification of Anglo-Saxon stock drew on Victorian and Edwardian racial thought, the kind studied by Reginald Horsman, who traced Anglo-Saxon racialism back into the nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ His alarm at non-white peoples coveting the empire's spoils echoed colonial anxieties dating back to the Indian Rebellion and beyond.¹¹⁹ Even his anti-Semitic tropes—the "Jewish financier" wrecking nations—had roots in British elite discourse, often couched as attacks on "cosmopolitans" or "foreign money power."¹²⁰ What fascism provided for Lymington was a clear frame to connect and intensify these ideas into a quasi-revolutionary program, even if he was skeptical of the applicability of continental fascism to Britain. In this sense, this iteration of British fascism can be seen as a radicalization of the logic of British imperial-racial order. Lymington still operated with the fundamental assumption of British imperial ideology—that human beings are hierarchically organized into races with differential worth and destiny—but he took that assumption to its most extreme, internally directed conclusion. If the British Empire had long been a racial state ruling over others, Lymington wanted to turn Britain itself into a more overt racial state, purified and hardened from within.¹²¹

Networks, Reception, and Legacy

Lymington's *Famine in England* made a splash in 1938. It enjoyed a far warmer reception than one might expect for a book laced with anti-Semitism and barely concealed admiration for continental dictators. Part of its appeal lay in Lymington's pedigree. He was a peer of the realm, an accomplished country gentleman, and a former MP warning of national doom, which commanded a certain respect. But the book also tapped into widespread anxieties of the late 1930s. The prospect of another war was terrifying to a population that still remembered the slaughter of the First World War. Fears of food shortages in wartime were not confined to fascists: even mainstream observers were asking whether farming could stand the strain of a protracted war.¹²² Lymington's call for agricultural self-sufficiency thus resonated beyond the far-right fringe. He was not alone in advocating for agricultural revival across the empire.¹²³ The difference was he made it emotive and grandiose, linking food security with national rebirth.

Reviews of *Famine in England* in the British press were remarkably positive, often glossing over the book's racial and authoritarian content. *The Dairy Farmer*, an agricultural magazine, hailed its "vital importance" and said "it should be read by every Member of Parliament." Another reviewer in the same publication found the book "full of interest."¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ "Racial regimes are constructed social systems in which race is proposed as a justification for the relations of power. While necessarily articulated with accruals of power, the covering conceit of a racial regime is a makeshift patchwork masquerading as memory and the immutable." See Cedric Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (North Carolina, 2007), xii. For recent work on this, see Alana Lentin, *The New Racial Regime: Recalibrations of White Supremacy* (Pluto Press, 2025).

¹¹⁸ Reginald Horsman, "Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (1976): 387–410. See also Dan Stone's elaborations on the "Extremes of Englishness" in Stone, *Breeding Superman*, 1–11.

¹¹⁹ This reflects a trend in early twentieth-century Western fiction that has been called a fear of "reverse colonization": see Stephen D. Arata, "The Occidental Tourist: 'Dracula' and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 4 (1990): 621–45.

¹²⁰ Tony Kushner, "Anti-Semitism in Britain: Continuity and the Absence of a Resurgence," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013): 434–49.

¹²¹ "Modern states are racial in their modernity, and modern in their racial quality." See David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Blackwell, 2002), 7.

¹²² Vernon, *Hunger*, 138–43.

¹²³ Vernon, *Hunger*, 140–44.

¹²⁴ *The Dairy Farmer*, June 1938, 15M84/F149/1, HRO.

These farm journals treated Lymington as a serious agronomic thinker, unsurprising given he was a known innovator in farming circles. The praise came from many others, in addition to the agriculturalists. J. R. Clynes, a former leader of the Labour Party, wrote that Lymington's book was "like a seer's crystal" in which one could read the nation's fate, and that ignoring its message "may mean national suicide."¹²⁵ Such accolades from a prominent Labour figure are perhaps startling, but they reflect how Lymington's core warning regarding Britain's perilous food situation cut across party lines. Prominent MPs of various stripes—including at least one communist (Salter Chalker)—engaged seriously with the text.¹²⁶ It also drew praise from Cambridge academic and director of agriculture of the United Provinces, Hugh Martin Leake, who heaped praise on the book, and informed Lymington his ideas would merge well with continental-style corporatism.¹²⁷ The fascist Major J. F. C. Fuller wrote that the book was a "vitally important work from every point of view."¹²⁸ Many figures of considerable note in interwar Britain also found great value in the text. G. K. Chesterton told his readers that the book was "priceless" and "utterly reliable and perennially readable," dealing with a "burning issue."¹²⁹ T. S. Eliot, with whom Lymington had maintained contact throughout the 1930s, published a review in *The Criterion* highlighting the importance of the book. Eliot instructed that it should be consulted if the "inevitable deterioration" of British land and people was to be halted.¹³⁰ It was not long before the BBC came knocking, holding several meetings with Lymington and eventually inviting him to speak on a program about British agriculture.¹³¹ The breadth of this interest indicates that the text appealed to a range of ideological orientations. In an era when British politics was polarized between appeasers and anti-appeasers, pacifists and re-armers, Lymington's book provided rhetorical ammunition to the pro-fascist appeasement camp. It argued, in effect, that Britain simply could not afford war, not just economically, but racially and spiritually.

Within the explicitly fascist and ultra-right milieu, *Famine in England* was greeted as a triumph, a vindication of what they had been saying all along about "blood and soil." Arnold Leese, "one of the period's most fanatical, uncompromising and idiosyncratic of fascists,"¹³² wrote to Lymington admitting he had read *Famine in England* with "great pleasure," and that he thought the "policy of the Imperial Fascist League [IFL] identical with which you advocate." Leese said he knew, just the same as Lymington, that the "Jew menace must be met radically," and requested copies of the book be sent to the IFL so they could distribute it to members.¹³³

Oswald Mosley and other members of the BUF leadership praised Lymington's work.¹³⁴ The BUF paper *Action* favorably reviewed Lymington's policy ideas.¹³⁵ By 1938 BUF writers

¹²⁵ *The Dairy Farmer*, June 1938, 15M84/F149/2, HRO.

¹²⁶ *The Dairy Farmer*, June 1938, 15M84/F149/2, HRO.

¹²⁷ Hugh Martin-Leake to Lymington, 11 October 1938, 15M84/25/1–3, HRO.

¹²⁸ *Country Life*, 9 April 1938, 105. For other local reactions, see *Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser*, 9 April 1938, 15; *North Devon Journal*, 14 April 1938, 6. Interestingly, the *Western Gazette* ran a column linking Lymington's book with several local organizations, including the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation and Rolf Gardiner's Springhead Ring; *Western Gazette*, 8 April 1938, 15.

¹²⁹ G. K. Chesterton, "Famine in England," *G.K.'s Weekly*, 21 April 1938, 46.

¹³⁰ T. S. Eliot, "A Commentary," *The Criterion* 18 (1938): 58–62, at 59.

¹³¹ G. C. Beadle to Lymington, 16 May 1938, 15M84/F147/46/2, HRO; The British Broadcasting Corporation to Lymington, undated memorandum, 15M84/F147/24, HRO; P. F. Edgard to Lymington, 20 October 1938, 15M84/F147/21, HRO.

¹³² Linehan, *British Fascism*, 71.

¹³³ Arnold Leese to Lymington, 5 April 1938, 15M84/F148/4, HRO.

¹³⁴ "The British Union of Fascists welcomes Viscount Lymington's book ... as a last desperate endeavor to awaken the British people to their danger before it is too late." See *The Dairy Farmer*, July 1938, 3.

¹³⁵ *Action*, 14 November 1936, 15.

were keen on agrarian issues as part of their “Empire autarky” platform. Fascist journals had previously echoed Lymington’s themes in its own policy statements, arguing that “home self-sufficiency in food” was essential to national freedom.¹³⁶

Few contemporaries publicly condemned *Famine in England* for its fascist or racist content. One reason is that Lymington was adept at coding his language. He could refer to “international cosmopolitans” or “vested interests” as culprits without always saying “Jews,” though of course he did say “Jews” too. Race, as Stuart Hall indicated, is a “floating signifier.”¹³⁷ Many readers perhaps read those parts as attacking “finance” in general or “alien influences” in vaguer terms. Moreover, in the charged atmosphere of 1938, when the specter of aerial bombing and blockade loomed, Lymington’s insistence on strengthening the home front had a patina of patriotism that could shield it from accusations of subversion. Interestingly, in mid-1939 the British government indeed started implementing measures not unlike what Lymington urged: stockpiling food, instituting guaranteed prices, planning to plow up more land, and the famous “Dig for Victory” campaign that was introduced within months of the start of the hostilities. Lymington was able to crow that the government’s response to the war proved his point. The difference, of course, is that mainstream planners approached it as a practical problem of wartime logistics, whereas Lymington saw it as the pathway to a racial nationalist revolution.

One notable critique came from an article in the *Yorkshire Observer*, which warned that Lymington’s fine talk of soil and patriotism was a stalking horse for fascism, pointing to his Mystery associations and hinting at his anti-Jewish leanings, declaring Lymington a “British Hitler.”¹³⁸ Elsewhere, Lymington was accused of being “imaginative rather than realistic,” and that he had left the Conservative Party because it was not “right enough.”¹³⁹ By the outbreak of the Second World War, the British government was keeping an eye on Lymington and his associates, although, unlike many BUF members, he was not interned under Defence Regulation 18B. This is likely because he was seen as less of an organizing threat and perhaps because, as an aristocrat and now peer, he had establishment connections that provided some immunity.¹⁴⁰ Following publication of *Famine in England* Lymington received a phone call from Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir John Simon, who had been ordered to monitor Lymington’s activities. Simon communicated that he “did not disagree” with Lymington’s anti-war stance nor did he want to “stay his hand” in this effort.¹⁴¹ In other words, Simon was content to allow Lymington’s anti-war agitation to continue, even if it was pursued alongside sympathy and support for Nazi Germany.

Lymington continued his activities in the British fascist-agrarian nexus through wartime, likely buoyed by the positive response *Famine in England* had garnered. In 1941 Rolf Gardiner and Lymington founded the Kinship in Husbandry as part of their blood (kinship) and soil (husbandry) politics. Gardiner emphasized that this was not about “assembling a group nor at all of forming a new political party but of drawing closer an existing

¹³⁶ *Action*, 10 April 1937, 12; *Action*, 20 February 1937, 12.

¹³⁷ “[R]ace works like a language. And signifiers refer to the systems and concepts of the classification of a culture, to its practices for making meaning. And those things gain their meaning, not because of what they contain in their essence, but in the shifting relations of difference, which they establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying field.” See Stuart Hall, “Race, the Floating Signifier: What More is There to Say about ‘Race’?”, in *Stuart Hall: Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Duke, 2021), 362.

¹³⁸ *Yorkshire Observer*, 19 March 1938.

¹³⁹ *Daily Express*, 19 March 1938.

¹⁴⁰ On the internment (or not) of this milieu, see Dan Stone, “The English Mystery, the BUF, and the Dilemmas of British Fascism,” *The Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 2 (2003): 336–58, at 357.

¹⁴¹ British Council Against European Commitments, “Telephone Conversation Between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Lord Lymington,” 14 September 1938, 15M84/F255/22, HRO.

community of conscience, sympathy and purpose in awareness of its potentialities.”¹⁴² Kinship in Husbandry began as a core group of 12 members and to expand its influence encouraged these members to work with their contacts and in their local areas. As well as Lymington and Gardiner, members included right-wing aristocrat Lord Northbourne and Douglas Kennedy, director of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Daniel J. Walkowitz has argued that English folk dancing was brought to the USA as part of the politics of the Left.¹⁴³ In inter-war Britain, it fused seamlessly with the Right and fascistic politics.

Agricultural writer Adrian Bell, future Oxford professor of poetry Edmund Blunden, botanist J. E. Hosking, Lymington’s long-term comrade Arthur Bryant, and Christian ruralist journalist H. J. Massingham were also involved with the Kinship in Husbandry. While not an official member, the British agricultural fascist Jorian Jenks was a frequent attendee of Kinship get-togethers. The first meeting, held at Merton College, Oxford, stressed the problems of England were not only between “town and countryside” but also “producer and parasite.”¹⁴⁴ The group reflected Lymington’s prior projects. It sought the “regeneration of rural England” through a “Conservative revolution.”¹⁴⁵ The group took advantage of Lymington’s prior contacts and (from 1943) his position in the House of Lords. The group drew up a list of willing supporters.¹⁴⁶ These included, among others, Bryant Irvine, military men Captain De Grey and Colonel H. Holderness, F. C. Loftus MP, Roy Wilson, and BUF member Francis Yeats Brown. Gardiner recommended Eve Balfour, Vernon Bartlett MP, the Duke of Bedford, and the editor of the *Catholic Herald* Michael de la Bedoyere.¹⁴⁷ While the group understood itself as a secret society, Dan Stone has argued that it was not an irrelevant, esoteric footnote in British history; rather, “the group’s ideas of ecology and self-sustenance were to some extent adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture during the war.”¹⁴⁸ It did not, importantly, shed the racial ideology Lymington and Gardiner had pursued in the previous decade.¹⁴⁹

After the war, it became evident that Lymington’s and Jenks’s paths had not diverged much at all. Both were founding members of the Soil Association in 1946. This organization, which pioneered Britain’s organic farming movement, was in part the institutional legacy of the interwar “back to the land” enthusiasm. Lymington, Jenks, and Gardiner all saw organic husbandry—free of industrial chemicals, emphasizing the harmony of soil and soul—as a continuation of their earlier ideals, albeit in a “post-fascist” context. Historians have noted the uncomfortable truth that the British organic movement has some intellectual roots in the far-right ruralist tradition. Philip Conford, for example, has traced how figures like H. J. Massingham (a traditionalist writer admired by Lymington) and Jorian Jenks blended ecological holism with deep social conservatism.¹⁵⁰ Lymington’s biography thus complicates

¹⁴² Rolf Gardiner to Viscount Lymington, 22 April 1941, 15M84/F196/1, HRO.

¹⁴³ Daniel J. Walkowitz, *City Folk: English Country Dance and the Politics of the Folk in Modern America* (New York: University Press, 2010).

¹⁴⁴ Notes on Proceedings at Merton College, Oxford, 21 September 1941, 15M84/F196/2, HRO.

¹⁴⁵ Kinship in Husbandry, “Rotation of Crops,” J. E. Hosking, 1 March 1942, 15M84/F196/9, HRO.

¹⁴⁶ Kinship in Husbandry, “List of Those Who Might Possibly Support a Rural Revival,” 8 May 1942, 15M84/F196/14, 1, HRO.

¹⁴⁷ For a more comprehensive overview of the Kinship in Husbandry, see Richard Moore Colyer and Philip Conford, “A ‘Secret Society’? The Internal and External Relations of the Kinship in Husbandry,” *Rural History* 15, no. 2 (2004): 189–206.

¹⁴⁸ Stone, *Breeding Superman*, 53.

¹⁴⁹ The Kinship forwarded a “eugenicist vision combined with a vitalist call on behalf of the sacred bond between nation and land.” The group frequently discussed “racial decline, and national health, although their emphasis was on an agrarian renaissance, based on ecological principles and seen as a panacea against the evils of industrialization.” See, respectively, Stone, “The British Far Right,” 187; Dietz, *Neo-Tories*, 71.

¹⁵⁰ See also Philip Conford, “‘Saturated with Biological Metaphors’: Professor John MacMurray (1891–1976) and the Politics of the Organic Movement,” *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 3 (2008): 317–34.

our understandings of ideological transmission. His overt fascist activism essentially ceased after 1939, as the Second World War dampened open support for such ideas, and Lymington himself served in the Royal Hampshire Regiment during the war, then lived quietly as a gentleman farmer, eventually moving to Kenya to live out his life as a colonial landowner. But many of his core convictions, including the importance of husbandry, the critique of industrial society, even aspects of his elitism, found new life in postwar rural discourse. This demonstrates that while fascist movements may be defeated, some of their intellectual currents can be absorbed into mainstream or supposedly “apolitical” movements.

The war and its outcome—a victory for Britain that required alliance with the very “Jewish financiers” and “brown races” Lymington spurned (the USA with its financial power, India with its manpower)—made his immediate calls irrelevant. Yet the war also, in a perverse way, validated parts of his warning. Britain came close to a food crisis in 1940–42 when U-boat blockades were at their worst, and only drastic rationing plus American and imperial imports averted severe hunger. The burden of hunger was then placed back into the Empire, seen in the outbreak of the 1943 Great Bengal Famine.¹⁵¹ After the war, the British state in fact never returned to *laissez-faire* in agriculture, but maintained a regime of supports and subsidies, in line with what interwar farmers like Lymington had pleaded for. But these pragmatic measures were shorn of racialist rhetoric. They were presented as modernizing productivity, not breeding a master race.

From a historiographical perspective, the case of Viscount Lymington forces a rethinking of how we categorize political ideologies in interwar Britain. For decades, many historians dismissed the British far-right’s rural or aristocratic elements as reactionary rather than fascist, or as eccentric footnotes to the BUF’s urban story. Philip Conford’s work, for instance, while invaluable in chronicling Lymington’s career, tended to cast him as a radical right agrarian Tory whose flirtation with fascism was secondary to his agrarianism.¹⁵² Lymington, however, was a fascist because of his agrarianism. That is, through his High Toryism he constructed a fascist ideology that integrated and intensified his agrarian, anti-modern impulses into a total political creed centered on race and nation. As Liam Liburd argues, we miss crucial dimensions of British fascism if we ignore how historical agents, such as Lymington, rooted their extremism in the wider history of the politics of race and empire in Britain.¹⁵³ Lymington’s ideas were an exaggeration, not a negation, of established British ruling-class worldviews. The paternalist disdain for democracy, the belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority, the romanticization of the countryside, the dread of imperial decline, all had respectable pedigrees in Britain. Lymington’s innovation was to articulate those elements into a racial-nationalist, quasi-revolutionary formula, borrowing from European fascism’s sense of urgency and willingness to uproot institutions.

Lymington demonstrates that British fascism need not wear a uniform or form a mass party to be significant. Not every British fascist was a member of the BUF, not every fascist idea was broadcast through a microphone at Olympia. Some percolated in gentlemen’s clubs, agricultural conferences, and intellectual journals. Carefully examining these strands reveals what one historian calls “the jackboots off” tenets of fascism laid bare without the distracting pomp.¹⁵⁴ In Lymington’s case, those core values were the maintenance of racial hierarchy and imperial-style order as the answer to domestic crisis. He envisaged England itself becoming a kind of purified, well-tilled “estate” under firm leadership, as Kenya or India under the Raj had been, a notion of racial dictatorship turned inward. Indeed, it can

¹⁵¹ Senjuti Mallik, “Colonial Biopolitics and the Great Bengal Famine of 1943,” *Geojournal* 88 (2023): 3205–21.

¹⁵² Conford, “Organic Society,” 95.

¹⁵³ Liburd, “Turn Again,” 465.

¹⁵⁴ Liburd, “Turn Again.”

be considered a vision of settler-colonialism fascism rebounded, as Black radical theorist George Padmore presciently suggested about fascism's relationship to colonialism.¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

Viscount Lymington's life and work illuminate a distinctive strand of British fascism, one that arose from manors, fields, and farmsteads rather than factories, yet was no less inflected with racism and authoritarianism. *Famine in England* reveals how race functioned as a grammatical structure in British fascist agrarian thought, severing Lymington's fascism both from continental models and from prior interpretations that downplayed its racial core. Lymington's vision of national rebirth was agrarian in form but racial in substance; he imagined an England made strong and whole again by returning to its "native" soil, purging foreign and urban corruptions, and reasserting the dominance of its Anglo-Saxon stock. In theoretical terms, his case affirms that British fascism was not an alien eruption into an otherwise liberal landscape, but rather a dramatic rearticulation of existing elements in British society and empire. The crisis of hegemony in 1930s Britain was managed by figures like Lymington through racialized narratives that made extreme solutions seem necessary and even patriotic. And as Cedric Robinson has argued, so long as the underlying racial order of society remains intact, it will continue to spawn fascist answers in times of stress.¹⁵⁶ Lymington's program was indeed fascist, but it was built from the prejudices and hierarchies of the British imperial system. His fascism was a result of the intensification of British racial capitalism, a potential culmination of a worldview that placed order and leadership above progressive or egalitarian ideals.

Lymington was thus far from an isolated crank. He was in fact a vital connector between traditional aristocratic conservatism and the newer currents of fascism and eco-authoritarian thought. As Dan Stone has also argued, Lymington's English Mistery had links "both personal and ideological, with much wider strands of thought in interwar Britain, from the ecological and rural revivalist to the National Socialist and all the movements, interest groups, and political groupings on the intervening spectrum."¹⁵⁷ In both this movement and in the English Array, Lymington fostered ideological traffic between High Tory die-hards and avowed fascists. Through kinship with Jorian Jenks and Rolf Gardiner, Lymington helped carry the torch of "blood and soil" ideas into circles concerned with organic farming and rural revival. In his influence on contemporaries, whether sympathetic MPs of the 1930s or postwar agrarian romantics, Lymington's ideas had a life beyond explicitly fascist political contexts. Lymington thus complicates our moral map of British history, reminding us that ideas can survive "defeat" in transmuted forms. Indeed, the language of soil and heritage can easily be co-opted into nationalist narratives even today, absent the overt racial language, but still carrying exclusionary implications.

¹⁵⁵ George Padmore, *How Britain Rules Africa* (Negro Universities Press, 1936); Liburd, "The Lost Pillar of British Political Culture," 1–21.

¹⁵⁶ "As a discipline of domination," fascism's "conditions of existence are those paradigmatic moments in the West's historical experience (e.g., the appropriation by an emergent but still amorphous elite of Christianity during the Dark Age or nationalism following the French Revolution) when the disintegration of one hierarchical social order provides the occasion for the instituting of a successor under a new regime of truth. And like Christianity and nationalism, the ethos of fascism swept through the whole of Western civilization notwithstanding the conspicuous particularities evident at specific localities. As such, for a moment it manifested itself in national or societal arenas (German national socialism, Italian fascists, Spanish Falangists, etc.) while actually composed from the ideological, political, and technological materials of a civilization. It is, then, a mistake to posit fascism as an inherent national trait or to ascribe it to a particular culture or class." See Cedric Robinson, "Fascism and the Response of Black Radical Theorists," in H. L. T. Quan, *Cedric J. Robinson: On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance* (Pluto Press, 2019), 153.

¹⁵⁷ Stone, "The English Mistery," 337.

If recent scholarship on fascism has turned to its transnational dimensions,¹⁵⁸ and Lymington's racial romanticism is recognized as but one iteration of a broader European phenomenon, greater attention must nevertheless be paid to the specific national and imperial contexts for these discourses. British fascism, as exemplified by Lymington, was not simply a provincial imitation of Mussolini or Hitler. It was an attempt to solve British problems—agricultural depression, imperial insecurity, class strife—by drawing on British repertoires of racial thought and authoritarian nostalgia. As such, it highlights the importance of the “Empire at home”: the way imperial modes of rule and categorization fed back into domestic politics.¹⁵⁹ The racial paternalism Lymington espoused for Britain was arguably a domestication of the racial governance Britain practiced abroad. One might say Lymington wanted to be the benevolent despot of Britain, as colonial officials were in India, preserving a mythic stability through top-down control and racial hierarchy. In this sense, British fascism was both subversive and conservative. It was subversive of the liberal-democratic state, but conservative (even restorative) of the imperial racial order as applied to the metropole.

The case of Viscount Lymington encourages us to broaden our definition of what counted as fascist thought and who counted as a fascist actor in Britain. It urges a more nuanced view by revealing that fascists could wear a tweed jacket and write about cattle breeds as easily as don a black shirt and shout about Jewish bankers. By acknowledging that race was the silent grammar in much of Britain's interwar discourse, coming to the fore in times of crisis, we better understand how ostensibly “respectable” figures could slide into fascist modes of thinking. We also become more alert to the potential for fascist articulations to reappear whenever social order seems under threat. The anxieties Lymington preyed upon—economic insecurity, rural decline, fear of the racial “enemy”—have not vanished. His story is a cautionary tale of how easily a rhetoric of national renewal rooted in exclusion and mythic pasts can gain traction.

In the end, Viscount Lymington did not alter the course of British history. The war and the welfare state would address Britain's crises in far more diverse ways than he prescribed.¹⁶⁰ Yet his legacy lies in crystallizing an ideology of “homegrown fascism” that forces us to see British history's darker potentialities within itself. It reminds us that the grammar of race and nation can be reassembled in new combinations, and that even the green and pleasant land of England was not immune to fantasies of purity and rebirth through struggle. In taking Lymington seriously as an intellectual actor, we gain a more complete and more sobering picture of the British 1930s, one in which the battle for the soul of the nation was waged not only between Left and Right, but between competing visions of order. Lymington's ultimately failed vision nonetheless serves as a historical document of how close British political thought could come to fascism under the pressures of decline. Lymington's time as an MP and then his elevation to a seat in the House of Lords, when viewed alongside his role in the English Mystery, the English Array, the British Council Against European Commitments, the Kinship in Husbandry, and the Soil Association, illustrates how Britain produced and, in conditions of social and political disarticulation, sustained fascist ideals that moved in and out of political legitimacy. As we continue to “decolonize” our understanding of fascism,¹⁶¹ bringing figures such as

¹⁵⁸ Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, eds., *Fascism Without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperations between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945* (Berghahn, 2017); Ángel Alcalde, “The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research,” *Contemporary European History* 29 (2020): 243–52.

¹⁵⁹ James Trafford, *The Empire at Home* (Pluto Press, 2020).

¹⁶⁰ On this, see Robbie Shilliam, *Race and the Undeserving Poor: From Abolition to Brexit* (Agenda Publishing, 2018), 81–108.

¹⁶¹ Liam Liburd and Paul Jackson, “Debate: Decolonizing Fascist Studies,” *Fascism* 10 (2021): 323–45.

Lymington from the margins to the center is critical to the project of recognizing the recurring rhetoric of blood and soil when it echoes in our own times.

Kian Aspinall is postdoctoral research associate at the University of Cambridge. His work examines the analyses of and the reactions to fascism in the writings of Black radicals such as W. E. B. Du Bois, George Padmore, and C. L. R. James. He also works on fascism through the methodological tool of racial capitalism, highlighting the position of race in fascist assemblages. Thus far his work has been published in *Race and Class* and *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*. Please address any correspondence to ka650@cam.ac.uk

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