

## Two Tribes

**Chris Beckett**

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A thought experiment wrapped in a science fiction novel, Chris Beckett's *Two Tribes* audits Brexit and Britain's current political and class gulf from a dystopian future, as a historian tries to find the origins of her world in the contemporaneous diaries of a couple who comprise both sides of the divide.

Two and a half centuries from now, Zoe, a minor official and historian of Britain's Governing Body, tries to lose herself in the past. Working to reconstruct the world of Michelle, a lower class, right-leaning woman, and Harry, an upper class, left-leaning man, both of whose diaries have survived global warming, the Warring Factions, and Britain's dissolution into the Chinese Protectorate, Zoe adopts an unorthodox research technique. She decides to create a historiographic narrative that novelizes the diaries, blending them with research and characters of her own to illustrate the past's sociopolitical slide.

At first, the novel's dive into the diarists' inner worlds and secret motivations presents like a both sides story. But over the course of the novel, the approach tilts toward working class apologetics: Harry's fascination with Michelle reveals uncomfortable truths about his own liberal leanings and fetishizations, and the "two tribes" power is revealed to be unequal in terms of who has the ability to construct narrative truth and social systems.

As it slips between the diarists' points of view and Zoe's (Zoe interjects contextual details or impressions into diary entries; other diary entries give way to Zoe's imagined characters without context) the novel-within-a-novel proves to be a challenging narrative structure. As a framing device, though, the metanovel heightens awareness of the novel as an artificial construct.

Provocative and precarious, the future-set novel *Two Tribes* imagines dire consequences if Britain's social breaches are left unaddressed.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (July / August 2021)

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