

the comparative weakness of the Established Church, the absence of art, literature and science, the dirt of the towns, the rough heartiness and hospitality – all formed a strange contrast to Cambridge and Brighton.<sup>14</sup>

Carpenter says:

It had come on me with great force that I would go and throw in my lot with the mass-people and the manual workers. I took up the University Extension work perhaps chiefly because it seemed to promise this result.

The reality was different, for

it merely brought me into the life of the commercial classes; and for seven years I served – instead of the Rachel of my heart's desire – a Leah to whom I was not greatly attached.<sup>15</sup>

The 'Leah' was middle class and very female, whereas 'the Rachel of his heart's desire' was working class and *male*.

Carpenter's homosexuality was the dominant factor throughout his life and both his originality and his written oeuvre grew out of it. Women were always to be strongly drawn to him and he proved highly empathetic to their condition, but

from the first, my feeling, physically, toward the female sex was one of indifference, and later on ... of positive repulsion. Though having several female friends, whose society I like and to whom I

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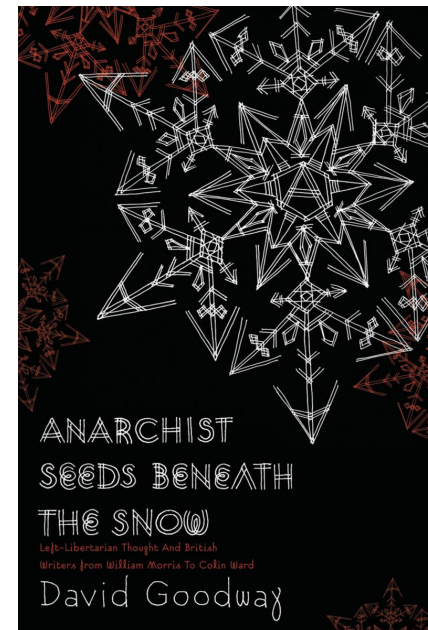
<sup>14</sup> MDD, pp. 79–80.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

# Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow

Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward

David Goodway



2006

I had come to feel that the so-called intellectual life of the University was ... a fraud and a weariness. These everlasting discussions of theories which never came anywhere near actual life, this cheap philosophizing and ornamental cleverness, this endless book-learning, and the queer cynicism and boredom underlying – all impressed me with a sense of utter emptiness. The prospect of spending the rest of my life in that atmosphere terrified me...<sup>12</sup>

Without a fellowship how was Carpenter to support himself? In this respect, though, he immediately fell on his feet, for it was in the autumn of 1873 that Cambridge launched the University Extension movement<sup>13</sup> and he was appointed to lecture on astronomy from October 1874 in Leeds, Halifax and Skipton. For the next seven years he was engaged in this work in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, adding courses on ‘Sound’, ‘Light’, ‘Pioneers of Science’ and ‘The Science and History of Music’ to those on ‘Astronomy’ and ‘Modern Astronomical Discovery’, spending the winters in lodgings in Leeds, Nottingham, York or Sheffield and the summers in Brighton. His University Extension years were the crucial transitional period in his life. Before 1874

I had never been in the Northern towns. I was profoundly ignorant of commercial life. The manners, customs, ideas, ideals, the types of people, the trades, manufactures, the dominance of Dissent,

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72; but cf. Tsuzuki, pp. 26–7.

<sup>13</sup> N.A. Jepson, *The Beginnings of English University Adult Education – Policy and Problems: A Critical Study of the Early Cambridge and Oxford University Extension Lecture Movements between 1873 and 1907, with Special Reference to Yorkshire* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), pp. 82, 100. This is the standard work on its subject, but has no more on Carpenter’s career as a University Extension lecturer than is in *My Days and Dreams*.

following the resignation because of religious doubts of Leslie Stephen. Carpenter was ordained in 1870, having already become a curate at St Edward's Church, where the second incumbent under whom he worked was the Christian Socialist F.D. Maurice. Charles Carpenter happened to be a great admirer of Maurice and had brought his family up in Maurice's Broad Church mysticism; but direct contact with him accentuated his son's mounting problems with the Church of England. Maurice was the new Professor of Moral Philosophy, yet 'of his philosophy perhaps the less said the better':

I opened out my difficulties to him; and he was I think troubled to find I could not reconcile myself to the position which *he* occupied apparently without difficulty. But to me his attitude was a growing wonder.... the trouble to me was a practical one – namely the insuperable *feeling* of falsity and dislocation which I experienced, and which accompanied all my professional work from the reading of the services to the visiting of old women in their almshouses.... Deep below I felt that some sort of sheer necessity was driving me on. Sometimes when I was occupied with, and thinking about, quite other things, a kind of shiver would run down my back: 'You've got to go, you've got to go', and I felt as if I was being pushed to the edge of a steep place.<sup>11</sup>

Carpenter first resigned his curacy and proceeded in 1873 to relinquish his orders. This was an especially brave act since he thereby forfeited his clerical fellowship, although obviously he was hoping to be re-elected to a lay fellowship (which was possible since the Liberal government's legislation of 1870–1), despite recalling in his autobiography that

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 58–9 (Carpenter's emphasis).

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meals and care-lined brow, goes to and fro like an automaton...<sup>8</sup>

Carpenter was the seventh of ten siblings, six of them sisters. When he reached the age of ten he was sent as a day boy to Brighton College, a public school which had been founded only in 1845. That the family was somewhat unconventional is indicated by all of them – with the exception of the eldest brother, who had just left school and joined the Indian Civil Service – taking off in 1857 to spend a year in France, where they lived at Versailles and Edward and Alfred attended the Lycée Impériale. Charles Carpenter was an intellectual: he had known and admired Coleridge, studied German philosophy in the original, and was ‘a philosophic Radical of the Mill school’ and a strong supporter of Henry Fawcett when MP for Brighton.<sup>9</sup> Carpenter greatly loved both his parents – they were ‘the best people in the world’ – but his mother regarded ‘all expression of tender feeling little short of a sin’: ‘We early learned to suppress and control emotion, and to fight our own battles alone.’<sup>10</sup>

Carpenter did not leave school until he was nineteen, but still spent five months learning German in Heidelberg before going up in 1864, now aged twenty, to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where he read mathematics. He graduated in 1868 as tenth wrangler (that is, with the tenth best marks in mathematics that year in the entire university) and was elected to a clerical fellowship at Trinity Hall. He was to be a lecturer in mathematics but the holder of his fellowship had to be an Anglican clergyman. This was no difficulty for Carpenter since from schooldays he had been intending to take orders, yet ironically, given later developments, his fellowship had become vacant

<sup>8</sup> Edward Carpenter, *England’s Ideal: And Other Papers on Social Subjects* (1887; London: Swan Sonnenschein, revised edn, 1895), pp. 88–9 (Carpenter’s emphasis).

<sup>9</sup> MDD, pp. 38–9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15, 42.

Alfred's son, Francis, became a national hero during the First World War for his role in the blocking of the Zeebrugge Canal.<sup>6</sup> Charles Carpenter's marriage in 1833 led to his retirement from the bar; after his father-in-law's death in 1841 he and his family were able to move from Walthamstow to Brighton; and when the wealthy Admiral Carpenter died in 1846 he was 'freed ... from any real cause of pecuniary anxiety – though from time to time all through his later life he was liable to fits of considerable depression and nervousness about his monetary concerns'.<sup>7</sup> It was then observation of the nagging anxiety of his neurasthenic father's life as a *rentier* that accounts for a major thrust of Carpenter's critique of the unhappinesses of the middle-class life, particularly in *England's Ideal*:

From his childhood he is trained ostensibly in the fear of God, but really in the fear of Money. The whole tenor of the conversation which he hears round him, and his early teaching, tend to impress upon him the awful dangers of not having *enough*.... The youthful tender conscience soon comes to look upon ... the acquisition of large dividends as part of the serious work of life ... he realizes with painful clearness the difficulty of finding investments which shall be profitable and *also secure*; circulars, reports, newspaper-cuttings, and warning letters, flow in upon him; sleepless nights are followed by anxious days; telegrams and railway journeys succeed each other. But the game goes on: the income gets bigger, and the fear of the workhouse looms closer! ... the hapless boy, now an old man before his time, with snatched

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<sup>6</sup> Except where otherwise indicated, all details of Carpenter's life are drawn from his autobiography (MDD) or Tsuzuki; but for this paragraph see also Ida G. Hyett, 'From the Family Point of View', in Beith, pp. 112–18.

<sup>7</sup> MDD, pp. 37–8.

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terval of ten years until an uneven collection of essays that initially had appeared as a special issue of a journal, *Prose Studies*, and a fine biography published in India, yet effectively unknown elsewhere. Whereas both Morris and Ruskin have been reassessed during the last thirty to forty years and restored to their full Victorian grandeur, Carpenter, not of their stature but an interesting, original and important writer and practical thinker, whose name it is not foolish to mention alongside theirs, returned to the periphery and neglect, although the publication in 2008 of Sheila Rowbotham's acclaimed biography may end this.<sup>5</sup> Edward Carpenter was born in 1844 in Brighton to a family of strong naval traditions. His mother Sophia, née Wilson, of Walthamstow, was the daughter of a naval officer who had become a shipbuilder. His father Charles was the son of an admiral – this side of the family was from the West Country – and himself served in the Royal Navy until his mid-twenties, when, for reasons of health, he left active service and read for the Chancery Bar. Carpenter's younger brother, Alfred, attained the rank of commander and was decorated with the DSO (although he married the sister of the Fabian Sydney Olivier, was treasurer of the post-Fabian Fellowship of the New Life and supported Edward's ideas); and

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items had been preceded by Terry Eagleton's entirely unpublished doctoral thesis, 'Nature and Spirit: Edward Carpenter in His Intellectual Context' (Cambridge PhD, 1969) – although see Terry Eagleton, 'Edward Carpenter', *Tribune*, 18 March 1966, and also his *Shakespeare and Society: Critical Studies in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), pp. 193–206. Also the argument of Delavenay's book was anticipated in an article by the Indian scholar: D.K. Barua, 'An Unacknowledged Source of Some of D.H. Lawrence's Ideas', *Journal of English Studies*, X (1969), pp. 57–70.

<sup>5</sup> Brown (one of the contributors to this volume, Keith Nield, had previously written an admirable entry on Carpenter for Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (London: Macmillan), II (1974), pp. 85–93); Dilip Kumar Barua, *Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929: An Apostle of Freedom* (Burdwan: The University of Burdwan, 1991); Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London and New York: Verso, 2008).

rial volume in 1931 and Tom Bell's interesting pamphlet the following year<sup>2</sup> there was not a single book or pamphlet about him – with the partial exception of the indispensable bibliography produced by Sheffield City Libraries, to which he had bequeathed his books and papers<sup>3</sup> – for nearly forty years. Carpenter's reputation had collapsed for the same reasons, and even more completely than those of Ruskin and Morris. Then, in 1970, a lecture by an unrelated namesake appeared in print, closely followed by Emile Delavenay's important and persuasive study of Carpenter's unacknowledged influence on D.H. Lawrence (who never once mentioned Carpenter's name in his copious published output – and on only one occasion in a letter), Sheila Rowbotham's long and original biographical essay, and at last, in 1980, Chushichi Tsuzuki's excellent, albeit too short, biography, amazingly the first.<sup>4</sup> There followed an in-

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Beith (ed.), *Edward Carpenter: In Appreciation* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931); T.H. Bell, *Edward Carpenter: The English Tolstoi* (Los Angeles, CA: The Libertarian Group, 1932).

<sup>3</sup> *A Bibliography of Edward Carpenter: A Catalogue of Books, Manuscripts, Letters Etc. by and about Edward Carpenter in the Carpenter Collection in the Department of Local History of the Central Library, Sheffield, with Some Entries from Other Sources* (Sheffield: Sheffield City Libraries, 1949). The Carpenter Collection has now been removed to Sheffield Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929: Democratic Author and Poet: A Restatement and Reappraisal* (London: Dr Williams's Trust, 1970); Emile Delavenay, *D.H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter: A Study in Edwardian Transition* (London: Heinemann, 1971); Sheila Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life', in Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977); Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). See also Sheila Rowbotham, 'In Search of Carpenter', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 3 (Spring 1977). There is, in addition, from the beginning of the decade an insightful article by Stanley Pierson: 'Edward Carpenter, Prophet of a Socialist Millennium', *Victorian Studies*, XIII, no. 3 (March 1970), pp. 301–18 (only partially reprinted in his *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: The Struggle for a New Consciousness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 97–105). It is noteworthy that these

For **Che Mah** without whose love, companionship, enjoyment of life and sense of fun it is improbable this book would ever have been written

## Acknowledgements

First I must thank the following institutions and their staff for access to various collections: International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam (Goldman Archive); University of Leeds (Central Records); Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds (Mattison Collection and Read Library); University College London (Alex Comfort Papers); William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles; Museum of People's History, Manchester (Communist Party Archive); University of Reading (Routledge Archive); Sheffield Archives (Carpenter Collection); University of Victoria, Victoria, BC (Read Archive). I have also made great use of not only the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, but also the J.B. Priestley Library, University of Bradford (and its too little utilized Commonweal Collection); the British Library; and the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics (much appreciated for its open access to the shelves).

I have had the privilege of knowing reasonably well two of my principal subjects, Alex Comfort and Chris Pallis, and a third, Colin Ward, extremely well, and I am indebted to them for answering my questions and providing me with access to their records. I should thank too Jane Comfort, Nicholas Comfort, Jeanne Pallis, Michael Pallis, Ken Weller and Harriet Ward. It is appropriate to mention here also Ben Read, Herbert Read's youngest son and literary executor, the keeper of his father's flame and an energetic support for all who write about him.

I have also enjoyed the friendship over many years of Carole Pateman, Nicolas Walter, Peter Marshall, Alan Carter

## 3. Edward Carpenter

Edward Carpenter's first significant works, *Towards Democracy*, *England's Ideal* and *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*, appeared in the 1880s and from the 1890s the second two – above all *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* – and later titles were selling extremely well. By 1919 16,000 copies of *England's Ideal* had been printed and 21,000 of *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*, and by 1921 no fewer than 30,000 of the complete edition of *Towards Democracy*, which had been published only as recently as 1905, while *Love's Coming-of-Age* of 1896 reached 14,000 with Allen & Unwin by 1916 and had gone into a cheap edition with another publisher. Besides American editions of almost all Carpenter's books, there were translations into French, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Russian, Bulgarian and Japanese. It has been estimated that *Love's Coming-of-Age* had worldwide sales of at least 100,000; and its translator believed that no other modern English book had been so successful in Germany. By 1916 four books discussing his oeuvre had been published in English and one in French, as well as many articles.<sup>1</sup>

Although Carpenter himself lived (and published) for another ten years, all this changed drastically with the ending of the First World War; and after the publication of a fine memo-

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<sup>1</sup> These details are taken from the very useful bibliography appended to Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams: Being Autobiographical Notes* (1916; London: Allen & Unwin, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1921) [hereafter MDD], pp. 325–36; and Keith Nield, 'Edward Carpenter: The Uses of Utopia', in Tony Brown (ed.), *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1990), pp. 19–20.



adherence to state planning. The 1920s and the first half of the 1930s were therefore exceptionally unfavourable years for left libertarianism, the current only reviving in 1936 with the initial success of the Spanish Revolution.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> S.T. Glass, *The Responsible Society: The Ideas of the English Guild Socialists* (London: Longmans, 1966), has become the (exceedingly brief) standard account of Guild Socialism; but Niles Carpenter, *Guild Socialism: An Historical and Critical Analysis* (New York: D. Appleton, 1922), although a contemporary study, continues to be indispensable. See also Cole, *History*, III, Part 1, pp. 242–8; C.E.M. Joad, *Introduction to Modern Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 74–86; and, for an anarchist appreciation, Geoffrey Ostergaard, *The Tradition of Workers' Control: Selected Writings*, ed. Brian Bamford (London: Freedom Press, 1997), pp. 55–80. For Cole, there are Wright's excellent study and Margaret Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole* (London: Macmillan, 1971), esp. chaps. 4–6, 8, 10; as well as interesting discussions by Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 35–42, and Darrow Schecter, *Radical Theories: Paths beyond Marxism and Social Democracy* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 111–24, 182–6. Richard Price, 'Contextualizing British Syndicalism, c. 1907–c. 1920', *Labour History Review*, LXIII (1998), pp. 261–76, is a stimulating reconsideration of all the libertarian movements of the second decade of the twentieth century, and of which Ken Coates and Tony Topham (eds.), *Workers' Control: A Book of Readings and Witnesses for Workers' Control* (London: Panther, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1970) contains a useful anthology.

and Vernon Richards. I also knew, but much less well, Albert Meltzer, Norman Potter, Geoffrey Ostergaard and Ronald Sampson (whose daughter, Elizabeth Sampson, I also need to thank). I only met Edward Thompson on two or three occasions and so have had to rely almost exclusively on his marvellous writings as well as the assistance of Dorothy Thompson. Ivan Avakumović once bought me lunch in Vancouver; I had some correspondence with George Woodcock and a very little with Tony Gibson; and I have met Stuart Christie once or twice.

I am indebted for information, material, stimulation and advice to very many others, who include Cathy Adeane, Alan Anderson, Paul Anderson, John Barnes, Heiner Becker, Mark Beeson, Dave Berry, Janet Biehl, David Bradshaw, E.E. Bissell (whose extraordinary Powys collection is now to be found at the Dorset County Museum), Raymond Carr, Glen Cavaliero, Hugh Cecil, Ted Crawford, Andy Croft, Louise de Bruin, Francis Ellingham, Martyn Everett, Sharif Gemie, Paul Gibbard, Karen Goaman, Paul Gordon, Dorothy Greenald, Judy Greenway, Peter Powys Grey, Steven Halliwell, Julian Harber, Cecily Hill, Peter Hirschmann, Christian Høgsbjerg, Belinda Humfrey, James Joll, Ian Jones (for the loan of many of Edward Carpenter's books), W.J. (Bill) Keith, Ruth Kinna, Robin Kinross, Jeff Kwintner, Morine Krissdóttir, Carl Levy, Paul Lewis, Charles Lock, Jo McGhee (the current owner of Carpenter's house at Millthorpe), Stuart Macdonald, Roger Martlew, Sue Powell, Isobel Powys Marks, Stephen Powys Marks, Richard Maxwell, Mervyn Miller, Michael Paraskos, S.E. Parker, Bob Potter, Jon Purkis, John Quail, Susan Rands, Tom and Celia Read (for their hospitality and conversation at Stonegrave), Virginia Rowan (Louis Adeane's widow), Alan Smith, John Sloan, Luke Spencer, Tom Steele, John Toft, Ruth Walter, Alice Wexler, Andy Whitehead, George Williamson and Mary Young.

Many readers – or more probably non-readers – will be astonished to learn of the support I have received over the years from Eric Hobsbawm and John Saville (including unrestricted access to the latter's personal papers and the loan of several files), right down to encouragement for this book and assistance in trying to place it for publication. My intellectual and political outlook has been shaped by the Marxism of their remarkable generation of historians, to which of course Edward Thompson belonged, as much as by anarchism. A younger member of this group, Raphael Samuel, was another dear (and much missed) friend of long standing. But I have also been greatly influenced by the writings, which I continue to esteem, of Murray Bookchin, the warmth and generosity of whose friendship I have had the pleasure of experiencing.

This work was written in the School of Continuing Education, University of Leeds, lamentably closed on 31 July 2005 after fifty-nine distinguished years – for seventeen of which Edward Thompson was a member of the staff – yet another indication of the sad, bad times in which we live. I am enormously indebted to the tolerant but wholehearted support of three of its chairs: Miriam Zukas, Dick Taylor who has always believed in the importance and relevance of libertarian theory, and Malcolm Chase, a fellow historian of Chartism whose comradeship has in general meant much to me.

Ultimately, though, I have been dependent on a small group of intimate friends who have always been involved in whatever I have been writing. I have known for many years Tim Hyman – we first met as members of the Powys Society and our mutual admiration of the novels of John Cowper Powys continues to be a major bond – and Richard Schofield (the final editor of *Solidarity*), as also John Doheny in Vancouver, but whose death in January 2005 was a sorry blow. Much more recently Alastair Reid has joined this group. Having read sample chapters for another publisher, he established contact and has commented most empathetically, yet also critically, on each section of the

It is a commonplace that during the past six years the discussion of industrial and social problems has shifted its centre. Prior to the war students and reformers were principally occupied with questions of poverty. Today their main interest appears to be the government of industry. An increasing number of trade unionists regard poverty as a symptom of a more deeply rooted malady which they would describe as industrial autocracy and demand 'control'.<sup>66</sup>

But the traditional moderation of British trade unions was soon to reassert itself; the first phase of the interwar depression arrived during the second half of 1920, overwhelming the chances of success for militant action; and the Labour Party's electoral advances, above all the breakthrough in the election of 1922, went far to restore faith in parliamentarianism and to set the British working class, after the decade-long dalliance of some of its sections with libertarian alternatives, firmly on the parliamentary road to socialism. Cole and his wife Margaret had from 1919 edited the *Guildsman*, which they kept going as the *Guild Socialist* down to 1923, and then brought out their own *New Standards* until they were obliged to admit defeat the following year, overwhelmed by the statism of both the Labour and the Communist Parties. It was in 1922 that Orage, although by then obsessed by Social Credit and occultism, abandoned the *New Age*, to counter whose youthful and provincial 'anarchism' the Webbs had launched in 1913 the aptly titled *New Statesman*; and it was the latter's metropolitan 'bureaucracy' which was to flourish in the coming decades. Significant decentralizing tendencies in Labour's policies were to be extinguished by the economic and political crisis of 1931 and the

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<sup>66</sup> R.H. Tawney, 'Foreword' to Carter L. Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), p. vii.

more prosperous members of the community not requiring to be subjected to any such legislation.<sup>63</sup>

Belloc was to develop with G.K. Chesterton the theory of distributism, urging the creation of a nation of small proprietors through the widest possible distribution of property: ‘the re-establishment of a Distributive State in which the mass of citizens should severally own the means of production’. Syndicalists, industrial unionists and Guild Socialists, supplemented during wartime by the leadership of the Shop Stewards’ Movement, had no sympathy for this political programme, yet were impressed by Belloc’s analysis, sharing his rejection of ‘the servile state’.<sup>64</sup> Belloc’s political origins in Liberalism help to explain the apparent paradox that in their anti-statism the revolutionary socialists had drawn very near to the concerns of the radical-liberal ‘Old Unionists’ who had been resisting state socialism since the 1890s and continued to represent a major current within the trade unions, and hence also within the early Labour Party (established in 1900–6).<sup>65</sup>

By the end of the war the mental landscape of much of the labour movement had been, although only temporarily, transformed. As Tawney commented in 1920:

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<sup>63</sup> Maurice B. Reckitt, *As It Happened: An Autobiography* (London: J.M. Dent, 1941), pp. 107–8.

<sup>64</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *The Servile State* (London and Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1912), pp. 5–6. See Hinton, *Shop Stewards’ Movement*, pp. 43–8, and Holton, *British Syndicalism*, pp. 181–4, for the book’s influence. The socio-political ideas of Belloc and Chesterton are discussed by Barker, pp. 84–91; Margaret Canovan, *G.K. Chesterton: Radical Populist* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), esp. pp. 81–99; Ian Boyd, ‘Chesterton and Distributism’, in D.J. Conlon (ed.), *G.K. Chesterton: A Half Century of Views* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Alastair J. Reid, ‘Old Unionism Reconsidered: The Radicalism of Robert Knight, 1870–1900’, in Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organized Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 228–43, for a key member of the previous generation.

book as it was completed. I only hope that the totality will not prove a disappointment.

Various portions of this book have been previously published, as follows, and I am exceptionally grateful to the respective editors and publishers for their encouragement and comments and enabling the present work to emerge. Chapter 5 is a revised version of ‘A Cult of Sensations: John Cowper Powys’s Life-Philosophy and Individualist Anarchism’, *Powys Journal*, XIV (2004). Parts of chapters 6 and 7 first appeared in ‘The Politics of John Cowper Powys’, *Powys Review*, no. 15 (1984–5). Chapter 8 is a revision of ‘Introduction’, Herbert Read, *A One-Man Manifesto and Other Writings for Freedom Press* (London: Freedom Press, 1994), which later appeared as part of ‘Introduction’ and as ‘The Politics of Herbert Read’ in David Goodway (ed.), *Herbert Read Reassessed* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998). The second half of chapter 10 was published as ‘Aldous Huxley as Anarchist’, in Ian Angus (ed.), *Anarcho-Modernism: Toward a New Critical Theory: In Honour of Jerry Zaslove* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2001). Chapter 11 is a revised version of ‘Introduction’, David Goodway (ed.), *Against Power and Death: The Anarchist Articles and Pamphlets of Alex Comfort* (London: Freedom Press, 1994). Parts of chapters 10 and 11 also appeared in ‘Aldous Huxley and Alex Comfort: A Comparison’, in H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight (eds.), ‘*To Hell with Culture: Anarchism and Twentieth-Century English Literature*’ (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005). Some of chapter 12 appeared as parts of ‘E.P. Thompson and the Making of *The Making of the English Working Class*’, in Richard Taylor (ed.), *Beyond the Walls: 50 Years of Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Leeds, 1946–1996* (Leeds: The University of Leeds, 1996) and of ‘Muggletonian Marxism’, *Anarchist Studies*, VI (1998) and as ‘E.P. Thompson and William Morris’, in Peter Faulkner and Peter Preston (eds.), *William Morris: Centenary Essays* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999). Chapter 13 is a revision of

'Introduction', David Goodway (ed.), *For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004). Chapter 14 is an extended version of 'The Anarchism of Colin Ward', in Ken Worpole (ed.), *Richer Futures: Fashioning a New Politics* (London: Earthscan, 1999), which later served as 'Introduzione', David Goodway, *Conversazioni con Colin Ward* (Milan: Elèuthera, 2003) and in English as 'Introduction', Colin Ward and David Goodway, *Talking Anarchy* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2003).

My final debt, as attentive readers will have noticed, is to the woman to whom *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow* is dedicated.

Keighley,  
August 2005

into support of the Labour Party (he had actually joined the ILP in 1917), was selected as parliamentary candidate for Chelsea, and contested the seat in the general elections of 1922 and 1923.<sup>62</sup>

Maurice Reckitt, who had been a prominent Guild Socialist, believed that 'syndicalism was so plainly an importation without any organic relation to English tradition or the industrial situation here, that apart from its effect in giving an impulse to the trade union amalgamation movement, its direct influence was very slight'. 'The anti-collectivist and anti-political trend found,' he considered, 'its true tongue in quite other quarters.' One of these was the *New Age* in general and Hobson's articles in particular; the other was the critique by Hilaire Belloc, Liberal MP for Salford South, 1906–10, of the Liberals' innovative social legislation culminating in the National Insurance Act of 1911, originating in his articles for the *New Age* and published as *The Servile State* in 1912. 'I cannot overestimate the impact of this book upon my mind,' Reckitt recalled:

Belloc argued, with a rigorous cogency and with forceful illustration, that the whole allegedly Socialist trend, which the Fabians were so fond of boasting that they had grafted upon Liberalism, was leading not to a community of free and equal citizens, not even to any true collectivism, but to the imposition upon the masses as the price of the reforms by which their social condition was to be ameliorated, of a servile status, definitely sundering them from the condition of those

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<sup>62</sup> Ironside, esp. chaps. 4–8, is a first-rate study (although not proceeding beyond 1939). See also Ronald W. Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (London: Jonathan Cape and Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), chaps. 10–14; Caroline Moorehead, *Bertrand Russell: A Life* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), chaps. 9–12; Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), chaps. 13–20.

Russell explained 'Why I Am a Guildsman' for the *Guildsman* in 1919, the year of maximum industrial militancy and when his own left libertarianism also climaxed, ending an article on 'Democracy and Direct Action' with a flourish:

Direct action has its dangers, but so has every vigorous form of activity. And in our recent realization of the importance of law we must not forget that the greatest of all dangers to a civilization is to become stereotyped and stagnant. From this danger, at least, industrial unrest is likely to save us.<sup>59</sup>

Although Russell himself identified a position of 'aristocratic anarchism' and Beatrice Webb regarded him as an 'aristocratic anarchist', the latter description derives from the Webbs' suggestive habit of dividing radicals between 'bureaucrats' and 'anarchists', and his politics have been more accurately categorized as 'aristocratic liberalism'.<sup>60</sup> He visited Soviet Russia in 1920, 'hoping to find the promised land', but 'loathed the Bolsheviks', very perceptively considering Bolshevism to be 'a close tyrannical bureaucracy with a spy system more elaborate and terrible than the Tsar's': 'No vestige of liberty remains, in thought or speech or action'.<sup>61</sup> He relapsed

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<sup>59</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Uncertain Paths to Freedom: Russia and China, 1919–22*, ed. Richard A. Rempel, Beryl Haslam *et al.* (*The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. 15) (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 36, 80–81. 'Introduction' to *ibid.*, pp. xxix–xxxii, has a helpful handling of Russell's position with respect to Guild Socialism and direct action.

<sup>60</sup> Philip Ironside, *The Social and Political Thought of Bertrand Russell: The Development of an Aristocratic Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 104; Margaret Cole, *Growing up into Revolution* (London: Longmans, Green, 1949), pp. 135–6. See also 'Introduction' to Bertrand Russell, *Prophecy and Dissent, 1914–16*, ed. Richard A. Rempel *et al.* (*The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. 13) (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. xxvii–xxviii.

<sup>61</sup> *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 3 vols., 1967–9), II, p. 122.

# Abbreviations

AIT	Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores
CGT	Confédération Général du Travail
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CNT	Conferación Nacional del Trabajo
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
DAC	Direct Action Committee against Nuclear War
END	European Nuclear Disarmament
FAI	Federación Anarquista Ibérica
FPSI	Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IWMA	International Workingmen's Association
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista
PPU	Peace Pledge Union
RCP	Revolutionary Communist Party
14RSG	Regional Seat of Government
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SIA	Solidaridad Internacional

be the ultimate ideal, to which society should continually approximate, is for the present impossible, and would not survive more than a year or two at most if it were adopted'. On the other hand,

both Marxian Socialism and Syndicalism, in spite of many drawbacks, seem ... calculated to give rise to a happier and better world than that in which we live. I do not, however, regard either of them as the *best* practicable system. Marxian Socialism ... would give far too much power to the State, while Syndicalism... would ... find itself forced to reconstruct a central authority in order to put an end to the rivalries of different groups of producers.

His conclusion therefore was that 'the best practicable system is that of Guild Socialism, which concedes what is valid both in the claims of the State Socialists and in the Syndicalist fear of the State', although considering that the Guild Socialism he advocated was a form 'leaning more, perhaps, towards Anarchism than the official Guildsman would wholly approve'.<sup>57</sup> When the narrator of Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* visits Thornton Tyrrell (the name under which Russell appears), he finds him reading Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread*.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Proposed Roads to Freedom: Socialism, Anarchism and Syndicalism* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, n.d.), pp. xi–xii, 211. (The American edition of *Roads to Freedom* had the more tentative title of *Proposed Roads to Freedom*.) See too an interview of 1917, 'Guild Socialism and Education', in Bertrand Russell, *Pacifism and Revolution, 1916–18*, ed. Richard A. Rempel *et al.* (*The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. 14) (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 467–70. *Freedom's* review of *Roads to Freedom* is reprinted in a useful article: Vivian Harper, 'Russell and the Anarchists', *Anarchy*, no. 109 (March 1970). Marshall, *Demanding*, pp. 566–70, also discusses Russell's relationship to anarchism.

<sup>58</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (London: Reprint Society, 1940), pp. 478–9.

the *New Age* in the trenches, supporting its political as well as its aesthetic agendas, and a contributor to it and the *Guildsman* (and Orage was to be a decisive influence on him).<sup>55</sup> R.H. Tawney joined the National Guilds League and one of his most impressive works, *The Acquisitive Society* of 1921, bears the imprint of the Guild Socialist emphasis on function.

Bertrand Russell, of a Whig family, the godson of John Stuart Mill, and a friend of the Webbs and member of the Fabian Society from the 1890s, was another eminent member of the National Guilds League, serving on its Executive; and, impelled by his fierce, highly activist opposition to the First World War – although not of military age, he was to serve a six months’ sentence in Brixton – he was for several years a pronounced left libertarian. Announcing this turn in his thinking in the widely read *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, a series of lectures written in 1915, he explained that ‘under the influence of socialism, most liberal thought in recent years has been in favour of increasing the power of the State, but more or less hostile to the power of private property’, whereas ‘syndicalism has been hostile both to the State and to private property’, and declared his belief that ‘syndicalism is more nearly right than socialism in this respect, that both private property and the State ... have become harmful to life through excess of power, and that both are hastening the loss of vitality from which the civilized world increasingly suffers’. In contrast, he also maintained that in some respects the State’s functions should be enlarged.<sup>56</sup> Three years later, in *Roads to Freedom*, routes identified in the sub-title as ‘socialism, anarchism and syndicalism’, he was firm in holding back from anarchism, since ‘pure Anarchism, though it should

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<sup>55</sup> Herbert Read, *The Contrary Experience: Autobiographies* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), pp. 72–3, 83–4, 111–12, 203, 210–11.

<sup>56</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1916), p. 44. For the influence of the war, see *ibid.*, pp. 9–10. Read’s recommendation of the book to his future wife is in Read, *Contrary Experience*, p. 94.

## Preface to the new edition

This book should have been entitled *Seeds beneath the Snow*. I was advised by my original publisher that the word ‘anarchist’ needed to be in the title if I was to find a significant number of readers outside academia. Since that was exactly what I wanted – and continue to seek – I inserted ‘anarchist’ in front of *Seeds beneath the Snow* without appreciating the adverse consequences. First, because the volume then appeared too crude and propagandist, it failed to be noticed by the mainstream press and periodicals (save, surprisingly, the *Daily Telegraph*, where it was enthusiastically reviewed by A.N. Wilson). Second, some readers, even sympathetic and knowledgeable ones, have complained that by no means are all my subjects anarchist. That, though, I have never claimed – merely that they are ‘left-libertarian’. The work of non-anarchist writers can unintentionally have anarchist implications or sow anarchist ‘seeds’, and that seems to me obviously to be the case with left-libertarians.

A more cogent criticism would have been that while I implicitly allocated full chapters to full or near anarchists, Aldous Huxley realistically can only be categorized as a left-libertarian. Further, G.D.H. Cole is of such importance as a thinker and influence that he is deserving of a half-chapter along with Morris, Orwell and Thompson. I have not been permitted to make such major alterations to this second edition, although I have made numerous small changes to the text, correcting errors, improving style and bringing some things up to date. More substantial additions follow in the afterword on a chapter-by-chapter basis, surveying recent publications, attempting to do justice to

older works which I have only just caught up with and introducing some new sources (principally works by the appropriate author).

Although a couple of chapters dated from as early as 1994, when I came to complete the book ten years later I did so under considerable pressure, with the introduction and conclusion (in particular) being written at speed and without significant reflection. I also found myself – much to my surprise – adding short passages throughout the book about less important writers: from John Barlas, Bertrand Russell and Eric Gill through to Nicolas Walter, Carole Pateman and Peter Marshall. It is therefore not surprising that reviewers and others have remarked on omissions. The absence of women writers has (as I had anticipated) been remarked upon, one reviewer nominating Mary Wollstonecraft, Dora Marsden, Rebecca West and Sheila Rowbotham (as well as Louisa Bevington and Ethel Mannin, whom I do bring in).<sup>1</sup> Wollstonecraft lies outside my chosen period, as do her husband William Godwin and their daughter's husband Percy Bysshe Shelley. I did consider Marsden but abandoned the idea given the inaccessibility of her writings. At a very late stage I was about to include Rowbotham, but chickened out not having time to do the necessary reading, but on the strength of her generous, very Marxist and sometimes uncomprehending review of *Seeds* I was correct to exclude her.<sup>2</sup> Yet she is now describing herself as a 'left-libertarian'.<sup>3</sup> As I explain below in the afterword, Guy Aldred was a deliberate omission. Others have suggested the novelist Julian Rathbone (1935–2008) and the Catholic philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, the latter for the

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<sup>1</sup> Judy Greenway, in *Anarchist Studies*, XVI (2008), p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> In *Red Pepper*, no. 158 (February–March 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 'Revolutionary Rosa', *Guardian*, 5 March 2011.

I am neither a Communist nor a Social Democrat, because I regard both as creeds of centralization and bureaucracy, whereas I feel sure that a Socialist society that is to be true to its equalitarian principles of human brotherhood must rest on the widest possible diffusion of power and responsibility, so as to enlist the active participation of as many as possible of its citizens in the tasks of democratic self-government.<sup>53</sup>

Concurrently he was writing:

Looking back, forty years later, to the movement as it existed when I was young, I am very conscious how much in those days we oversimplified the issues, and how much of the reality we failed to face. But I am as convinced as ever I was that we were essentially in the right, and that Socialism cannot be soundly built except on a foundation of trust in the capacity of ordinary people to manage their own affairs ... Mass democracy, I feel sure, is bound to be unsound unless it can be broken up into units of normally manageable size and complexity. We made, no doubt, many errors; but in that respect we were right and our critics wrong.<sup>54</sup>

The National Guilds League had been set up belatedly in 1915 and from 1916 published the *Guildsman* (initially from Clydeside, significantly). Herbert Read was an avid reader of

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<sup>53</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought* (London: Macmillan, 5 vols, 1953–60), V, p. 337. See also *ibid.*, III, Part 1, pp. 246–8, and IV, Part 1, 25–6.

<sup>54</sup> G.D.H. Cole, 'Foreword', to Pribičević, p. viii. See also G.D.H. Cole, *The Case for Industrial Partnership* (London: Macmillan, 1957), esp. pp. 10, 21. Colin Ward, 'The State and Society', *Anarchy*, no. 14 (April 1964), pp. 115–17, gives an anarchist view of Cole.



group of connected purposes. Brown, Jones and Robinson must therefore have, not one vote each, but as many different functional votes as there are different questions calling for associative action in which they are interested.<sup>50</sup>

Much of Cole's conception of a fully participatory society had its origins in Rousseau, whose *Social Contract* and *Discourses* he had translated for the Everyman edition of 1913, though Morris, whom he described as 'of the same blood as National Guildsmen', was the major lifelong influence on Cole.<sup>51</sup>

Although many of his fellow Guild Socialists – together they had converted the Fabian Research Department into the Labour Research Department – were to become Communists, Cole himself stuck with the Labour Party while remaining fundamentally a Guild Socialist and libertarian. He could still write in 1941: 'One man cannot really represent another – that's flat. The odd thing is that anyone should have supposed he could.' Similarly he believed that 'every good democrat is a bit of an anarchist when he's scratched'.<sup>52</sup> At the end of his life he concluded his monumental history of socialist thought with a forthright statement:

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<sup>50</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-stated* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), p. 33. G.D.H. Cole, *Social Theory* (London: Methuen, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1923), pp. 66–72, classifies the range of functional associations.

<sup>51</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *Self-Government in Industry* (London: G. Bell, 1917), p. 121. For Morris, see also *ibid.*, pp. 119–22, 280, 302; G.D.H. Cole, *William Morris: A Lecture Given on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1957 to the William Morris Society at the Art Workers' Guild* (London: William Morris Society, 1960). For the debt to Rousseau, see G.D.H. Cole, 'Conflicting Social Obligations', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, XV (1915), an important paper in the evolution of Cole's ideas; and G.D.H. Cole, *Essays in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1950), chap. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Cole, *Essays*, pp. 98, 100.

originality and libertarianism of the articles he wrote as a Trotskyist and which have recently been disinterred.<sup>4</sup>

I have decided to deal very briefly (at the end of the afterword, rather than at appropriate places in the main text) with the following new writers: G. Scott Williamson, Innes H. Pearse, Charles Duff – although like Wilde an Irishman and therefore not strictly 'British' – Colin MacInnes, George Melly and Brian Morris.

If there remain significant omissions, it is because many writers have libertarian tendencies, identifying with anarchism, if not explicitly, certainly implicitly. As I argue elsewhere, there is a long-standing affinity between anarchism and all forms of the creative, imaginative writing we call 'literature'.<sup>5</sup>

## Additional acknowledgements

I have continued to receive assistance from many of those listed on p. viii. Of these I shall only name again Mark Beeson, since he has now read the book scrupulously, spotted numerous typos and minor errors and advised on passages of sloppy writing (all missed by the original copy editor...). In addition, I must now thank for help of various kinds the following: Richard Alexander, Emily Charkin, Rossella di Leo, Danny Evans, Rosemary Fost, Robert Goff, Wynford Hicks, Norm Mairs, Eric Laursen, Brian Morris, Barry Pateman, Sheila Rowbotham, Rufus Segar, Wayne Spencer, Anna Vaninskaya, Christine Walter, Ben Ward, Damian White and Stuart White.

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<sup>4</sup> See Neil Davidson, 'Alasdair MacIntyre as a Marxist, 1956–1968', in Keith Flett (ed.), *1956 and All That* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> David Goodway, 'Literature and Anarchism', in Ruth Kinna (ed.), *Continuum Companion to Anarchism* (London and New York: Continuum, forthcoming)

# 1. Introduction

This book was strongly recommended to the commissioning editor of one of Britain's best-known firms by a reputable historian whose latest work he was publishing. The editor replied that personally he would be extremely interested but he would never dare to take it to his editorial board. The problem presumably lay in my subject, for anarchism continues to engender at the beginning of the twenty-first century the passionate opposition it aroused at the end of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries when it became irretrievably associated with bomb-throwing and violence, a violence that has re-erupted in recent years with the widely publicized activities of self-professed anarchists in the anti-globalization and similar movements.

Yet anarchism – or left libertarianism, if one requires a less emotive term – is a long-established political position and ideology, associated with a substantial body of necessary, radical thought. In other countries this is taken for granted and intellectual respect is paid to anarchism, even if very much a minority tradition, but it has never been in Britain and the other Anglo-Saxon nations. Here anarchism continues to be shunned in polite circles, whether social or academic. Herbert Read tells of finding himself at a dinner sitting next to 'a lady well known in the political world, a member of the Conservative party', who 'at once asked me what my politics were, and on my replying "I am an anarchist"... cried, "How absurd!", and did not address another word to me during the whole meal'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Read, *Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p. 13.

pendent of the 'Guild Congress' the State would remain 'with its Government, its Parliament, and its civil and military machinery...Certainly independent; probably even supreme.'<sup>48</sup>

While Hobson seems to have been responsible for initiating the primary features of Guild Socialism, its principal thinker was to be G.D.H. Cole, a very young Oxford don before the war and unpaid research officer to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers during it. Cole, a prolific author throughout his life, was particularly fecund between 1917 and 1920 when he published four books on Guild Socialism – *Self-Government in Industry*, *Social Theory*, *Chaos and Order in Industry* and, the most systematic exposition, *Guild Socialism Re-stated* – another four with major Guild Socialist bearings, several pamphlets, and many articles.<sup>49</sup> He developed a theory of functional democracy, rejecting democratic representative government in favour of a pluralistic society in which representation would be functional – that is, derived from all the functional groups of which the individual is a member (the most important are named as political, vocational, appetitive, religious, provident, philanthropic, sociable and theoretic), final decisions having to emerge as a consensus between the different groups, not as the fiat of a sovereign authority:

... there must be ... as many separately elected groups of representatives as there are distinct essential groups of functions to be performed. Smith cannot represent Brown, Jones and Robinson as human beings; for a human being, as an individual, is fundamentally incapable of being represented. He can only represent the common point of view which Brown, Jones and Robinson hold in relation to some definite social purpose, or

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<sup>48</sup> Orage, *National Guilds*, p. 263.

<sup>49</sup> See the selective bibliography in A.W. Wright, *G.D.H. Cole and Socialist Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 286–8.

ter in *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*.<sup>46</sup> He had been a member of the West Yorkshire avant-garde responsible for the foundation of Leeds Arts Club, in which the dominant personality was A.R. Orage, who himself moved to London, taking over (with Holbrook Jackson, another Leeds man) the weekly *New Age* in 1907. Orage had a very considerable input in the emergence in the *New Age*'s columns of Guild Socialism. He published a series of articles in 1912–13 by S.G. Hobson, an Ulsterman then managing a banana plantation in British Honduras, and when Orage collected these as *National Guilds* he located the kernel of Hobson's ideas in Penty's work and also an article of his own (Orage had certainly collaborated with Penty in the development of *The Restoration of the Gild System*), yet these attributions were to be forcefully denied by Hobson himself.<sup>47</sup> In contrast to Penty, Hobson envisaged the trade unions converting themselves into enormous National Guilds which would take over the running of modern productive industry as well as distribution and exchange. This was, as the *Syndicalist* observed, entirely compatible with syndicalism; but alongside and inde-

<sup>46</sup> Stanley Pierson, *British Socialists: The Journey from Fantasy to Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 203–4, is sufficiently bold to offer an explication.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur J. Penty, *The Restoration of the Gild System* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1906), pp. vi–viii; A.R. Orage (ed.), *National Guilds: An Inquiry into the Wage System and the Way Out* (London: G. Bell, 1914), p. v; S.G. Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist* (London: Edward Arnold, 1938), pp. 176–7; Frank Matthews, 'The Ladder of Becoming: A.R. Orage, A.J. Penty and the Origins of Guild Socialism in England', in David E. Martin and David Rubenstein (eds.), *Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays Presented to John Saville* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 152–4. The article was A.R. Orage, 'Politics for Craftsmen', *Contemporary Review*, XCI (January–June 1907). For Orage's role in the elaboration of Hobson's ideas, see Rowland Kenney, *Westerling: An Autobiography* (London: J.M. Dent, 1939), p. 198; Wallace Martin, *'The New Age' under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), p. 208. See also Gary Taylor's useful *Orage and 'The New Age'* (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2000), esp. pp. 19–24, 57–63, as well as Pierson, *British Socialists*, pp. 192–226.

a close friend has delighted for many years in introducing me as 'an anarchist historian', a description usually met with at best bemusement, and otherwise appalled silence. Things have been no better on the left and in the working-class movement, for, as Read explained elsewhere: 'In calling [my] principles Anarchism I have forfeited any claim to be taken seriously as a politician, and have cut myself off from the main current of socialist activity in England.'<sup>2</sup> And whereas the manifestations, especially British but also internationally, of Marxism, Communism, democratic socialism, liberalism, conservatism, nationalism and even fascism, in terms of movements as well as theory, have been relentlessly discussed, analyzed and researched, left libertarianism is almost entirely neglected in this country.

The anarchist tradition is characterized by such concepts and practices as autonomy, both individual and communal; mutual aid, or co-operation; organization from the bottom up; opposition to hierarchy; direct democracy or, at the very least, participatory democracy; federation; self-management; decentralization; anti-statism; anti-parliamentarianism; spontaneity; resistance to war; and increasingly, although with deep roots in the tradition, sustainability and ecology.<sup>3</sup> It should therefore be immediately apparent that the current is of central contemporary pertinence, not only because of its engagement with the most pressing human and non-human problems but also since it is a politics which infuses what used to be called the 'new social movements': the peace and women's movements and now, increasingly, the environmental and anti-globalization (or anti-capitalism) movements, many of whose participants tend to be animated by anarchism, consciously or unconsciously. As a correspondent from Oakland,

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Read, *Annals of Innocence and Experience* (London: Faber & Faber, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1946), p. 1<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> For an able summary of the principal tenets of anarchism, also emphasizing the historically central repudiation of capitalism and the market economy, see Brian Morris, 'Dichotomies?', *Freedom*, 13 September 2003.

California, wrote in March 2004, ‘the libertarian sentiment in broader movements ... almost seems normalized these days’.

In addition, the mounting global crisis occasioned by the despoilation of the planet by irresponsible States, unrestrained capitalism and triumphant consumerism, has coincided catastrophically with the collapse of Communism and the political and intellectual bankruptcy of social democracy which have left social and political radicals in substantial disarray. In Britain the consequences of a decade of New Labour in general and the repercussions of the inept, disastrous war on Iraq and of the crazy intervention in Afghanistan in particular are still very much in the course of working themselves out.

Until recently I was reluctant to express my longstanding anarchist sympathies since they attracted such scorn, while in contrast my almost equal engagement with Marxism was modestly acceptable. I am increasingly convinced of the urgent relevance of the anarchist position and that it is not anarchism which is utopian but rather that it is the belief that voting for a political party – any party – can bring about significant social change that is utopian in the sense of being completely unrealistic. Anarchists have amused themselves by maintaining that ‘if voting changed anything, it would be abolished’; but there is demonstrable truth in the slogan. As William Morris observed, whereas ‘the socialists hoped to see society transformed into something fundamentally different ... The object of parliamentary institutions, on the contrary, was the preservation of society in its present form...’<sup>4</sup> Engagement in the electoral process helps to disengage activists from the social movements and direct action through which radical change might be achieved. It also legitimates the role of the elected politician and rule by government. Gaetano Mosca’s contention that ‘the represen-

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted by J.T. Murphy, *Preparing for Power: A Critical Study of the History of the British Working-Class Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), pp. 75–6.

it, ‘Guild Socialism’ stands forth as the latest lubrication of the middle-class mind. It is a ‘cool steal’ of the leading ideas of Syndicalism and a deliberate perversion of them.

We do not so much object to the term ‘guild’ as applied to the various autonomous industries, linked together for the service of the common weal, such as advocated by Syndicalism. But we do protest against the ‘State’ idea which is associated with it in Guild Socialism.

Middle-class people, even when they become Socialists, cannot get rid of the idea that the working class is their ‘inferior’; that the workers need to be ‘educated’, drilled, disciplined, and generally nursed for a very long time before they will be able to walk by themselves. The reverse is actually the truth.<sup>45</sup>

There is considerable justice in these much quoted criticisms of what was undeniably a very middle-class form of socialism, yet Guild Socialism was theoretically more important than they could allow, becoming more original and also non-statist.

The origins of Guild Socialism are customarily traced to 1906 and the publication by the former York architect, Arthur J. Penty, of *The Restoration of the Gild System*. Penty’s advocacy of a return to a handicraft economy and the control of production by trade guilds looks back, beyond Morris, to – as he cheerfully indicates – Ruskin, although he also noted (but did not proceed to elaborate) that ‘to understand the full significance of the present proposals they should be considered in conjunction with the theory put forward’ by Edward Carpen-

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<sup>45</sup> *Syndicalist*, February 1914. For Bowman, see Brown, ‘Introduction’, pp. 12–13, 26 n12.

not only to accept dilution but to assist in its implementation, in exchange for 'an ever-increasing control over workshop conditions', that is a share in the control of the industry.<sup>43</sup> Its struggle over dilution was lost when a strike of March 1916 was broken with the fining of strikers, the deportation of ten of the leaders and the imprisonment of five others. Leadership of the movement then shifted towards Sheffield. In August 1917 the Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement was inaugurated at a national conference in Manchester; and five more conferences were held before the end of the war, at which at least 33 towns were represented. There was a weekly paper, the *Worker*, published in Glasgow, and a monthly, *Solidarity*, in London. The movement was to disintegrate rapidly with the coming of peace, as war production ended and former militants found themselves unemployed. Its remnants were to form a constituent – part of the SLP, with which it overlapped, was another – when the Communist Party of Great Britain was founded in 1920.<sup>44</sup>

Another variety of libertarian socialism, Guild Socialism, had also been influential during the second decade of the twentieth century. An anonymous article in the *Syndicalist*, written presumably by the editor Guy Bowman, complained:

Middle-class of the middle-class, with all the shortcomings ... of the middle-classes writ large across

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted by Branko Pribičević, *The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control, 1910–1922* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959), p. 124.

<sup>44</sup> J.T. Murphy, *Preparing for Power: A Critical Study of the History of the British Working-Class Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), chaps. 5–10, and Hinton, *Shop Stewards' Movement*, need to be read alongside Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983), Part 1, and Alastair Reid, 'Dilution, Trade Unionism and the State during the First World War', in Steven Tolliday and Jonathan Zeitlin (eds.), *Shop Floor Bargaining and the State: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). But see also James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement, 1867–1974* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983), pp. 96–108; Clegg, chaps. 4, 5; and Pribičević

tative is not elected by the voters but, as a rule, has himself elected by them... or ... his friends have him elected' is not a fantasy of Italian scepticism and elite theory but a penetrating summary of the elected's real relationship to the electors.<sup>5</sup>

Anarchism is notorious for its diversity. Its accepted varieties range from the egoism of Max Stirner, through the individualism of such Americans as Benjamin Tucker and the mutualism of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, both of whom accepted (within strict bounds) the institution of private property, to the collectivism of Mikhail Bakunin, communism of Peter Kropotkin and revolutionary trade unionism of the syndicalists. What connects almost all of these into a coherent political stance is unremitting hostility to the State and parliamentarianism, advocacy of direct action as the means of attaining desired goals, and organization through co-operative associations, built and federated from the bottom upwards. Of these it is the first that is entirely distinctive to anarchism. The State is rejected not just as integral to the current order but crucially as the means to any desirable transformation; and whereas Marxists and other socialists have had ingenuous faith in its eventual 'withering away', the anarchists' pessimism that the survival of the state in any post-revolutionary society will lead to the exact opposite has been historically confirmed with the amassment of tyrannic power by Communist states. Stirner concurs with this but is set apart from all other anarchists by his rejection of organization, despite the attempt by admirers to build on his passing, uncharacteristic mention of a 'Union of Egoists'. All the same most, although not all, anarchists have been content to include the powerful, iconoclastic analysis of *The Ego and Its Own* within their unsystematic ideology. Organization, it must be insisted against popular misconceptions, is not necessarily rejected by anarchists, whose concern

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<sup>5</sup> Cited by T.B. Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 10.

is for their organizations to be fully democratic and built so as to withstand to the maximum the inevitable tendency to bureaucratization, the process in which, as Christopher Pallis (writing as Maurice Brinton) explains it, a group seeks 'to manage *from the outside* the activities of others'.<sup>6</sup>

For a century and a half anarchists have been overwhelmingly socialist, despite the concurrent existence of small numbers of individualists in Europe and the USA. A fruitful approach to understanding anarchism is to recognize its thoroughly socialist critique of capitalism, while emphasizing that this has been combined with a liberal critique of socialism, anarchists being united with liberals in their advocacy of autonomous associations and the freedom of the individual and even exceeding them in their opposition to statism. The apparent paradox, perhaps particularly for the English, is therefore that anarchism has historically been a type of socialism but simultaneously closely related to liberal thought.<sup>7</sup> In the description of Gerald Brenan, who had lived among the anarchists of Andalusia, it is 'a wildly expansive and liberty-loving form of socialism'.<sup>8</sup> This bipolar nature of anarchism helps, in fact, to explain anarchism's failure to flourish in Britain with its deeply entrenched liberal traditions and a strong radical liberalism. John Stuart Mill, the great

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice Brinton, 'Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', *Critique* (Glasgow), no. 4 (Spring 1975), p. 85 [reprinted in David Goodway (ed.), *For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004), p. 174] (Pallis's emphasis).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938), pp. 21–31; Noam Chomsky, 'Notes on Anarchism', *Anarchy*, no. 116 (October 1970), pp. 312–14; David E. Apter, 'The Old Anarchism and the New – Some Comments', in David E. Apter and James Joll (eds.), *Anarchism Today* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 1–2; Nicolas Walter, *About Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2002), pp. 29–32.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960 edn), p. xi.

had been an organizer for the SLP and IWW in Scotland and the USA respectively.<sup>42</sup>

Immediately after the declaration of war the trade-union leadership declared an 'industrial truce' in August 1914, and this was supplemented the following year by the Munitions of War Act which made arbitration compulsory and suspended union customs in all industries supplying vital war needs. In the face of the growing labour shortage and the need to change over to the production of weapons, employers were obliged to reorganize their workshops and – in the process known as 'dilution' – to employ less skilled men as well as women in jobs previously reserved for male skilled workers. In these conditions power in the factories and mines fell into the hands of unofficial movements. The heirs of prewar syndicalism were to be the amalgamation committee movement, seeking the creation of an industrial union in engineering as the first step in the attainment of workers' control, and especially the shop stewards' movement, shop stewards leading many unofficial strikes in opposition to both the government and the trade-union officials.

Clydeside had the largest concentration of the production of munitions in the British Isles and has been viewed as the cockpit for a struggle over dilution, a considerable mythology being generated around the self-appointed Clyde Workers' Committee as the spearhead of the shop stewards' movement, a narrative for which the intellectually impressive J.T. Murphy, of the Sheffield Workers' Committee, bears much responsibility. The Clyde Workers' Committee, which was dominated by the sectarians of the SLP, appreciated that resistance to dilution *per se* was socially regressive, and developed the policy

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<sup>42</sup> The best accounts of British syndicalism are: Holton, *British Syndicalism*; Holton, 'Revolutionary Syndicalism'; Geoff Brown, *Sabotage: A Study in Industrial Conflict* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1977), chap. 2; Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889, vol. 2: 1911–1933* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 22–74; White, 'Syndicalism'.

exploiter.<sup>40</sup> All disputes between capital and labour were seen as contributing to the class consciousness of the workers and preparatory to the final struggle, envisaged as a revolutionary general strike that would enable the syndicalist unions to take over the running of all major social arrangements and establish a stateless co-operative commonwealth.

Britain experienced a series of massive strikes during ‘the labour unrest’ of 1910–14. The first dispute with a syndicalist dimension was a lockout at a colliery in Tonypany, in the Rhondda, from September 1910. In November miners employed in the five other pits controlled by the Cambrian Combine went on strike in sympathy, 13,000 men staying out until August, when they returned to work on terms they could have had before the strike began. They were as contemptuous of the official union leaders as they were of the employers. During 1911 the (South Wales Miners) Unofficial Reform Committee formed, drafting its notable and libertarian programme, *The Miners’ Next Step*, in which the objective was stated as ‘to build up an organization, that will ultimately take over the mining industry, and carry it on in the interests of the workers’.<sup>41</sup> Disputes followed in the docks, on the railways – leading to the first national rail strike – and in the mines. One of the final outbreaks occurred in Dublin where for six months there was a bitter, violent lockout of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, which was under the inspirational leadership of James Larkin, a quasi-syndicalist, and James Connolly, a major theorist of industrial unionism and who

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<sup>40</sup> Cited by E.J. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), p. 280.

<sup>41</sup> Unofficial Reform Committee, *The Miners’ Next Step: Being a Suggested Scheme for the Reorganization of the Federation* (1912; London: Pluto Press, 1973), p. 30.

and generous theorist of liberalism, and Herbert Spencer, a major exponent of laissez-faire individualism, whose writings appealed immensely to the Spanish anarchists, can be – and have been – rightly designated as ‘libertarians’.<sup>9</sup> On account of Victorian liberalism, the dominant ideology of the second half of the nineteenth century, shading into libertarianism, varieties of state socialism were here intrinsically more attractive to those hostile to the existing order.

‘Libertarian’ and ‘libertarianism’ are frequently employed by anarchists as synonyms for ‘anarchist’ and ‘anarchism’, largely as an attempt to distance themselves from the negative connotations of ‘anarchy’ and its derivatives. The situation has been vastly complicated in recent decades with the rise of anarcho-capitalism, ‘minimal statism’ and an extreme right-wing laissez-faire philosophy advocated by such theorists as Murray Rothbard and Robert Nozick and their adoption of the words ‘libertarian’ and ‘libertarianism’. It has therefore now become necessary to distinguish between their right libertarianism and the left libertarianism of the anarchist tradition. But ‘libertarian’ and ‘libertarianism’ also tend to be used as softer, less extreme terms than ‘anarchist’ and ‘anarchism’ and that is the manner in which I propose to employ them in this book. Hence I describe, entirely conventionally, William Morris and E.P. Thompson as ‘libertarian communists’ (Thompson’s self-description, in fact) and George Orwell as a ‘libertarian socialist’, meaning that they exhibited some or even many anarchist characteristics without signing up for the full anarchist programme.

That programme, as already stated, I take to consist of three elements – the rejection of the State and parliamen-

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 163–8. Stan Clark, ‘Herbert Spencer and Anarchism’, is an excellent, regrettably unpublished, paper (delivered to the Anarchist Research Group, January 1994), on Spencer’s influence on anarchism.

tarianism, the utilization of direct action, and the advocacy of co-operative and federal organization – of which the first is entirely distinctive, the second typifies revolutionary ideologies and the last is shared with most other forms of socialism as well as trade unionism and co-operation. On the other hand, I regard as ‘anarchistic’ and ‘libertarian’, but not necessarily ‘anarchist’, such features as autonomy, direct democracy, self-management and workers’ control, decentralization, opposition to war, sustainability and environmentalism. So in 1960, at the height of the British New Left, Edward Thompson stressed the need ‘to break through our present political conventions, and help people to think of socialism as something done *by* people and not *for* or *to* people, by pressing in new ways *on the ground*’, believing:

One socialist youth club of quite a new kind ... one determined municipal council, probing the possibility of new kinds of municipal ownership in the face of Government opposition; one tenants’ association with a new dynamic, pioneering on its own account new patterns of social welfare – play-centres, nursery facilities, community services for and by the women – involving people in the discussion and solution of problems of town planning, racial intercourse, leisure facilities; one pit, factory, or sector of nationalized industry where new forms of workers’ control can actually be forced upon management ... would immediately help in precipitating a diffuse aspiration into a positive movement...

This was a thoroughly libertarian programme, but since Thompson never advocated the abolition of the State and

of the CGT.<sup>38</sup> British syndicalism was also strongly influenced by American industrial unionism: of the IWW, founded in 1905, and of Daniel De Leon’s semi-parliamentarian, semi-syndicalist Socialist Labour Party. A Socialist Labour Party (SLP) had been launched in Britain in 1903 as a breakaway from the SDF’s Scottish section, was to be centred on Clyde-side and, in its advocacy of ‘dual unionism’, only during the war relaxed its prohibition of members accepting union office. William Paul, a leading theoretician of the SLP, was in 1917 to subject the Fabian and ILP programme of municipal and state enterprise to a cogent critique, maintaining that the extension of state control would merely reinforce capitalism and ‘bring with it armies of official bureaucrats, who will only be able to maintain their posts by tyrannizing and limiting the freedom of the workers’, the proletariat becoming little better than serfs. In contrast he advocated industry being ‘democratically owned and controlled by the workers electing directly from their own ranks industrial administrative committees’, leading to the replacement of ‘the capitalist political or geographical State’ by a ‘central industrial administrative committee’.<sup>39</sup> Syndicalism combined a Marxist analysis of capitalism with, roughly, an anarchist strategy, the means being the work-to-rule, the go-slow (ca’canny), the irritation strike, sabotage. This wasn’t a negative, anti-social conception for, as Emile Pouget stressed in *Le Sabotage*, the militancy was directed ‘only against capital; against the bank-account’: ‘The consumer must not suffer in this war waged against the

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<sup>38</sup> Geoff Brown, ‘Introduction’, to *The Industrial Syndicalist* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1974), pp. 11–13.

<sup>39</sup> William Paul, *The State: Its Origin and Function* (Glasgow: Socialist Labour Press, n.d.), pp. 183, 197–8. See also James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards’ Movement* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), pp. 46–7. Raymond Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), despite its title, is a history of the SLP.



decade of the twentieth century, the greatest potential for effecting radical change in British society since Chartism – considers that the principal indigenous influence on emergent syndicalism, 1900–10, came from ‘the anti-state traditions of William Morris and the Socialist League’.<sup>36</sup> And Mann, who was to become the leading syndicalist in Britain, was to write in 1914: ‘Grand old William Morris taught the true doctrine, and slow though we are, there are multitudes not far from salvation. To be free from state dictatorship to function as joint co-operative controllers of industry through our industrial organizations – this is the conception needed...’<sup>37</sup>

Syndicalism proper, although never a coherent, organized movement, erupted in Britain from 1910 and was terminated by the outbreak of war in 1914. It was principally an import from France, where from the late 1890s trade unionists, through the CGT, were overwhelmingly syndicalist. The word ‘syndicalism’ indeed is derived from *syndicalisme*, which simply means ‘trade unionism’, the French equivalent for the English ‘syndicalism’ being *syndicalisme révolutionnaire*: revolutionary trade unionism. When Mann returned to England in May 1910 after eight years in Australasia, Guy Bowman was one of the group who met him at the Royal Victoria Dock, London. Virtually the first thing Mann said to Bowman was ‘Let’s go and see the men of Direct Action’, and within three weeks the two men were in Paris talking to leading members

<sup>36</sup> Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism, 1900–1914: Myths and Realities* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), pp. 37–8; Robert J. Holton, ‘Revolutionary Syndicalism and the British Labour Movement’, in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Hans-Gerhard Husung (eds.), *The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain and Germany, 1880–1914* (George Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 269. See also Joseph White, ‘Syndicalism in a Mature Industrial Setting: The Case of Britain’, in Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (eds.), *International Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), p. 101.

<sup>37</sup> Holton, *British Syndicalism*, p. 139. See also White, ‘Syndicalism’, pp. 101, 110.

parliamentary institutions it fell significantly short of being anarchist.<sup>10</sup>

The historic anarchist movement was a workers’ movement which flourished from the 1860s down to the close of the 1930s. On the other hand, there has been a consensus that anarchist precursors can be traced back to Chinese Taoism and Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu as well as to Classical Greece and Zeno of Citium. Most recently, it has been argued convincingly that the Mu’tazilite and Najdite Muslims of ninth-century Basra were anarchists.<sup>11</sup> Examples begin to multiply in Europe from the Reformation of the sixteenth century and its forebears (for example, the Bohemian Taborites and German Anabaptists), and the Renaissance (Rabelais and Etienne de la Boétie) and English Revolution (not only the Diggers and Gerrard Winstanley but also the Ranters) in the sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries respectively.<sup>12</sup> Some eighteenth-century figures are even more obviously anarchist: the Rousseau of *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755), William Blake (1757–1827) throughout his *oeuvre* and William Godwin in his great *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793) and the essays of *The Enquirer* (1797). Unlike Blake, whose ideas made no impact on his contemporaries, Godwin exerted considerable influence, most markedly on his future son-in-law, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who went on to become, in Peter Marshall’s words, ‘the greatest

<sup>10</sup> E.P. Thompson, ‘Revolution Again! Or Shut Your Ears and Run’, *New Left Review*, no. 6 (November–December 1960), p. 31 (Thompson’s emphasis).

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Crone, ‘Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists’, *Past and Present*, no. 167 (May 2000); and also Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), esp. chaps. 4–6.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, Part 2, provides the most thorough modern discussion of anarchist genealogy. See also George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1986), chap. 2. There is also a discussion of anarchist antecedents in traditional Chinese thought in Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), chap. 1.

anarchist poet by putting Godwin's philosophy to verse'. Marshall goes far beyond this fairly conventional wisdom by claiming both Blake and Godwin as 'founding fathers' of British anarchism.<sup>13</sup> It is, however, very significant that Godwin was not recognized as an anarchist thinker until the very end of the nineteenth century (and Blake not for another hundred years). It was the Austrian anarchist scholar, Max Nettlau, who described *Political Justice* in 1897 as 'the first strictly anarchist book', leading Kropotkin to call Godwin 'the first theorist of stateless socialism, that is, anarchism', four years later in the Russian edition of *Modern Science and Anarchism*.<sup>14</sup>

Godwin could not be identified as an anarchist until after anarchism had come into being as a social movement, which it only did from the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Moreover it also needed to be named as such, as it first was by Proudhon in 1840 in *What Is Property?* where he not only calls himself an 'anarchist' – 'I am (in the full force of the term) an anarchist' – but also attempts to appropriate 'anarchy' as a positive concept. While he appreciates that 'the meaning ordinarily attached to the word "anarchy" is absence of principle, absence of rule; consequently, it has been regarded as synonymous with "disorder"', he asserts that '*Anarchy*, – the absence of a master, of a sovereign ... is the form of government to which we are everyday approximating', emphasizing that he is 'a firm friend of order'. Like many anarchists to come, he con-

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Marshall (ed.), *The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin* (London: Freedom Press, 1986), p. 10; Peter Marshall, *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* (London: Freedom Press, 1988), p. 11. See also Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), esp. pp. 303–4, 332–5.

<sup>14</sup> N[icolas] W[alter], 'Sacred Text?', *Freedom*, 20 November 1976; *idem*, 'Godwin and Anarchism', *Freedom*, March 1986; *idem*, 'Correction', *Freedom*, February 1987. All three items are reprinted in Nicolas Walter, *The Anarchist Past and Other Essays*, ed. David Goodway (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2007), pp. 36–41, 44–50.

politics.<sup>33</sup> In short, William Morris was a libertarian and a communist, indeed a libertarian communist just as E.P. Thompson was eventually to call himself.

Despite the early disappearance of the Socialist League, Morris's influence was considerable within the British working-class movement. As the secretary of a Lancashire branch of the SDF movingly wrote in 1896: 'Comrade Morris is not dead there is not a Socialist living whould believe him dead for he Lives in the heart of all true men and women still and will do so till the end of the time.' Harold Laski was to report that in the north-east during the depression of the 1930s, copies of *News from Nowhere* and *A Dream of John Ball* were to be found 'in house after house of the miners', even when most of their furniture had been sold off.<sup>34</sup> Tom Mann, indefatigable socialist and trade-unionist militant over half a century, had never been a member of the Socialist League, but he was deeply indebted to Morris, who, he was to recall, enabled him to 'get a really healthy contempt for Parliamentary institutions and scheming politicians'. Although he was appointed national secretary of the newly formed Independent Labour Party (ILP), he never believed in political action as the exclusive means of attaining socialism – and concluded his pamphlet, *What the ILP Is Driving At*, in 1894 with the 'grand words of William Morris, "Come hither, lads and hearten / for a tale there is to tell / of the wonderful days a-coming / when all shall be better than well..."'<sup>35</sup> The historian of British syndicalism – the tendency that had, along with the related and succeeding movements of the second

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<sup>33</sup> See E.P. Thompson, *Morris*, esp. pp. 597–602, 613–14; Kinna, *William Morris*, pp. 166–9; and Ruth Kinna, 'William Morris and Anti-Parliamentarism', *History of Political Thought*, XV (1994), pp. 593–613.

<sup>34</sup> Mackail, II, p. 364; Paul Thompson, p. 239.

<sup>35</sup> Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Tom Mann, 1856–1941: The Challenges of Labour* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 74; Joseph White, *Tom Mann* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 72, 88.

of organization. Kropotkin's conclusion entailed that it was the later development of the state which had perverted an innate capacity for freedom and co-operation and that society could therefore dispense with the state. Morris, although also anti-statist, did not believe that the state could be abolished immediately, but that a new form of social organization would need to be built and it was that which might ultimately be able to displace it. Unlike Kropotkin's anarchist community, which is natural, Morris's communist society is artificial and would need to be painstakingly constructed.<sup>30</sup>

Morris was then an anti-statist who advocated, as Kinna puts it, 'decentralized federation', and Rodney Barker emphasizes in an able discussion of his libertarianism: 'Like anarchists and ... many conservatives, Morris placed the state and politics in a wholly secondary and instrumental position, for his view of the proper character of human living left little place for them.'<sup>31</sup> During the 1880s he eschewed parliamentarianism, and his lecture of 1887, 'The Policy of Abstention', although only delivered twice and never published in his lifetime, was to be commended by Herbert Read as 'the best statement of the case against parliamentary action ever made in English'.<sup>32</sup> Although he moderated his opposition to parliamentary participation from 1890 with the thwarting of his revolutionary hopes and his abandonment of the Socialist League, he did so reluctantly and retained his extreme distaste for conventional

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<sup>30</sup> This paragraph is indebted to the enlightening and subtle argument of Kinna, 'Morris, Anti-Statism and Anarchy', esp. pp. 218–19, 225–8. See also Kinna, *William Morris*, pp. 137–8, 142–6.

<sup>31</sup> Kinna, 'Morris, Anti-Statism and Anarchy', p. 217; Rodney Barker, *Political Ideas in Modern Britain* (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 73.

<sup>32</sup> LeMire, p. 310; Herbert Read, *The Politics of the Unpolitical* (London: George Routledge, 1943), p. 3. 'The Policy of Abstention' is printed in *WMAWS*, II, pp. 434–53.

sidered anarchy to be the highest form of order, contrasting it with the disorder and chaos of the present.<sup>15</sup>

Karl Marx took the initiative in conjunction with British liberal trade unionists in establishing the First International in 1864, but within a year or two they began to be challenged by the co-founding Proudhonist mutualists from France, reinforced by other libertarians as anarchist movements began to form also in Switzerland, Spain and Italy. A titanic clash of personalities and political philosophies ensued between Marx and Bakunin; and by the late 1870s both the International Working Men's Association and a rival anti-authoritarian International had collapsed. Further conflict ensued within the Second International of 1889, leading to the permanent exclusion of the anarchists by the state socialists from 1896.<sup>16</sup> Despite the prominence of Bakunin and Kropotkin in Western Europe, anarchism only emerged as a significant movement in their native Russia as late as the Revolution of 1905. Here then we have the four major nations – France, Spain, Italy, Russia – and their attendant cultural systems that contributed to anarchism as a mass force in the labour movements of Europe and the Americas from the 1860s until the First World War. For anarchism was also strong in the United States – not among native-born Americans, but within the immigrant communities, above all the Germans, Russians, Russian Jews and Italians – and in Latin America, whence it was in part carried by Spanish and Italian militants and immigrants, notably in Mexico – where it was an influential current in the Revolution of 1910–20 – Cuba,

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<sup>15</sup> P.J. Proudhon, *What Is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (London: William Reeves, 2 vols., n.d.), II, pp. 259–60, 264 (Proudhon's emphasis).

<sup>16</sup> James Joll told me that he had been so intrigued by the anarchists' conduct while writing *The Second International, 1889–1914* (1955) that he decided to try to understand them in his next but one book, *The Anarchists* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964).

Brazil and Argentina.<sup>17</sup> Significant movements and traditions also existed in the Netherlands, Germany and Portugal, as well as East Asia, in Japan and China.<sup>18</sup> Other important anarchist thinkers, in addition to those already named, were the Italian Errico Malatesta, in exile for most of his adult life, and the excitingly original German, Gustav Landauer, murdered in 1919 during the suppression of the Bavarian Republic.

Anarchist communism was partially displaced as the dominant tendency within anarchism with the formation of the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) in 1895 and the rapid radiating out of syndicalism from France. According to Sorel, 'Historians will one day see in this entry of the anarchists into the [unions] one of the greatest events that has been produced in our time...'<sup>19</sup> In the USA revolutionary syndicalism took the form of the industrial unionism of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World); elsewhere syndicalism attained mass followings in France, Italy, Argentina and Spain, where the mighty CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) was set up in 1910. It was the CNT which was responsible for the amalgam of 'anarcho-syndicalism', combining syndicalist preoccupation with the workplace, daily industrial conflict and

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<sup>17</sup> See especially: John M. Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1860–1931* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987 edn); Frank Fernández, *Cuban Anarchism: The History of a Movement* (Tucson, AZ: Sharp Press, 2001); John W.F. Dulles, *Anarchists and Communists in Brazil, 1900–1935* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1973); Eduardo Colombo, 'Anarchism in Argentina and Uruguay', in Apter and Joll. A good continental overview may be obtained from Victor Alba, *Politics and the Labour Movement in Latin America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), chap. 4, and – down to 1914 – Max Nettlau, *A Contribution to an Anarchist Bibliography of Latin America* (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 1994)

<sup>18</sup> For China, Zarrow and Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism and the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991), are recommended.

<sup>19</sup> Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 56.

anarchism internationally in the 1880s and 1890s, nor with the obsessive emphasis on violent revolution as opposed to propaganda by the word: 'For I cannot for the life of me see how [the principles of anarchy], which propose the abolition of compulsion, can admit of promiscuous slaughter as a means of converting people...'<sup>27</sup> Both the Socialist League and eventually *Commonweal* were to be extinguished, as early as the mid-nineties, through their association with and support for terrorism. And while Morris celebrated *individuality* – for its self-restraint, fearlessness, tolerance and pride – he abhorred the selfishness and egotism which he considered *individualism* entailed. Yet all the same he found it difficult, as has been seen, to differentiate his position from that of anarchist communists like Kropotkin. 'In the end, Morris seemed to know that he was not an anarchist, without realizing why,' as Ruth Kinna observes;<sup>28</sup> but it is Kinna who has managed to expose the root cause of Morris's opposition to anarchism by comparing his thought with Kropotkin's. The two men knew, visited and admired each other, but very significantly Kropotkin never claimed Morris for anarchism.<sup>29</sup> Kinna is able to highlight the differences between them in their analyses of the mediaeval commune, which they both revered. Kropotkin believed that mediaeval architecture, for example, was fostered, but not created, by the commune, whereas Morris considered all the commune's achievements were the products of its system

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<sup>27</sup> *CLWM*, IV, p. 113. See also E.P. Thompson, *Morris*, p. 594, as well as the forceful 'A Socialist Poet on Bombs and Anarchism', reprinted in Tony Pinkney (ed.), *We Met Morris: Interviews with William Morris, 1885–96* (Reading: Spire Books and William Morris Society [2005]), pp. 81–7.

<sup>28</sup> Ruth Kinna, 'Morris, Anti-Statism and Anarchy', in Peter Faulkner and Peter Preston (eds.), *William Morris: Centenary Essays* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), p. 220.

<sup>29</sup> For their relationship, see MacCarthy, *William Morris*, pp. 544–6; Paul Meier, *William Morris: The Marxist Dreamer* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 2 vols., 1978), I, pp. 196–200; May Morris, 'Introduction', *CWWM*, XX, pp. xxi–ii, xxix–xxx.

There can be no doubt, though, that *News from Nowhere* depicts an anarchist society; but equally that William Morris was not an anarchist. The novel opens with William Guest returning from a meeting of 'the League' at which 'there were six persons present, and consequently six sections of the party were represented, four of which had strong but divergent Anarchist opinions'.<sup>25</sup> Morris *knew* about anarchism, for anarchists became preponderant in the Socialist League in the late 1880s and such was his disagreement with them that he withdrew in 1890. Thereafter his political activity was restricted to a local body, the Hammersmith Socialist Society (formerly the Hammersmith branch of the Socialist League), which met in the coach-house attached to his home at Kelmscott House. He frequently, consistently and vehemently denied that he was an anarchist. He described himself as a 'Communist' and, although he maintained that 'Communist-Anarchists' often could not 'differentiate themselves from Communists', according to Bruce Glasier he had declared that 'Anarchism and Communism, notwithstanding our friend Kropotkin, are incompatible in principle.' He also stated, with some bitterness: 'Such finish to what of education in practical Socialism that I am capable of I received...from some of my Anarchist friends, from whom I learned, quite against their intention, that Anarchism was impossible...'<sup>26</sup>

Morris gave two sets of reasons for his rejection of anarchism: its violence and its individualism. Although he appreciated that not every anarchist advocated extreme violence, he had no sympathy with the terrorism that engulfed

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Morris, *Political Writings*, p. 448; J. Bruce Glasier, *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement: Being Reminiscences of Morris' Work as a Propagandist, and Observations on His Character and Genius, with Some Account of the Persons and Circumstances of the Early Socialist Agitation* (London: Longmans, Green, 1921), p. 63; *CWWM*, XXIII, p. 278 ('How I Became a Socialist'). See also Glasier, pp. 123–7.

the revolutionary general strike with the traditional anarchist belief in the need for an ultimate armed insurrection.<sup>20</sup>

These decades of the heyday of international anarchism – already weakened by the war itself – came substantially to an end as a consequence of the Russian Revolution. Many anarchists and, perhaps especially, syndicalists were deeply impressed by the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in October 1917, their anti-parliamentarianism and their determination to move forthwith, without waiting for the maturation of capitalism, to the building of a socialist society, and they defected in large numbers to the national Communist Parties as they began to be formed. In contrast, the Insurgent Army of the Ukraine, under the inspired leadership of the peasant anarchist, Nestor Makhno, fought against first the Germans and the Whites and then the Red Army. We now know that French anarchism remained strong until the mid-1920s, and then bounced back again ten years later with the Popular Front and particularly the Spanish Revolution and Civil War.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere anarchism withered away, save in the Hispanic world where in 1936 the CNT and FAI (Federación Anarquista Ibérica) spearheaded a major anarchist revolution in Spain, only for it to be put into reverse the following year by Stalinist counter-revolution. With the defeat of the Spanish Republic early in 1939, proletarian anarchism entered terminal decline globally, with only isolated pockets retaining significant strength, as in Cuba it would appear.

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<sup>20</sup> An excellent survey is provided by Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (eds.), *International Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990). See also Marcel van der Linden, 'Second Thoughts on Revolutionary Syndicalism', *Labour History Review*, LXII (1998), pp. 182–96. For anarcho-syndicalism there is the very important article by J. Romero Maura, 'The Spanish Case', in Apter and Joll, pp. 71–2.

<sup>21</sup> See David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917–1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002).

After remarking that in coming out for anarchism he had 'forfeited any claim to be taken seriously as a politician' and excluded himself from 'the main current of socialist activity in England', Herbert Read continued: 'But I have often found sympathy and agreement in unexpected places, and there are many intellectuals who are fundamentally anarchist in their political outlook, but who do not dare to invite ridicule by confessing it.'<sup>22</sup> There is truth in this, yet the argument should not be pressed too far (for it needs to be refined). While intellectuals frequently played very significant roles in the socialist and other radical movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they were not particularly attracted to anarchism: certainly not in the way they undoubtedly were to Marxism and democratic socialism. At least three factors need to be considered in attempting to account for this. Anarchism did not offer intellectuals the social and political rewards which the other forms of socialism did. No positions of power or influence were awarded by anarchism in the struggle for or would have been after the attainment of a free society. Secondly, anarchist movements have tended to be exceptionally hostile not only towards the middle classes in general, but also bourgeois intellectuals. Finally, anarchism does not afford the theoretical and mental satisfactions that Marxism especially, but also reformist socialism, have done. It does not fetishize theory or cleverness or intellectual ability. Its appeal has been as much, if not more, emotional than rational. Anarchism definitely did not recruit -perhaps in Italy, for example, but not overall - the lawyers, economists, historians and academics which the other socialist movements did. It can be argued, as Paul Goodman does, on the other hand, that anarchism - or, at least, anarchist theory - has received disproportionate contributions from intellectuals trained or active in the life sciences, geography, progressive education and the like. The geographers Kropotkin and Elisée

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<sup>22</sup> Read, *Annals*, p. 134.

we are very well off as politics, - because we have none. If you ever make a book out of this conversation, put this in a chapter by itself, after the model of old Horrebrow's Snakes in Iceland'.

'I will', said I.<sup>23</sup>

In the London of the twenty-second century the former Houses of Parliament have become literally, instead of metaphorically, a dung-market. Civil and criminal law have disappeared, since 'private property being abolished, all the laws and all the legal "crimes" which it had manufactured of course came to an end'. Decision-making is consensual and by means of direct democracy. If there is disagreement at the 'meeting of neighbours, or Mote', a decision is postponed until the next Mote:

when the Mote comes together again there is a regular discussion and at last a vote by show of hands. If the division is a close one, the question is again put off for further discussion; if the division is a wide one, the minority are asked if they will yield to the more general opinion, which they often, nay, most commonly do. If they refuse, the question is debated a third time, when, if the minority has not perceptibly grown, they always give way..<sup>24</sup>

A particularly interesting and impressive chapter, 'How the Change Came', unfolds a complex transition from capitalism to socialism, spread over half a century and including a two-year civil war, in marked contrast to the belief of most contemporary anarchists that the change could and would occur virtually overnight.

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<sup>23</sup> *CWWM*, XVI, p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81, 88.

rather than a dream'.<sup>21</sup> It is unique as a utopia written by a major socialist theorist and exceptionally unusual as a utopia in which it would actually be pleasurable to live. Anarchists moreover have been consistent in hailing *News from Nowhere* as an anarchist utopia. Kropotkin, for example, considered that it was 'perhaps the most thorough, and deeply anarchistic conception of future society that has ever been written'; George Woodcock that it portrays 'nothing less than that paradisaical anarchy dreamed of by libertarians for three centuries' and that as 'a society without government [it] is the nearest thing to an anarchist utopia'; and Peter Marshall that it is 'entirely anarchistic'.<sup>22</sup> 'Nowhere' is indeed a stateless society without government and representative institutions. The chapter 'Concerning Politics' makes its point partly through its very brevity and may be quoted in full:

Said I: 'How do you manage with politics?'

Said Hammond, smiling: 'I am glad that it is of *me* that you ask that question; I do believe that anybody else would make you explain yourself, or try to do so, till you were sickened of asking questions. Indeed, I believe I am the only man in England who would know what you mean; and since I know, I will answer your question briefly by saying that

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<sup>21</sup> May Morris (ed.), *The Collected Works of William Morris* (London: Longmans, Green, 24 vols., 1910–15) [hereafter *CWWM*], XVI, p. 211. Cf. John Goode, 'William Morris and the Dream of Revolution', in John Lucas (ed.), *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1975 edn), pp. 246, 273. See Morris's review of *Looking Backward*, reprinted in Morris, *Political Writings*, pp. 419–25, and also *CWWM*, XVI, p. xxviii.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Kropotkin, 'In Memory of William Morris', *Freedom*, November 1896 (reprinted in Peter Faulkner (ed.), *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 400); Woodcock, *Anarchism*, p. 372; George Woodcock (ed.), *The Anarchist Reader* (Glasgow: Fontana Paperbacks, 1977), pp. 377–8; Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 173.

Reclus, anthropologist Elie Reclus, and educationalists Louise Michel, Sébastien Faure and Francisco Ferrer come readily to mind.<sup>23</sup>

There can be no doubt that one type of intellectual has been consistently drawn to anarchism, placing a premium on absolute freedom and non-interference in their personal and social lives, and belonging, like Read himself, to the artistic and literary avant-gardes. Significant clusters of anarchist painters and writers existed in pre-1914 Italy, New York before and during the First World War and, most impressive of all, the France of the 1880s and 1890s, where the Neo-Impressionists – Camille and Lucien Pissarro, Paul Signac, most probably the enigmatic Georges Seurat – and the Symbolist writers, including one of the greatest poets, Stéphane Mallarmé, all consisted of militant anarchists or sympathizers. In Bohemia the fact that Jaroslav Hašek had been a member of anarchist groups and worked on anarchist journals helps to explain the subversive genius of *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk*; and Franz Kafka had attended anarchist meetings in Prague, gaining considerable familiarity with anarchist writers and personalities, and actually mentioning Bakunin and Kropotkin in his diary.<sup>24</sup> The German actor, Ret Marut, fleeing from Munich in 1919, recreated himself in Mexico as the still insufficiently appreciated novelist, B. Traven.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See 'Interview' with Noam Chomsky, in James Peck (ed.), *The Chomsky Reader* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1987), pp. 19–21; Colin Ward and David Goodway, *Talking Anarchy* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2003), pp. 147–8. Michel's remarkable school in Fitzroy Square is described by John Shotton, *No Master High or Low: Libertarian Education and Schooling in Britain, 1890–1990* (Bristol: Libertarian Education, 1993), pp. 33–5.

<sup>24</sup> Cecil Parrott, *The Bad Bohemian: The Life of Jaroslav Hašek, Creator of the Good Soldier Švejk* (London: Bodley Head, 1978), chaps. 4–6; Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe: A Study in Elective Affinity* (London: Athlone Press, 1992), pp. 82–3 *et seq.*

<sup>25</sup> Karl S. Guthke, *B. Traven: The Life behind the Legends* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991), is much the best study. Roy Pateman, *The Man*

In Britain anarchism as a social movement never amounted to much, except among the Yiddish-speaking Jews of East London and – for reasons still to be explained – on Clydeside where a tenacious libertarian tradition existed in the twentieth century among Glaswegian workers.<sup>26</sup> It was in countries with despotic or centralizing States that anarchism flourished: France after the bloody suppression in 1871 of the Commune and the criminalizing of anarchist activity with *les lois scélérates* of 1893–4; the ramshackle, semi-feudal empires of Russia, where political parties and trade unions were completely illegal before 1906 and unions only a little less so until the February Revolution, and Spain, where the CNT was banned between 1923 and 1930; Italy with a heavy-handed new State, attempting to assert itself in the aftermath of the unification of 1870 and periodically subjecting anarchist militants to *domicilio coatto* – confinement in prison or banishment to penal islands – especially from 1894 to 1900. The liberal, minimal statism of Britain, even though the powers of the State, both national and local, were increasing after 1867, principally for reasons of social reform, was situated in a world apart from these turbulent and sanguinary histories. The other common characteristic of the anarchist cultures is that they were embedded in the artisan response to industrialization, first in France, followed by Italy and finally, in the early-twentieth century, by Russia and Spain. The equivalent period in Britain ran from the Jacobinism of the 1790s through

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*Nobody Knows: The Life and Legacy of B. Traven* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), unconvincingly reopens the issue of Traven's identity. See also Hakim Bey, 'Storm Demon: Who Was B. Traven?', *Drunken Boat* (New York), no. 2 (1994), for the argument that Traven was a 'great writer'.

<sup>26</sup> For the Jewish anarchism of the *Arbeter Fraind* group, see William J. Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals, 1875–1914* (London: Duckworth, 1975). The attempted revisionism of Matthew Thomas, *Anarchist Ideas and Counter-Cultures in Britain, 1880–1914: Revolutions in Everyday Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), serially plagiarized though the book is, is unpersuasive.

of the Socialist League, with Morris both editing and financing it.

In the early years of the revival of socialism, boundaries between the various societies were blurred and there was much overlapping. An example is Charlotte Wilson, the first editor of *Freedom*, also being a member of the Fabian Society. From the mid-1880s this fluidity began to change considerably as, for instance, Fabian doctrine was elaborated. Similarly, Morris between 1885 and 1890, the years he was in the Socialist League, thought through his socialism. This he did in his lectures and the prolific journalism he contributed to *Commonweal*, preceded by a year's worth to the SDF's paper, *Justice*, all now collected in two fat volumes.<sup>19</sup> He had already read Marx's *Capital* in the French translation, he continued to study it and E.P. Thompson was convincingly to claim him for Marxism. That is, Morris's mature socialism fits both within and extends Marx's thought, and Shaw, who came to know him well from 1884, had no doubt that he was 'on the side of Karl Marx *contra mundum*'.<sup>20</sup>

During 1890 Morris serialized in *Commonweal* his great utopian novel, *News from Nowhere; or, An Epoch of Rest*, in reaction to the state socialist and highly regimented society depicted in *Looking Backward* by the American Edward Bellamy. It was written not as a work to convert people to socialism, but to sustain socialists by giving them a glimpse of the socialist future, Morris's closing words being 'if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision

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<sup>19</sup> William Morris, *Political Writings: Contributions to Justice and Commonweal, 1883–1890*, ed. Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994); William Morris, *Journalism: Contributions to Commonweal, 1885–1890*, ed. Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Shaw, 'Morris as I Knew Him', p. ix. See E.P. Thompson, *Morris*, esp. App., 2, and pp. 779–810. Cf. Ruth Kinna, *William Morris: The Art of Socialism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 94, 97–9, 109–112, 122–6.



that Disraeli's government might intervene on Turkey's side in yet another war with Russia, which was entirely unacceptable after the recent Turkish massacres of Bulgarian Christians and had led Gladstone to write his famous pamphlet, *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*. It was during this agitation that Morris met some of the leading trade unionists, including Henry Broadhurst, secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, yet he found no hope in them for 'they were quite under the influence of the Capitalist politicians, and ... the General Election once gained, they would take no forward step whatever'.<sup>16</sup> Also Morris played the leading role in forming the first conservation organization, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, stimulated by the need to defend mediaeval cathedrals and churches from over-enthusiastic restoration by neo-Gothic architects. He became its honorary secretary, and it was at the foundation meeting, which he chaired, that in 1877 he gave his first speech.

As he was to tell Scheu: 'It must be understood that I always intended to join any body who distinctly called themselves socialists, so when ... I was invited to join the Democratic Federation by Mr Hyndman, I accepted the invitation hoping that it would declare for Socialism, in spite of certain drawbacks that I expected to find in it...'<sup>17</sup> The principal drawback was Hyndman's autocratic personality; and so it was that, as early as 1884, the minute SDF was split, with Morris leading a break-away including Eleanor Marx, her lover Edward Aveling, Walter Crane and Joseph Lane, complaining of 'arbitrary rule', to form on the last day of the year the Socialist League.<sup>18</sup> Marx had died in 1883, but Engels supported the dissidents from the outside. The weekly *Commonweal* was launched as the organ

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<sup>16</sup> *CLWM*, II: 1881–1884, p. 230.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>18</sup> E.P. Thompson, *Morris*, p. 359.

Luddism to Chartism, but had terminated with the latter's disappearance after 1848. Had anarchist, or indeed Marxist, ideology been available in those decades British history might have been very different, but it would have still have had to contend with the constitutionalism of the 'free-born Englishman' (or true-born Briton), to be depicted with typical brilliance by E.P. Thompson.<sup>27</sup>

Although for these reasons mass, proletarian anarchism failed to erupt in the British Isles, there was all the same a distinguished minority intellectual, overwhelmingly literary, anarchist – and rather broader and still more distinguished libertarian – tradition. And that is what this book is about. Substantial parts of chapters are devoted to three libertarian communists or socialists who were definitely not anarchists: the great William Morris, poet, designer and craftsman; George Orwell, novelist and essayist; and Edward Thompson, a major historian, but who at the outset of his career aspired to being a poet and taught literature. An anonymous publisher's reader commented – in the travails that the proposal for the current work experienced – that Aldous Huxley, novelist and essayist, was 'certainly not' an anarchist 'in a formal sense', while conceding the justice of stitching into my argument 'people who sometimes sit lightly to it in order to demonstrate the width of anarchist suggestion'. Huxley undoubtedly did not adhere to my principal anarchist criterion – the absolute rejection of the State – yet he has been allocated a full chapter, if only for the importance of his neglected utopia, *Island*, the triumphant culmination of a quarter of a century's concern with working out 'a satisfactory technique for giving practical realization to the ideal of philosophic anarchism'.<sup>28</sup> In addition the neurologist Christopher Pallis, who had first

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<sup>27</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1980), chap. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Goldman Archive, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, VI, copy of letter from Huxley to Emma Goldman, 15 March 1938.

qualified in medicine, always denied being an anarchist, but this I will argue has much to do with his scorn for much of anarchism, including its individualism, frequent opposition to organization and theoretical shortcomings, and that his politics are fully anarchist, with a warm appreciation of the Russian anarcho-syndicalists and Platformists. Nor did Edward Carpenter, poet and sexual reformer, ever name himself an anarchist, in spite of his advocacy of ‘non-governmental society’ and support for syndicalism.

Oscar Wilde, dramatist and man of letters, stated in an interview that he believed he was ‘something of an Anarchist’, but previously said, ‘In the past I was a poet and a tyrant. Now I am an anarchist and artist.’<sup>29</sup> John Cowper Powys, a marvellously original novelist, is the only one of my subjects to be discussed in two full chapters. In the first I will show that his very important life-philosophy is best understood as a form of individualist anarchism, while in the second I trace the way in which he came to adopt also a social anarchism and – while confused on theoretical matters concerning government, authority and law – from the late 1930s was consistent in describing himself as anarchist, and that at a time when he was writing two outstanding novels, one of which, *Porius*, is his masterpiece. No such terminological difficulties apply to the three remaining writers. Herbert Read (poet, literary and art critic, and educational theorist), Alex Comfort (another doctor and medical scientist, but concurrently a poet and novelist) and Colin Ward (who had worked in architect’s offices before becoming a writer on housing, planning and the environment) were forthright and influential proponents of anarchism.

<sup>29</sup> Percival W.H. Almy, ‘New Views of Mr Oscar Wilde’, *The Theatre*, XXIII (March 1894), in E.H. Mikhail (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2 vols., 1979), I, p. 232; Oscar Wilde, ‘Référéndum artistique et social’, *L’Ermitage*, July 1893, cited by Paul Gibbard, ‘Anarchism in English and French Literature, 1885–1914: Zola, the Symbolists, Conrad and Chesterton’ (Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 2001), p. 168.

a man of the working creature, you cannot make a tool. Let him but begin to imagine, to think, to try to do something worth doing; and the engine-turned precision is lost at once. Out come all his roughness, all his dulness, all his incapability...but out comes the whole majesty of him also...<sup>13</sup>

In his 1892 preface Morris comments that Ruskin’s teaching is ‘that art is the expression of man’s pleasure in labour; that it is possible for man to rejoice in his work...and lastly, that unless man’s work once again becomes a pleasure to him... all but the worthless must toil in pain, and therefore live in pain’. Morris concludes that ‘the hallowing of labour by art is the one aim for us at the present day’ and ‘if Politics are to be anything less than an empty game...it is towards this goal of the happiness of labour that they must make’.<sup>14</sup> Ruskin had very misleadingly announced in 1871 that he was ‘a Communist of the old school – reddest also of the red’; rather, as he was to write only two months later and repeat in his autobiography, ‘I am, and my father was before me, a violent Tory of the old school...’ His biographer, Tim Hilton, grappling to denominate his politics, comes up with ‘utopian Toryism’ and ‘High Tory utopianism’.<sup>15</sup> It was therefore left for Morris to go beyond Ruskin, using the latter’s thought as a foundation for the highly original socialism he was to develop himself.

Morris entered public life in 1876 when he became treasurer of the Eastern Question Association, set up when it seemed

<sup>13</sup> John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3; New York: Merrill & Baker, 3 vols., n.d.), II, pp. 161–2.

<sup>14</sup> *WMAWS*, I, pp. 292–3.

<sup>15</sup> John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (Orpington: George Allen, 9 vols., 1871–87), I, Letter 7, p. 2, and Letter 10, p. 2; John Ruskin, *Præterita: Outlines of Scenes and Thoughts Perhaps Worthy of Memory in My Past Life* (1885–9; London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949 edn), p. 5; Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Later Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 145, 213.

the spareness, directness and vividness of the Old Norse seem responsible for the same qualities in his expository prose.<sup>11</sup>

This is the forceful, unadorned language of the speeches and lectures which Morris began to deliver in 1877 on art, art and society, and finally socialism. He gave the last in the year of his death, 1896, bringing the total to 197, some of which were given on several occasions, in the case of 'Monopoly; or, How Labour is Robbed' perhaps as many as 22.<sup>12</sup> To understand the content of the lectures and Morris's thought generally, a final, specific influence needs to be named. This is John Ruskin, coming from within the Gothic Revival and also, to an extent, Pre-Raphaelitism, of which he had become the spokesman and an associate. The chapter, 'The Nature of Gothic', in *The Stones of Venice*, which he had first read while at Oxford, Morris considered so important that he printed it separately in 1892 as a Kelmscott Press book. In his discussion of the worker's place in the productive process Ruskin rivals for radical profundity Marx's analysis of alienation:

You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cog-wheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanize them...On the other hand, if you will make

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<sup>11</sup> Bernard Shaw, 'Morris as I Knew Him', in *WMAWS*, II, p. xxxvii. For the impact of Iceland on Morris, see 'The Early Literature of the North - Iceland', in Eugene D. LeMire (ed.), *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1969); E.P. Thompson, *Morris*, pp. 175-91; J.N. Swannell, *William Morris and Old Norse Literature: A Lecture* (London: William Morris Society, 1961); MacCarthy, *William Morris*, chap. 9; Charles Harvey and Jon Press, *Art, Enterprise and Ethics: The Life and Works of William Morris* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), chap. 4.

<sup>12</sup> They are listed by LeMire, App. 2.

My concern is to show that these eleven writers constitute a submerged but creative and increasingly relevant current of social and political theory and practice, an alternative, left-libertarian tradition. How much of a tradition it was in the sense of a shared continuity of thought is more debatable. But Carpenter was acknowledged by Read as a major influence and Wilde and Huxley read him with approbation. Read became the admiring publisher and friend of the younger Comfort, who was, like Huxley and Orwell, very much an independent thinker and unobligated to others. Ward names Morris, Orwell and Comfort as significant influences. Thompson and Pallis are distinctive in being decisively shaped by Marxism, but Thompson was as indebted also to Blake and Morris. Morris's impact is pervasive, with Wilde an early admirer, but with Read, as an advocate of industrialism and the machine, having an uneasy, though increasingly close, relationship to his outlook. Wilde and Powys shared a common debt to Taoism and Chuang Tzu (as well as to Walter Pater) and Powys in turn was much influenced by Wilde. Morris and Carpenter were on excellent terms, Morris staying at Millthorpe, and Carpenter expressing 'great admiration and friendship' for the other man.<sup>30</sup> Comfort was to regard Orwell as a friend. Lastly, Read was to write movingly of Orwell: 'I suppose I have felt nearer to him than to any other English writer of our time...who was, in general, nearer in ideals & even in eccentricities?'<sup>31</sup>

Other anarchist and libertarian writers are mentioned in the course of the book, generally in the five other general chapters and usually with extreme brevity, although in several cases there is a more substantial profiling, even some discussion. They include John Barlas (1860-1914), S.G.

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<sup>30</sup> Cited by H.W. Lee and E. Archbold, *Social-Democracy in Britain: Fifty Years of the Socialist Movement* (London: Social-Democratic Federation, 1935), p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> Read Archive, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC: letter from Read to George Woodcock, 3 August 1966.

Hobson (1870–1940), Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), A.R. Orage (1873–1934), Eric Gill (1882–1940), A.S. Neill (1883–1973), G.D.H. Cole (1889–1959), George Woodcock (1912–95), John Hewetson (1913–90), Tony Gibson (1914–2001), Vernon Richards (1915–2001), D.S. Savage (1917–2007), Marie Louise Berneri (1918–49), Ronald Sampson (1918–99), Albert Meltzer (1920–96), Louis Adeane (1921–79), Norman Potter (1923–95), Geoffrey Ostergaard (1926–90), Ivan Avakumović (b. 1926), Nicolas Walter (1934–2000), April Carter (b. 1937), Carole Pateman (b. 1940), Stuart Christie (b. 1946), James Kelman (b. 1946), Peter Marshall (b. 1946) and Alan Carter (b. 1952). (Among others perhaps deserving of consideration, but only named here or in passing, are the poet L.S. Bevington (1845–95), W.C. Owen (1854–1929), H.W. Nevinson (1856–1941) and G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936).)

The eleven figures accorded extended treatment have been selected for their merit, for the importance or interest of their work and careers. Fortunately, however, they represent the full spectrum of anarchist diversity: from the individualism of Powys to the near syndicalism of Pallis. Read adhered and Ward is still committed to anarchist communism, although Read for a time regarded himself as a syndicalist as well. Powys and the highly individualist Wilde were also, like Carpenter, socialists. Morris, Orwell and Thompson were, as has already been stressed, libertarian communists or socialists. Neither Huxley nor Comfort, however, was a socialist. To complicate the picture further, Read, Huxley and Comfort were pacifists. Read, who had been awarded the DSO and MC during the First World War and seriously considered remaining in the Army, thereafter became an absolute, Gandhian pacifist. Huxley was to make a spectacular conversion to pacifism, into which Comfort grew as a schoolboy; and both were to be activists in the Peace Pledge Union. Huxley emigrated to the USA in the late thirties, and from the fifties it was Comfort and notably

For unlike almost all other significant socialist thinkers Morris had no personal experience of what it was to be in need: ‘Few major socialists have been more exempt from the deforming pressures of scarcity in their own lives and imaginations’.<sup>8</sup> Morris himself was to observe:

... I daresay that you will find some of my visions strange enough.

One reason which will make some of you think them strange is a sad and shameful one. I have always belonged to the well-to-do classes, and was born into luxury, so that necessarily I ask much more of the future than many of you do...<sup>9</sup>

The fourth general influence on Morris was Old Norse literature. He had Eiríkr Magnússon tutor him in Icelandic from 1868, visited Iceland in 1871 and 1873, and translated in conjunction with Magnússon several of the sagas, of which he said that ‘the delightful freshness and independence of thought of them, the air of freedom which breathes through them, their worship of courage (the great virtue of the human race), their utter unconventionality took my heart by storm’.<sup>10</sup> He was thereby rescued from being merely a Pre-Raphaelite poet and, in Bernard Shaw’s words, ‘the facile troubadour of love and beauty’, as he had become after the vigour of *The Defence of Guenevere*, and was infused with the endurance, courage and hope of ‘the literature of the North’, values not to be found in Victorian Britain. And while his translations from the Icelandic have been much criticized for their archaic woodenness,

<sup>8</sup> Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 163–4 (Anderson’s emphasis).

<sup>9</sup> May Morris, *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2 vols., 1936) [hereafter *WMAWS*], II, p. 455 (‘The Society of the Future’).

<sup>10</sup> *CLWM*, II: 1881–1884, p. 229.

printing: all of which I must admit has given me and still gives me a great deal of pleasure.<sup>6</sup>

Concurrently Morris was an acclaimed poet. His first, exceptional collection, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, had been published at his own expense in 1858, and was followed by *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867) and the poetic work for which he was best known and admired in his lifetime, the massive *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70), sprawling over four of the twenty-four volumes of the *Collected Works*. On Tennyson's death in 1892 the two most serious contenders for his successor as Poet Laureate were Swinburne, who was immediately eliminated for his republicanism and atheism, and Morris, who even though by then a revolutionary socialist was sounded out by a member of Gladstone's Cabinet, James Bryce.<sup>7</sup> Morris was to become a major socialist thinker. Perry Anderson has shrewdly related the quality of his utopian vision to the fact that he was

a practising artist of the highest gifts, for whom ordinary work was daily creation.... Moreover, the major fields of Morris's practice were plastic arts, which are themselves distinctive within the forms of aesthetic composition for eluding the division between mental and manual labour. Yet at the same time, he was also a poet and a writer. Thus one might say that in his figurations of the future, Morris was able to draw on unique resources in his *present*, which brought him tangibly nearer to the conditions he imagined than any of his communist contemporaries: secure wealth, creative work, polymathic skills.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 229–30. Charles Harvey and Jon Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), is an exceptional study of Morris as a businessman.

<sup>7</sup> MacCarthy, *William Morris*, pp. 631–3.

Thompson who were to become prominent in the movement for nuclear disarmament.

I have indicated how, while all anarchists reject the State and parliamentarianism and advocate direct action, they differ when it comes to organization and private property. There is also disagreement over the means to be used to attain their ends, ranging from extreme violence to non-resistance and taking in all points between – other than legal, constitutional action. In the industrializing societies of Europe and the Americas in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries it was inevitable that trade unionists and revolutionaries would counter the brutal intimidation and suppression with which their strikes and insurrections were met with unrestrained retaliation. From the late 1870s the anarchists added to the traditional 'propaganda by the word' 'propaganda by the deed', such acts of revolt as violent strikes, riots, assassinations and bombings intended to ignite popular uprisings. This phase degenerated in France at the beginning of the 1890s into terrorism and the cult of dynamite, although care was normally taken to ensure that the victims would be class enemies, not members of the labouring masses. Anarchist terrorism was snuffed out by vigorous use of the *les lois scélérates*, but there were to be many assassinations – and even more numerous unsuccessful *attentats* on the lives – of monarchs and statesmen down to 1914, and anarchists became unfairly (but why not the Narodniks, whose methods they consciously adopted, or the Fenians?), though permanently, associated in the popular mind with bomb attacks, which did actually remain a continual feature of international, working-class anarchism down to its demise – and beyond, as a tactic of tiny, otherwise powerless, groups of romantic rebels, such as the Angry Brigade of the 1970s.

The deaths to be attributed to anarchist terrorists are insignificant when compared to the slaughter inflicted by the combatant states during the First World War, in the

aftermath of which mass pacifist sentiment began to manifest itself. There had already been a major libertarian thinker and great creative writer, whose philosophy of non-resistance repudiated equally all violence and all government. This was, of course, Leo Tolstoy, who has commonly been treated as a mainstream anarchist theorist, although this, as a fine article has argued recently, is problematic in that his philosophy (like Blake's) replaced all human authority with one absolute authority: God's authority.<sup>32</sup> One of the major political strengths of anarchist thought has been the insistence that means determine ends and that the institutions built to engage in current social conflict will prefigure the institutions that will exist in a post-revolutionary order. As the Preamble of the IWW put it, 'we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old'.<sup>33</sup> A libertarian, free society will only be brought into being through the creation of libertarian, free organizations in the here-and-now that break decisively with the authoritarian order. But what, pacifists ask, can be more authoritarian and repressive than violence and killing? How can a non-violent society be achieved using such means? 'The more violence, the less revolution,' Bart de Ligt, one of the most impressive anarchist thinkers of the interwar years, proclaimed – in Huxley's translation from the French.<sup>34</sup> Anarcho-pacifism became in the 1930s an important, although still minority tendency, within anarchism; but after the Second World War, with the use and deployment of nuclear weapons followed by mobilization of mass agitation for nuclear disarm-

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<sup>32</sup> Terry Hopton, 'Tolstoy, God and Anarchism', *Anarchist Studies*, VIII (2000), pp. 46–7.

<sup>33</sup> Joyce L. Kornbluh (ed.), *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1964), pp. 12–13.

<sup>34</sup> Bart de Ligt, *The Conquest of Violence: An Essay on War and Revolution* (London: George Routledge, 1937), p. x. Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), chap. 4, discusses usefully anarchism and violence as well as propaganda by the deed.

giving a summary of his life down to joining the Democratic Federation. He explained of the 1850s:

At this time the revival of Gothic architecture was making great progress in England and naturally touched the Preraphaelite movement also; I threw myself into these movements with all my heart: got a friend [Webb] to build me a house [Red House] very mediaeval in spirit in which I lived for 5 years, and set myself to decorating it; we found, I and my friend the architect especially, that all the minor arts were in a state of complete degradation especially in England, and accordingly in 1861 with the conceited courage of a young man I set myself to reforming all that: and started a sort of firm for producing decorative articles.<sup>4</sup>

The 'sort of firm' was Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., in which the principal participants were Morris himself, Burne-Jones, Webb, Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown. In 1875 it was reconstituted, amid considerable acrimony, as simply Morris & Co., with Morris as 'the only partner'.<sup>5</sup> By this time the business, subsidized in the early years by Morris's personal wealth and producing stained glass, furniture, wallpapers, printed chintzes, woven fabrics and tapestries, was a great success, both financial and artistic. Morris was revealed as a designer and craftsman of genius:

Almost all the designs we use for surface decoration, wallpapers, textiles, and the like, I design myself. I have had to learn the theory and to some extent the practice of weaving, dyeing, & textile

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 1881–1884, p. 228.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

in 1834 in Walthamstow, the son of a discount broker whose investment in Devon Great Consols was to make Morris an exceptionally wealthy man. He was educated at Marlborough College, a newly established public school, which he loathed, and the centuries-old Exeter College, Oxford, after which he was expected to become a clergyman. His career turned out to be very different indeed, shaped as he was by English Romanticism, the Gothic Revival, Pre-Raphaelitism and, rather later, Old Norse literature. E.P. Thompson was to highlight the first in his remarkable *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (1955), but then he was equally influenced by the Romantic writers, although in his case the formative poet was Blake rather than Morris's Keats. Morris steeped himself in mediaevalism while at Oxford and, on graduating, was articled in 1856 to the High Victorian Gothic architect, G.E. Street, who had temporarily opened an Oxford office in which Morris met his lifelong friend and collaborator, Philip Webb. He lasted only nine months with Street and turned to painting, following Edward Burne-Jones, the great friend he had made as an undergraduate, by becoming a pupil of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in London: 'Rossetti says I ought to paint, he says I shall be able: now as he is a very great man, and speaks with authority and as the scribes, I *must* try. I don't hope much, I must say, yet will try my best...'<sup>3</sup> It was in this way that Burne-Jones and Morris constituted a second phase, a second generation, of the Pre-Raphaelite artists.

The nearest Morris ever came to autobiography was in a letter he wrote in 1883 to the Austrian socialist, Andreas Scheu,

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*Work of William Morris* (London: Quartet Books, 1977 edn), provides an excellent survey of all Morris's activities, while Nicholas Salmon with Derek Baker, *The William Morris Chronology* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), is an indispensable handbook for all writers on Morris.

<sup>3</sup> *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, ed. Norman Kelvin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 4 vols., 1984–96) [hereafter CLWM], I, p. 28 (Morris's emphasis).

mament in Britain, anarchism grew in strength and close to pacifism. The success of Gandhian *satyagraha* in the attainment of Indian national independence and of other movements of civil disobedience, such as the Civil Rights Movement in the American South, provided conclusive testimony to the effectiveness of a new form of direct action: non-violent direct action. Both Gandhi, deeply influenced by Tolstoy and also indebted to Kropotkin, and even more his major successor, Vinoba Bhave, displayed striking anarchist characteristics, coupled with a disconcerting inconsistency and seeming lack of principle. 'Indian anarchism is not western anarchism in India,' as Geoffrey Ostergaard explained: 'It is different from western anarchism...'<sup>35</sup>

Readers of this book should have no doubt that its author believes that the most original, creative anarchist thinking over the last seventy years has been within anarcho-pacifism. In an increasingly violent world, but one in which Communist States have been overthrown largely by non-violent revolution, non-violent tactics have the most to commend them, to offer to present and future movements seeking radical social reconstruction, and to allow the anarchist seeds beneath the snow to germinate.

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<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey Ostergaard, 'Indian Anarchism: The Curious Case of Vinoba Bhave, Anarchist "Saint of the Government"', in David Goodway (ed.), *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 210. See also Robert Graham's review of Ostergaard's *Nonviolent Revolution in India*, in *Our Generation*, XIX, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1988), pp. 120B-122B.

## 2. Anarchism and libertarian socialism in Britain: William Morris and the background, 1880–1920

The first indigenous anarchist groups and journals in Britain only date from the 1880s and the belated revival of socialism – ‘revival’ because Owenite socialism had flourished in the 1830s and 1840s. London, in particular, afforded sanctuary in the late-Victorian and Edwardian decades for militants from continental Europe fleeing repression by their governments and there was much interaction between them and the tiny numbers of local anarchists, whom initially they often converted. Henry Seymour, a Proudhonist and admirer of Tucker, brought out the *Anarchist* in 1885–6. Kropotkin, who from 1877 had lived in Switzerland and France – including three years in a French prison – moved to England in 1886, when he founded *Freedom* with Charlotte Wilson and others. Albert Tarn, an individualist, published the *Herald of Anarchy* between 1890 and 1892. The Labour Emancipation League had been founded in the East End in 1882 and, while never calling itself anarchist, was always libertarian socialist and became anti-parliamentarian, as expressed in Joseph Lane’s notable *An Anti-Statist, Communist Manifesto* of 1887. Meanwhile the Democratic Federation had been inaugurated by H.M. Hyndman in 1881, became committed to socialism in 1883 and modified its name to the Social Democratic Federation (SDF)

the following year, when the Labour Emancipation League began working with it. The SDF was to be Marxist, whereas the Fabian Society, dating from 1884 and of which Wilson was also a prominent member, rapidly developed its peculiarly British form of evolutionary socialism, rejecting Marxist economics – accepting instead the neo-classical marginalist criticism of the labour theory of value – and appealing to the equally home-grown political and philosophical example of the utilitarians of the first half of the century.<sup>1</sup>

Early in 1883 William Morris had joined the Democratic Federation, as it still was, and was almost immediately elected treasurer, just before the June conference at which a socialist programme was adopted. Morris was already a famous and admired individual; as he was two years later to state, by no means immodestly, to the magistrate after his arrest in a free-speech campaign: ‘I am an artist, and a literary man, pretty well known, I think, throughout Europe’.<sup>2</sup> He had been born

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<sup>1</sup> For the anarchists, see John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse* (London: Paladin Books, 1978), chaps. 1–4; H. Oliver, *The International Anarchist Movement in Late-Victorian London* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), chaps. 1–3; Mark Bevir, ‘The Rise of Ethical Anarchism in Britain, 1885–1900’, *Historical Research*, LXIX (1996), pp. 143–65. The standard works on the SDF are Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), and Martin Crick, *The History of the Social-Democratic Federation* (Keele: Ryburn Publishing, 1994). For the Labour Emancipation League and Charlotte Wilson, see Joseph Lane, *An Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto*, ed. Nicolas Walter (Sanday, Orkney: Cienfuegos Press, 1978), and Charlotte M. Wilson, *Anarchist Essays*, ed. Nicolas Walter (London: Freedom Press, 2000). Royden Harrison, ‘Sidney and Beatrice Webb’, in Carl Levy (ed.), *Socialism and the Intelligentsia, 1880–1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), is a particularly stimulating discussion of the Fabians.

<sup>2</sup> E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1977), p. 397. This continues to be the outstanding political biography, but the most authoritative general biography is now Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994). J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (1899; London: Oxford University Press, 1950), written by the son-in-law of Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones, remains a classic, though weak on the politics. Paul Thompson, *The*



Douglas was still alive. Powys considered 'it's as good a book on Wilde as I ever seen', reporting to Louis Wilkinson (who had befriended Wilde as a correspondent in 1898 while still a schoolboy) that it was 'most lively & vivid reading....I can see very vivid possibilities for this great long rambling book', though very rightly commenting that 'what it wants is editing & revising'.<sup>100</sup> Bell was however to be disappointed. He died in 1942 and his book has only ever appeared in Argentina, shortened and in Spanish translation.<sup>101</sup>

From 1898 Bell worked for six years as secretary to Frank Harris, who was much impressed by his command of languages. 'Oscar Wilde without Whitewash' was first called 'Oscar Wilde, Frank Harris, Alfred Douglas and Myself' – Bell had met both Douglas and his father, the Marquis of Queensberry, and most unusually liked them both – and the original title was considerably more appropriate since the typescript contains as much, if not more, about Harris as it does about Wilde. In 1900 Wilde and Harris agreed to write a play together, with Wilde supplying the plot; and Bell describes himself as the 'intermediary' or 'go-between' selected by Wilde himself for the collaboration, for when Harris was back in London. Since 'Wilde wrote nothing at all. Not even the first act. Not one word,' Bell's role in the process failed to materialize and Harris had to write the play single-handedly, *Mr and Mrs Daventry* opening in London a month before Wilde's death in Paris on 30 November.<sup>102</sup> Bell had first met Wilde with Harris and an unnamed French writer

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<sup>100</sup> David Goodway (ed.), *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2008), p. 146; *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, 1935–1956* (London: Macdonald, 1958), p. 78; Louis Marlow [Wilkinson], *Seven Friends* (London: Richards Press, 1953), pp. 1–17. There are letters from Powys to Bell of 21 March and 18 June 1939 at the Clark.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas H. Bell, *Oscar Wilde: sus amigos, sus adversarios, sus ideas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Américalee, 1946).

<sup>102</sup> Bell, 'OWUP', pp. 139, 143.

am sincerely attached, the thought of marriage or cohabitation with any such has always been odious to me.

This is from the personal statement he wrote for John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis and published as one of the case histories in the path-breaking volume on *Sexual Inversion* in Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Carpenter explains:

At the age of 8 or 9, and long before distinct sexual feelings declared themselves, I felt a friendly attraction toward my own sex, and this developed after the age of puberty into a passionate sense of love ... I was a day-boarder at school and heard little of school-talk on sex subjects.... My own sexual nature was a mystery to me. I found myself cut off from the understanding of others, felt myself an outcast, and, with a highly loving and clinging temperament, was intensely miserable. I thought about my male friends – sometimes boys of my own age, sometimes elder boys, and once even a master – during the day and dreamed about them at night...

His 'passionate sense of love' was not to find 'any expression for itself till I was fully 20 years of age'.<sup>16</sup> This must have been after he gone up to Cambridge, where he was certainly to enjoy an *amitié amoureuse* with Edward Anthony Beck, a future Master of Trinity Hall. His friendship with another undergraduate, Charles George Oates, who was to be called to the

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<sup>16</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (New York: Random House, 2 vols., 1936), I, Part 4, pp. 107–8. *MDD*, p. 97n, directs readers' attention to this, 'history VII', and also to 'history XVII' (Ellis, I, Part 4, p. 135), which is clearly that of Carpenter's long-term lover, George Merrill, but before they became companions.

bar but continued to live with his mother at Meanwood, then outside Leeds, only progressed to intimacy when Carpenter began to work in the North – and Oates was then the recipient of a confessional correspondence down to his death in 1902. In any case, a physical relationship between men was a social impossibility in mid-Victorian Cambridge and so it may be seen that his thwarted sexuality underlay Carpenter's crisis of the early 1870s.

Cambridge's only positive contribution to his development came in 1868 or 1869 – that is, at the time of his fellowship – when another Trinity Hall don, unable to get on with it, handed him William Michael Rossetti's selection of *Poems by Walt Whitman* (1868). Before this Carpenter's preferred poets had been Tennyson, Wordsworth, Shakespeare and, especially, Shelley. Reading Whitman was epiphanic: 'What made me cling to the little blue book from the beginning was largely the poems which celebrate comradeship. That thought, so near and personal to me, I had never before seen or heard fairly expressed; even in Plato and the Greek authors there had been something wanting...'<sup>17</sup> He was continually to re-read 'the little blue book', then the essays of *Democratic Vistas*, which he originally esteemed even more, and later the complete *Leaves of Grass*. In 1874, on the eve of his departure from Cambridge, he wrote a remarkable long letter to Whitman: 'Because you have ... given me a ground for the love of men I thank you continually in my heart.... For you have made men to be not ashamed of the noblest instinct of their nature. Women are beautiful; but, to some, there is that which passes the love of women.' Whitman's comment was 'I seem to get very near to his heart and he to mine';<sup>18</sup> and he paid his first visit to

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<sup>17</sup> MDD, p. 65. See also Edward Carpenter, *Days with Walt Whitman: With Some Notes on His Life and Work* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1906), p. v.

<sup>18</sup> Tsuzuki, pp. 29–30.

1935, but with some additions of 1938, and owned by the outstanding research collection of Wilde materials, the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library at the University of California, Los Angeles.<sup>98</sup> The testimony is that of Thomas H. (Tom) Bell who, far from being an eccentric or peripheral observer, was close to the heart of the international anarchist movement, c. 1890–1940, the friend of Emma Goldman and Rudolf Rocker and brother-in-law of John Turner, the first person to be deported from the USA under the anarchist exclusion law following McKinley's assassination and future general secretary of the Shop Assistants' Union. Bell was born in Edinburgh in 1867, had been a member of the Scottish Land and Labour League and the SDF, claiming indeed to have converted James Connolly to socialism, before becoming an anarchist. As a ship's engineer he travelled widely, becoming an accomplished linguist and able to work as an interpreter and stenographer. He emigrated to the USA in 1904 and farmed in Arizona for ten years, before moving to Los Angeles, where he was active in the Libertarian Group which published his fine pamphlet and only freestanding work in English, *Edward Carpenter: The English Tolstoi*, in 1932.<sup>99</sup>

John Cowper Powys was interested by Goldman in 'Oscar Wilde without Whitewash' and promised to write a preface for it, even though he reported that his agent, Laurence Pollinger, was 'very scared of it for fear of libel-action' by Lord Alfred Douglas and that it could never be published in Britain while

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<sup>98</sup> For the dating of the typescript see Bell, 'OWwW', esp. ff. 5, 43, 48, 62, 241, 348, 378n, 451n, 465n, 467n. 'Oscar Wilde without Whitewash' was, however, used by Pullar in her biography of Harris.

<sup>99</sup> For Bell, see Rudolf Rocker, *En la borrasca (Años de destierro)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tupac, 1949), pp. 248–51; Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 29–33; Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (1931; New York: Dover, 2 vols., 1970), I, pp. 262–4; Bell, 'OWwW', esp. ff. 151, 159–61, 168, 201, 244; Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 110, 113, 114, 192, 203

But this I know, that every Law  
That men have made for Man,  
Since first Man took his brother's life,  
And the sad world began,  
But straws the wheat and saves the chaff  
With a most evil fan.<sup>95</sup>

Alexander Berkman used this stanza as the epigraph to his *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, which with the preceding verse and following verse similarly served Carpenter for *Prisons, Police and Punishment*.

In 1891 in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' Wilde could maintain the typically anarchist, yet optimistic, opinion that 'even in prison, a man can be quite free. His soul can be free. His personality can be untroubled. He can be at peace.' By 1898, writing to Cunninghame Graham who after 'Bloody Sunday' had had six weeks' experience of Pentonville, his outlook is equally anarchist but now lugubrious: 'I ... wish we could meet to talk over the many prisons of life – prisons of stone, prisons of passion, prisons of intellect, prisons of morality, and the rest. All limitations, external or internal, are prison-walls, and life is a limitation.'<sup>96</sup>

Finally, from the last year of Wilde's life come confirmation, discussion and details of his anarchism that, remarkably, never seem to have been drawn upon by any previous commentator on Wilde. They appear at length in a 477-page typescript, 'Oscar Wilde without Whitewash', begun after a related article of 1930, 'Oscar Wilde's Unwritten Play',<sup>97</sup> was sent for publication and before Frank Harris's death in 1931, and completed by

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>96</sup> Wilde, 'Soul', p. 265; Holland and Hart-Davis, p. 1021

<sup>97</sup> T.H. Bell, 'Oscar Wilde's Unwritten Play' [hereafter 'OWUP'], *Bookman* (New York), April-May 1930. This is however listed in the authoritative E.H. Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

Whitman in 1877 (there was to be a second in 1884), when he also met Emerson and other New England writers.

Leaving Cambridge did not resolve Carpenter's personal crisis. As a University Extension lecturer his health was bad 'and getting worse rather than better':

The state of my nerves was awful; they were really in a quite shattered condition. My eyes, which even in Cambridge days had been weak, kept getting worse. There was no disease or defect... It was simply extreme sensitiveness... A strong light from a lamp or candle was quite painful. I could hardly read more than an hour a day – certainly not two hours.<sup>19</sup>

The root problem remained as before: '...I was once or twice on the brink of despair and madness with repressed passion and torment.'<sup>20</sup> He was even reduced to visiting Paris 'to see if by any means I might make a discovery there! But the commercial samples of the Boulevards, though some of them deeply interested me, were nothing for my need': 'I enter the young prostitute's chamber, where he is arranging the photographs of fashionable beauties and favorite [sic] companions, and stay with him; we are at ease and understand each other.'<sup>21</sup>

It was Sheffield that rescued Carpenter from his predicament:

From the first I was taken with the Sheffield people. Rough in the extreme, twenty or thirty years in date behind other towns, and very uneducated,

<sup>19</sup> MDD, p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Ellis, I, Part 4, pp.107–8.

<sup>21</sup> Tsuzuki, p. 37; Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy: Complete Edition in Four Parts* (1905; London: Allen & Unwin, 1918 edn) [hereafter TD], pp. 67–8.

there was yet a heartiness about them, not without shrewdness, which attracted me. I felt more inclined to take root here than in any of the Northern towns where I had been.<sup>22</sup>

In 1879 he was invited by Albert Fearnough, a scythe maker and one of his students, to visit him at Bradway, a hamlet to the south of the city, where he lived with his wife and two children in a tiny cottage on the farm of another student, Charles Fox. Carpenter began to frequent Bradway, joining in the farm work, and soon decided to move in with the Fearnoughs at neighbouring Toley, while continuing with his lecturing. This was in May 1880, but in March 1881 they all returned to Bradway and a larger cottage on Fox's farm. It was now that Carpenter at last found sexual fulfilment, telling Whitman in July 1880: 'I am living with a man – the best friend I ever had or could think to have – an iron worker, scythe riveter, and his little family. He often says I wish Walt Whitman would come over here.'<sup>23</sup> Carpenter's lover, Albert Fearnough, was

a muscular, powerful man of about my age, quite 'uneducated' in the ordinary sense ... but well-grown and finely built ... a man whose ideal was the rude life of the backwoods, and who hated the shams of commercialism.... In many ways he was delightful to me, as the one 'powerful uneducated' and natural person I had yet, in all my life, met with.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *MDD*, p. 92.

<sup>23</sup> Tsuzuki, p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> *MDD*, pp. 102–3.

rules of the Prison Commissioners, the mode of discipline, as it is termed...the life'. He also repeats there what he contended in 'The Soul of Man' as to the degrading essence of authority: 'Authority is as destructive to those who exercise it as it is to those on whom it is exercised.'<sup>93</sup>

In *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* similarly it is not simply capital punishment which is rejected but prison in general:

... every prison that men build  
Is built with bricks of shame,  
And bound with bars lest Christ should see  
How men their brothers maim.  
With bars they blur the gracious moon,  
And blind the goodly sun:  
And they do well to blind their Hell,  
For in it things are done  
That Son of God nor son of Man  
Ever should look upon!  
The vilest deeds like prison weeds  
Bloom well in prison-air:  
It is only what is good in Man  
That wastes and withers there...<sup>94</sup>

As for law, while there is initially feigned hesitance:

I know not whether Laws be right,  
Or whether Laws be wrong...

there is regardless no doubting:

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 848, 851. Cf. Wilde, 'Soul', p. 266.

<sup>94</sup> Fong and Beckson, p. 213.

ever was.<sup>90</sup> In a central passage the meaning becomes clearer if ‘anarchist’ is substituted for ‘individualist’ and ‘the State’ for ‘Society’:

People used to say of me that I was too individualistic. I must be far more of an individualist than I ever was. I must get far more out of myself than I ever got, and ask far less of the world than I ever asked. Indeed my ruin came, not from too great individualism of life, but from too little. The one disgraceful, unpardonable, and to all time contemptible action of my life was my allowing myself to be forced into appealing to Society for help and protection against your father. To have made such an appeal against anyone would have been from the individualist point of view bad enough ... once I had put into motion the forces of Society, Society turned on me and said, ‘Have you been living all this time in defiance of my laws, and do you now appeal to those laws for protection? You shall have those laws exercised to the full. You shall abide by what you have appealed to’. The result is I am in gaol.<sup>91</sup>

It is this ‘Society’ that ‘takes upon itself the right to inflict appalling punishments on the individual’ and, while ‘There is no prison in any world into which Love cannot force an entrance,’ Wilde’s conclusion is the anarchist one that ‘The prison-system is absolutely and entirely wrong’.<sup>92</sup> In the first of two prosaic yet magnificent letters to the *Daily Chronicle* he itemized the ‘prison-system’ as ‘the governor, the chaplain, the warders, the lonely cell, the isolation, the revolting food, the

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 731.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 757–8. Cf. Bell, ‘OWwW’, ff. 110–11.

<sup>92</sup> Holland and Hart-Davis, pp. 734, 754, 779.

Explaining his sexual history for Symonds and Ellis over a decade later, he chose to depict himself ‘at the age of 37’ (that is, in 1881–2):<sup>25</sup>

my ideal of love is a powerful, strongly built man, of my own age or rather younger – preferably of the working class. Though having solid sense and character, he need not be specially intellectual.... Anything effeminate in a man, or anything of the cheap intellectual style, repels me very decisively.... My chief desire in love is bodily nearness or contact, as to sleep naked with a naked friend; the specially sexual, though urgent enough, seems a secondary matter.<sup>26</sup>

In April 1881 Carpenter began to write the title sequence of *Towards Democracy*, working largely in a wooden hut he had built for himself in the garden at Bradway (he had spent a couple of months in a joiner’s shop one summer in Brighton), and had finished the book by the end of the year. He was to explain that its writing and the anonymous publication in Manchester, at his own expense, in 1883 ‘got a load off my mind which had been weighing on it for years – a sense of oppression and anxiety which I had constantly suffered from before’.<sup>27</sup> *Towards Democracy* was successively expanded very considerably with other poems in 1885, 1892 and 1902, but it was only with the

<sup>25</sup> See Tsuzuki, pp. 124–7, 201 n16; Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1981), pp. 177–8.

<sup>26</sup> Ellis, I, Part 4, pp. 108. Oddly, Rowbotham, ‘Edward Carpenter’, misses the relationship with Fearnough (and in consequence so does Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1990), chap. 6). It is possible that Carpenter was also involved with Fox, who, after all, was already Fearnough’s friend: for Fox see *MDD*, pp. 103–4, and his depiction as ‘Martin Turner’ in Edward Carpenter, *Sketches from Life in Town and Country: And Some Verses* (London: George Allen, 1908), pp. 1–15.

<sup>27</sup> ‘A Note on “Towards Democracy”’, TD, p. 513.

appearance of the complete edition in 1905 that sales began to take off: between 1908 and 1921 it was reprinted ten times, four of them during the war. The title sequence is an ecstatic, over-the-top paean to the common people of England, to the Freedom and Equality which are immanent in them, and particularly to the young working men.

I see a great land poised as in a dream – waiting  
for the word by which it may live again.

I see the stretched sleeping figure – waiting for the  
kiss and the re-awakening.

I hear the bells pealing, and the crash of hammers,  
and see beautiful parks spread – as in [a] toy show.

I see a great land waiting for its own people to  
come and take possession of it.<sup>28</sup>

*Towards Democracy* has not worn well. Havelock Ellis's dismissive instant judgment of 'Whitman and water' has been frequently quoted and *Towards Democracy* described as 'Whitmanesque', but while Carpenter's free verse is manifestly indebted to *Leaves of Grass* there is another, more fatal influence at work: the abstractions (brooding spirits and the like), without the genius, of Shelley. Yet contemporaries were impressed by Carpenter's poetry. The astute Sir Robert Ensor, discussing in his magnificent *England, 1870–1914* the way in which poetry, 'after its brilliant phase between 1830 and 1870, collapsed almost suddenly', contended that 'in the early eighties Morris's few socialist poems and Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*... stand out over a thin crop of obvious minor work'.<sup>29</sup> And Ellis's considered opinion was that Carpenter, 'a person of altogether different temperament from Whitman', had produced 'a genuine original book full of inspiring and beautiful and consoling things, a book, indeed, that before long was to become for

<sup>28</sup> *TD*, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> R.C.K. Ensor, *England, 1870–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936).

symbolist and anarchist Paris was outraged. The novelists Paul Adam and Octave Mirbeau defended him in print as early as May and June respectively, Adam's article being illustrated with a sketch of Wilde by Toulouse-Lautrec in *La Revue blanche*, whose editor, Fénéon, also supported him; Stuart Merrill attempted to gather signatures to a petition for clemency; and the first public performance of *Salomé* took place in February 1896, with Toulouse-Lautrec designing the programme, at Lugné-Poë's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, of which Merrill was the manager.<sup>87</sup>

Imprisonment was to bring Wilde's career as a writer to an end, but not before it had enabled him to produce two of his finest works: the long letter to Lord Alfred Douglas, published posthumously by Robert Ross in heavily abridged form as *De Profundis*, and his one great poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. His terrible experience, brutal and degrading, served only to confirm and deepen his libertarian social, political and ethical views, expressed in both of these as well as in other correspondence of his final years.

In the resplendent prose and lucid thinking of *De Profundis* he rejects 'Morality': 'I am a born antinomian. I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws.'<sup>88</sup> He remembers telling Gide, 'as we sat together in some Paris café, that... Metaphysics had but little real interest for me, and Morality absolutely none' and so 'I need not tell you that to me Reformations in Morals are as meaningless and vulgar as Reformations in Theology.'<sup>89</sup> He has a good deal to say about his individualism, asserting: 'I am far more of an individualist than I

<sup>87</sup> Reg Carr, *Anarchism in France: The Case of Octave Mirbeau* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 94–5; Sonn, p. 176; Halperin, pp. 305–7; *Toulouse-Lautrec*, pp. 364–5; Holland and Hart-Davis, pp. 500n, 642–3, 916n; Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 462–3, 466. But see also Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 430–1.

<sup>88</sup> Holland and Hart-Davis, p. 732.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 741, 755.

LORD DARLINGTON: You allow of no exceptions?

LADY WINDERMERE: None!<sup>82</sup>

It can be seen that, as Lord Windermere expostulates, ‘How hard good women are!’ (Chiltern says of his wife: ‘She stands apart as good women do – pitiless in her perfection – cold and stern and without mercy’) and that ‘good people do a great deal of harm in this world’, as Lord Darlington believes.<sup>83</sup> Yet Lady Windermere comes to recant: ‘I don’t think now that people can be divided into the good and the bad as though they were two separate races or creations.’<sup>84</sup> *A Woman of No Importance* is much less interesting ethically than either *Lady Windermere’s Fan* or *An Ideal Husband*, but it is here that Wilde has one of his mouthpieces summarize what he himself presumably believed: ‘...intellectual generalities are always interesting, but generalities in morals mean absolutely nothing.’<sup>85</sup> Similarly the comment of the blackmailing Mrs Cheveley in *An Ideal Husband* that ‘Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike’ sounds like Wilde’s own position.<sup>86</sup> His position is antipodean to the bourgeois morality of his own day or of our own – and with the latter we need to include the equally Procrustean prejudices of political correctness.

When Wilde was arrested on 5 April 1895, both *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* had only recently opened in London, but although they had been playing to full houses, they were soon taken off and were not to be revived until after his death. In contrast, France in general was bemused by his sentence to two years’ hard labour; and

<sup>82</sup> Wilde, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, p. 388.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 388, 395; Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, p. 529.

<sup>84</sup> Wilde, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, p. 421.

<sup>85</sup> Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*, p. 45.

<sup>86</sup> Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, p. 519.

some people a kind of Bible’.<sup>30</sup> Raymond Unwin recalled reading *Towards Democracy* in 1884 on the train from Derbyshire to Oxford with ‘feelings of mystification, escape, and joy’: ‘...the sense of escape from an intolerable sheath of unreality and social superstition which the first reading ... brought to me’ was still fresh in 1931.<sup>31</sup> For heterosexuals such as Unwin Carpenter’s assertion that the human body is not to be ashamed of, is not the inferior of the human spirit, but that body and spirit are equals in the integrated personality, was an astonishing, liberating revelation:

I conceive a millennium on earth ... when men and women all over the earth shall ascend and enter into relation with their bodies – shall attain freedom and joy...<sup>32</sup>

The same truth combined with the extraordinarily uncooled and extensive homoerotic reference of *Towards Democracy* ensured that the impact on gays was as profound and longer lasting. An unknown previous owner of my own copy, who seems to have read it in 1941, marked only one passage in the entire 519 pages:

Now understand me well:

<sup>30</sup> Tsuzuki, p. 61. See also Havelock Ellis, in Beith, pp. 47–8. In contrast, Orage’s evaluation swung the opposite way to Ellis’s: from an adulatory two-part article on *Towards Democracy* in 1896 to, within ten years, dubbing Carpenter ‘Mrs Whitman’ (*Labour Leader*, 6, 27 June 1896; Holbrook Jackson, ‘A.R. Orage: Personal Recollections’, *Windmill*, no. 9 (1948), p. 44; Tom Steele, *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Arts Club, 1893–1923* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), pp. 35–6). For Carpenter’s assessment of his own indebtedness to Whitman: ‘A Note on “Towards Democracy”’, TD, pp. 517–19.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond Unwin, ‘Edward Carpenter and “Towards Democracy”’, in Beith, pp. 234–5.

<sup>32</sup> TD, p. 5. See also ‘The Soul to the Body’, *ibid.*, pp. 494–7. (On the other hand, I am informed by his biographer, Mervyn Miller, that Unwin slept with Carpenter on at least one occasion: in 1887 at a time of enforced separation from his future wife.)

There is no desire or indulgence that is forbidden;  
there is not one good and another evil – all are  
alike in that respect;

In place all are to be used.

Yet in using be not entangled in them; for then al-  
ready they are bad, and will cause thee suffering.<sup>33</sup>

Carpenter was a great liberator and sexual libertarian. *Towards Democracy* was just a beginning and *Love's Coming-of-Age* (1896), *Ioläus: An Anthology of Friendship* (1902), *The Intermediate Sex* (1908) and *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk* (1914) were important later contributions. Among their readers who were to write him letters of thanks were Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves. E.M. Forster, as a visitor, received the impetus to write the homosexual novel *Maurice* (albeit withheld for posthumous publication) and to achieve some modest physical release. He was to recall of Carpenter: 'The spell of his personal influence was tremendous.... It was the influence which used to be called magnetic ... and its effect was to increase one's vitality, so that one went away better able to do one's work. One's own work, not his...'<sup>34</sup> Carpenter's emancipatory sexual gospel is not, of course, exclusively anarchist, but I regard it as an essential element of his highly personal anarchism; and exactly the same applies to the way in which he was to live the simple life at Millthorpe for forty years.

At the same time as he began to write *Towards Democracy* – he attributed the precipitation of the composition of the se-

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>34</sup> Tsuzuki, pp. 147–9; E.M. Forster, 'Some Memories', in Beith, p. 79; 'Terminal Note', E.M. Forster, *Maurice* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), pp. 235–41; P.N. Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2 vols., 1977–80), I, pp. 256–8; Nicola Beauman, *Morgan: A Biography of E.M. Forster* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), pp. 207–9, 233–4, 283–4, 300–3; Wendy Moffat, *E. M. Forster: A New Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), pp. 112–14, 137–40, 147, 164–5, 178. See also E.M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951; Harmondsworth: Penguin edn, 1965), pp. 216–18.

pearance of sportive levity unheard of profundity of perception and thought' and equally that he exposed 'with a sudden flash of wit' 'the rift which has opened out ... between our moral belief and the belief of our fathers'.

In the first three of the society comedies Wilde subverts established morality, arguing for a more flexible and a fully human – one could say, libertarian – code of conduct in place of the rigid rules and ungenerous spirit of Victorianism. In *Lady Windermere's Fan* Mrs Erlynne, the previously demonized 'woman with a past', is finally recognized by Lady Windermere to be 'a very good woman'.<sup>80</sup> There is a similar progression in *An Ideal Husband*, where Sir Robert Chiltern, conventionally considered to be 'an ideal husband' but exposed as having once committed a politically corrupt act, laments, 'Why can't you women love us, faults and all? Why do you place us on monstrous pedestals? We have all feet of clay, women as well as men... It is not the perfect, but the imperfect, who have need of love...' while his wife can state: '[Life] has taught me that a person who has once been guilty of a dishonest and dishonourable action may be guilty of it a second time, and should be shunned,' believing that the rule should be applied 'to every one, without exception'. At the end of the play, though, Sir Robert can be loved by his wife for what he is, 'faults and all', his sister having commented: 'An ideal husband! Oh, I don't think I should like that. It sounds like something in the next world.'<sup>81</sup>

Lady Windermere had believed the same as Lady Chiltern in an irrefragable moral code.

LORD DARLINGTON: I think life too complex a  
thing to be settled by these hard and fast rules.

LADY WINDERMERE: If we had 'these hard and  
fast rules', we should find life much more simple.

<sup>80</sup> Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, in *Complete Works*, p. 430.

<sup>81</sup> Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, in *Complete Works*, pp. 519, 521, 551.



every kind of spiritual, moral, social and artistic convention, and all forms of authority demanding obedience merely as authority. Hence came that widespread assertion and demonstration of individualism that is still progressing. Wilde was the synthesis of all these phenomena of change. He may be said to have included [T.H.] Huxley and Pater and Morris and Whistler and Mr Bernard Shaw and Mr Max Beerbohm in the amazing eclecticism of his extravagant personality, that seems to have borrowed everything and made everything his own.<sup>77</sup>

The four years after the appearance of ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ saw Wilde’s spectacular success on the London stage with his great series of plays, *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (which opened in 1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). At first sight comedies set in aristocratic circles seem improbable products of a committed anarchist mind. There is just one expression of a mainline anarchist belief when Lord Illingworth remarks: ‘You can’t make people good by Act of Parliament...’; although he also says (as in ‘The Soul’): ‘Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or a nation.’<sup>78</sup> When Algy Moncrieff explains in *The Importance of Being Earnest* that the imaginary Bunbury had ‘quite exploded’ that afternoon and Lady Bracknell enquires, ‘Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage?’, it is a solitary reference to the world of contemporary anarchist struggle.<sup>79</sup> All the same, Barlas was perfectly correct when he said that Wilde ‘half-conceal[ed] under an ap-

<sup>77</sup> Richard Le Gallienne, *The Romantic ‘90s* (1926; London: Robin Clark, 1993), pp. 156–7.

<sup>78</sup> Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966), pp. 437, 456.

<sup>79</sup> Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in *Complete Works*, p. 372.

quence to the death of Sophia Carpenter early in 1881 – he resigned his lectureship. When his father died a year later leaving an estate of £20,744 – the unceasing anxiety had paid off handsomely, principally in American railway stock – Carpenter inherited around £6,000 and in addition he had an annual income of £50 to £60 from his Cambridge savings. He proceeded to buy seven acres of land in the beautiful Cordwell Valley, to the south of Bradway and Topley over the county boundary in Derbyshire, nine miles from the centre of Sheffield and six from Chesterfield. Millthorpe was a hamlet with ‘no resident squire of any kind, nor even a single “villa”, while the church, more than a mile distant [in Holmesfield], was quite amiably remote! We were just a little population of manual workers, sincerely engrossed in our several occupations.’<sup>35</sup>

He and his friends were familiar with the thirteen-acre St George’s Farm, which a dozen men and women ran as a co-operative experiment at Topley on land bought in 1876 for the Guild of St George by Ruskin; and Carpenter, when he visited Whitman for a second time in 1884, stayed with its former manager, William Harrison Riley, in Massachusetts.<sup>36</sup> The small holding at Millthorpe, in contrast, was not to be communitarian. Carpenter himself designed the cottage – really a small farm – and helped to build it from stone quarried on the site,<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> MDD, p. 148.

<sup>36</sup> Tsuzuki, pp. 40–1; ‘A Couple of Communists’, Carpenter, *Sketches*, pp. 196–211; Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England* (London: Longman, 1979), pp. 80, 105–8; Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in England, from 1880 to 1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), pp. 93–8; Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Later Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 353–4; MDD, pp. 117–18. See also, especially for Riley, Sheila Rowbotham, ‘“Our Party Is the People”: Edward Carpenter and Radicalism in Sheffield’, in John Rule and Robert Malcolmson (eds.), *Protest and Survival: The Historical Experience: Essays for E.P. Thompson* (London: Merlin Press, 1993), pp. 262–73.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Bryan Binns, ‘Pioneers, O Pioneers! Edward Carpenter, the Poet of Democracy’, *Woolwich Pioneer*, n.d. [1906] (cutting in the Matti-

and in October 1883 moved in with the Fearnhoughs. The intention was to make the three fields a self-sufficient market garden, and initially this is what more or less happened. He explained to Whitman: 'We are gardening about two acres; fruit, flowers and vegetables; have about two and a half acres grass and about the same quantity part wheat for ourselves and part oats for the horse.'<sup>38</sup> Driving a cart with the lettering 'EDW. CARPENTER MARKET GARDENER MILLTHORPE', he would take the produce to market in Chesterfield or Sheffield and sell it from a stall, as he describes compellingly in 'Trade'<sup>39</sup> – this was the man who only a decade earlier had been 'the Reverend Edward Carpenter'. For the first three or four years he was engaged in heavy manual labour, much to the benefit of his physical and mental health. (Indeed he came to believe that disease would disappear in a free and communist society.)<sup>40</sup> Thereafter, although he continued to undertake manual work for the rest of his life, writing and lecturing came to take precedence, and the running of the market garden was taken over by Albert Fearnhough.

From 1879 Carpenter had started to move towards vegetarianism. While he did not make 'any absolute rule against flesh-eating', he found 'the vegetarian diet – fruit and grains and vegetables, nuts, eggs, and milk – pleasant, clean, healthful in every way and grateful to one's sense of decency and humanity'.<sup>41</sup> Dress reform followed and – just as Morris had several years earlier sat on his top hat after resigning from the

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son Collection, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds) [hereafter MC]; C[lara] A[dams], 'Edward Carpenter: A Visit to His Old Home', *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, 5 June 1926 (MC).

<sup>38</sup> Tsuzuki, p. 50. See also *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, ed. Norman Kelvin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 4 vols., 1984–96) [hereafter CLWM], II: 1881–1884, p. 353.

<sup>39</sup> Collected in Carpenter, *England's Ideal*, pp. 128–38.

<sup>40</sup> See Edward Carpenter, *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure; And Other Essays* (1889; London: Allen & Unwin, 1921 edn), esp. pp. 28–40.

<sup>41</sup> *MDD*, pp. 100–1.

physical means, but spiritual. Nor are his spiritual weapons of the coarser kind, noisy and explosive. He does not use dynamite, but the dagger – a dagger whose hilt is crusted with flaming jewels, and whose point drips with the poison of the Borgias. That dagger is the paradox. No weapon could be more terrible. He has stabbed all our proverbs, and our proverbs rule us more than our kings. Perhaps it is better to say he uses sheet lightning. With a sudden flash of wit he exposes to our startled eyes the sheer cliff-like walls of the rift which has opened out, as if by a silent earthquake, between our moral belief and the belief of our fathers. That fissure is the intellectual revolution.<sup>75</sup>

In a period of lucidity in 1905 he wrote to his son, equally well albeit less showily, that Wilde 'was and remains my ideal of a man of genius in this generation; his words and writings...half-concealing under an appearance of sportive levity unheard of profundity of perception and thought'.<sup>76</sup> Similarly Richard Le Gallienne argued from the vantage point of the 1920s that Wilde was the 'symbolic figure' of the Late-Victorian Revolt of the 1880s and 1890s, that he was 'the incarnation of the spirit of the '90s':

The significance of the '90s is that they began to apply all the new ideas that had been for some time accumulating from the disintegrating action of scientific and philosophic thought on

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<sup>75</sup> John E. Barlas, *Oscar Wilde: A Study* (Edinburgh: Tragara Press, 1978), pp. 10–11. Sherard, *The Real Oscar Wilde*, pp. 116–20, quotes extensively from a manuscript copy of this item, originally published in April 1892 in the *Novel Review* (with which Champion was closely associated).

<sup>76</sup> Cited by Lowe, p. 9.

and ‘I must come and see you soon,’ signing himself ‘Your affectionate friend / Oscar’. The following month he provided a reference for Barlas to be admitted to the Reading Room of the British Museum, instructing him to ‘Send me a line, poet and scholar, and know me for ever your friend.’<sup>73</sup> Barlas’s violent behaviour continued and not long afterwards he collapsed into mental illness. He was arrested once more, this time for unprovoked assault in Crieff, Perthshire, and was confined first at an asylum in Perth (1892–3) and later for many years in Gartnavel Asylum, Glasgow, where he died in 1914.<sup>74</sup>

Barlas had published an article in April 1892 in praise of Wilde with a splendid conclusion:

... a man who is all this, and whose fate has cast him upon these latter days, cannot fail to be a revolutionist. And this voluptuous artist is a very Michael, or, rather, a Raphael, for he does not use

<sup>73</sup> Holland and Hart-Davis, pp. 511–12.

<sup>74</sup> The foregoing account of Barlas’s life depends primarily on David Lowe, *John Barlas: Sweet Singer and Socialist* (Cupar: Craigwood House Publishing Co., 1915) and Sloan, pp. 37–8, 66–9, 75, 81–3. (It is worth pointing out that Lowe, whose booklet is the principal source for Barlas’s career and who had known him from 1889, managed the office in the 1890s for Keir Hardie’s *Labour Leader* and became in 1923 an early biographer of Hardie (Kenneth O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist* [London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975], pp. 66, 138). Some details derive from Peter Mendes, ‘Introduction’ to Barlas, *Lyric-Epic*, pp. i–vi; Oliver, p. 76; J. Benjamin Townsend, *John Davidson: Poet of Armageddon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 190n. See also Frank Liebich, ‘Oscar Wilde’ (typescript copy of an original ms., Clark); Champion’s appreciation in ‘Comments’, *Book Lover*, 1 December 1914; Henry S. Salt, *Seventy Years among Savages* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1921), pp. 85–7, 233; Henry S. Salt, *Company I Have Kept* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930), pp. 76–80; Jerusha Hull McCormack, *John Gray: Poet, Dandy, and Priest* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991), pp. 73–4. The absence of a reliable work on Barlas is perplexing but, whereas Arthur Symons only projected one (Roger Lhombreaud, *Arthur Symons: A Critical Biography* [London: Unicorn Press, 1963], p. 302), Steven Halliwell’s long-promised study is now announced as co-authored with Philip Cohen.

board of Devon Great Consols and never bought another<sup>42</sup> – so Carpenter gave away his dress clothes in the early 1880s. He also dispensed with starched collars and braces and wore loose, scarf-like ties and belts, along with knickerbockers and sandals. In the mid-eighties he had a friend send him a pair of Indian sandals from Kashmir, began to wear them in all weathers, was to mount a protest against the British Museum Reading Room barring sandal-wearers, and himself started in a special workshop at Millthorpe to make sandals for sale. Indeed it was he who was responsible for the introduction of sandals into Britain. When in 1893 the Fearnoughs were replaced by George Adams and his family, Albert returning to scythe-making and Sheffield, Adams, one of the Sheffield Socialists, besides looking after the market garden helped with the sandal-making, so that after 1898, when he in turn left, he was able to make a living primarily from the trade, latterly in Letchworth Garden City. On the day after the departure of the Adams family, George Merrill, whom Carpenter had first met in 1889–90, moved in. Merrill, twenty years his junior, was ‘neat and orderly in his habits, and fond of housework’, as well as ‘sensitive and feminine by nature, gentle, and affectionate’;<sup>43</sup> and the two men formed a loving, stable relationship and were to move together in 1922 to Guildford, where Merrill predeceased Carpenter in 1928. Tom Bell has an amusing reminiscence of their being excluded from the casino at Monte Carlo since they were wearing ‘their loose shirts, knickers and sandals’.<sup>44</sup>

Carpenter achieved at Millthorpe what he called the ‘Simplification of Life’ (the title of one of his best essays); and this deeply impressed his readers, particularly of *England’s Ideal*

<sup>42</sup> E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1977), p. 192.

<sup>43</sup> Ellis, I, Part 4, p. 135 (see n.16 above).

<sup>44</sup> Bell, p. 20. For Carpenter’s description of the scene outside and, after their admittance wearing Bell’s clothes, inside the casino (but no mention of their exclusion): *TD*, pp. 435–40.

(1887), and, above all, those who were fortunate enough to visit him at Millthorpe.<sup>45</sup> Of the three men who inspired English agrarianism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries it was Carpenter alone, and not Ruskin or Morris, who provided the practical example.<sup>46</sup> Two early visitors to Millthorpe included Morris himself and C.R. Ashbee, both in 1885. Morris wrote to his daughter Jenny: ‘This is a pleasant healthy looking spot; hill & dale & lots of beautiful woods, and a little brook to turn the mill of Millthorpe: Carpenter seems to live in great amity with the workmen & the women; they all live together in the kitchen, and ‘tis all very pleasant.’ Fiona MacCarthy suggests very plausibly that Morris, who ‘tended to be gruff and self-conscious with his employees’, would have felt ‘almost envious’ of the way in which Carpenter had transcended the inhibitions of class.<sup>47</sup> For Ashbee, still a Cambridge undergraduate but shortly to become a major Arts and Crafts designer and architect and founder of the Guild and School of Handicraft, the two great influences of his life were Morris and Carpenter. Besides helping him to acknowledge his homosexuality, Carpenter, according to Ashbee ‘seeks to eliminate the superfluous ... his cottage is simply built and furnished: – there is the house-place or kitchen in which we sat & had our meals, there is a little parlour not yet furnished & used as a granary &

<sup>45</sup> ‘Simplification of Life’ is collected in Carpenter, *England’s Ideal*, pp. 95–120. ‘The Simplification of Life’ is also an article of 1896 (reprinted in Edward Carpenter, *Angels’ Wings: A Series of Essays on Art and Its Relation to Life* (1898; London: Allen & Unwin, 7<sup>th</sup> edn, 1923), pp. 237–42), a lecture of 1904 (see *Bibliography of Edward Carpenter*, p. 35) and the title of a volume of his selected works: Harry Roberts (ed.), *The Simplification of Life: From the Writings of Edward Carpenter* (1905).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Marsh, pp. 7–23.

<sup>47</sup> CLWM, II: 1885–1888, pp. 427–8; Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), pp. 456–7. See Thompson, pp. 289–90, for an assessment of Carpenter’s social daring. MacCarthy, *William Morris*, pp. 545–6, considers that Morris’s experience of Millthorpe may have provided one element in his vision of a decentralized society (initially in ‘The Society of the Future’).

socio-political content, it displays more talent and reads better than Wilde’s early verse.<sup>71</sup>

The romantic explanation for his later mental instability attributes it to a blow received on Bloody Sunday, November 1887, when, batoned by the police in Trafalgar Square, he fell, the story runs, at the feet of Eleanor Marx; but it seems more probable that it was caused by syphilis. He was an active propagandist, initially as a lecturer and organizer for the Marxist SDF, but in 1888–9 he followed Champion in quitting it and joining the Labour Electoral Association. He could write to Bruce Glasier in 1889 that he was ‘neither exclusively collectivist nor anarchist’ and then gravitated towards the anarchist Socialist League, for which he was working from at least May 1891. The veteran anarchist and fellow Scot, Tom Bell, of whom more later (but he is not to be confused with the Glaswegian iron moulder, SLP militant and future Communist stalwart of the same name), had no hesitation in calling Barlas an anarchist, having met him as ‘an extraordinarily able young man who had lately come into the movement’ at ‘the first conference of Anarchists in Scotland’.<sup>72</sup>

Wilde responded to Barlas’s gratitude in January 1892 by writing, ‘Whatever I did was merely what you would have done for me or for any friend of yours whom you admired and appreciated. We poets and dreamers are all brothers’,

<sup>71</sup> A selection was published as *Selections from the Poems of John E. Barlas* (‘Evelyn Douglas’) [ed. Henry S. Salt] (London: Elkin Mathews, 1924). Otherwise only three editions, largely of previously unpublished work, have appeared: John Evelyn Barlas, *Yew-Leaf and Lotus-Petal: Sonnets* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Oriole Press, 1935); John Barlas, *Six Sonnets*, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: privately printed by Eric and Joan Stevens, 1981); and John Evelyn Barlas (‘Evelyn Douglas’), *The Lyric-Epic of Love: Being Love-Sonnets Divided into Books According to the Stages of Love’s Growth and Harmonized with the Answering Moods and Phases of Nature* (London: privately printed by Eric Stevens, 2001).

<sup>72</sup> Barnes, pp. 166–7; Oliver, p. 76; Bell, ‘OWwW’, ff. 29, 107–8. Barlas published an article, ‘Anarchy and Laisser Faire’, in *Freedom*, March 1890.

fluenced politically by Barlas, but previous writers on his anarchism have stressed the significance of their friendship, while not knowing a great deal about it.<sup>69</sup>

Although born in Rangoon in 1860, the son of a merchant, Barlas was Scottish – he was a descendant of Kate Douglas, a fifteenth-century heroine – and educated at Merchant Taylors' School and New College, Oxford. It was at Oxford that he had met Wilde; but he knew also Robert Sherard, who, before being sent down for non-payment of debts, was an undergraduate at New College for a year, and Wilde and Sherard (who was to write four books about Wilde) were to become firm friends in Paris in 1883.<sup>70</sup> After Oxford Barlas entered the Middle Temple before turning to teaching, first for a couple of years at a Jesuit college in Ireland, next in Chelmsford, where he taught at the Grammar School, formed a socialist society and left in December 1886, moving on to Egham and coaching entrants for the army. In London he lived in poverty in Lambeth and elsewhere in the late 1880s and early 1890s, when he became a member of the Rhymers' Club. Between 1884 and 1893, he published eight volumes of poetry, all now exceedingly rare, usually under the name of Evelyn Douglas, save for the anonymous *Holy of Holies: Confessions of an Anarchist* (1887). Although his oeuvre is overwhelmingly love poetry and notable for its lack of

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'H.H. Champion: Pioneer of Labour Representation', *Cambridge Journal*, VI (1952–3), pp. 222–38; Andrew Whitehead's entry in Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville with David E. Martin (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. VIII (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 24–32; John Barnes, *Socialist Champion: Portrait of the Gentleman as Crusader* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2006).

<sup>69</sup> Woodcock, *Paradox*, p. 149; D'Amico, p. 112; Eltis, pp. 5, 17; Gibbard, p. 167.

<sup>70</sup> Sherard wrote three times on his friendship with Barlas: Sherard, *Oscar Wilde: The Story of an Unhappy Friendship*, pp. 104–9; Sherard, *The Real Oscar Wilde*, pp. 112–21; Robert Harborough Sherard, *My Friends the French: With Discursive Allusions to Other People* (London: T. Werner Laurie [1909]), pp. 92–5, 98–9.

apple-room; above are the bed rooms'. Janet Ashbee, his wife, was later to remark similarly on 'the absence of "Things", and of their attendant fuss and care'.<sup>48</sup>

A description of the cottage in 1906 runs:

the living room has the kitchen range in it; one door leads to the cellar, and another into the scullery and larder. The piano stands in a recess near the fire...while a table in the window is full of books and geraniums. On the other side of the entrance is the study, a comfortable, plain, square room with two windows, and an outer door into a sort of sheltered porch, where one can sit and write any sunny day, even in winter. Over this is Carpenter's bedroom.<sup>49</sup>

A very late visitor explained in 1926 that

the interior is still mostly furnished and decorated as in the days when Carpenter lived there... We lived in the study with its oak bookshelves still full of philosophical, psychological, sociological and literary works... We dined at the beautiful oak table designed by himself and Alf. Mattison, and reclined on the oak settle made by Albert Fearnough...<sup>50</sup>

Carpenter recalled Morris, probably under the influence of Millthorpe's simplicity, telling him:

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<sup>48</sup> Tsuzuki, pp. 64–5; Felicity Ashbee, *Janet Ashbee: Love, Marriage, and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), p. 34. See also Alan Crawford, *C.R. Ashbee: Architect, Designer and Romantic Socialist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 15–21; Fiona MacCarthy, *The Simple Life: C.R. Ashbee in the Cotswolds* (London: Lund Humphries, 1981), pp. 12, 17–21, 23, 66–8.

<sup>49</sup> Binns, see n. 37.

<sup>50</sup> Adams, see n. 37.

‘I have spent, I know, a vast amount of time designing furniture and wall-papers, carpets and curtains; but after all I am inclined to think that sort of thing is mostly rubbish, and I would prefer for my part to live with plainest whitewashed walls and wooden tables and chairs.’<sup>51</sup>

Thoreau was to become one of Carpenter’s favourite authors; and indeed he lent his copy of *Walden* to Morris when he stayed at Millthorpe. Yet Carpenter had only read *Walden* as late as 1883, at the very time he moved into his new house. In *My Days and Dreams* he admits that if he had come across Thoreau’s book only a year earlier his life would have certainly been very different:

It helped ... to make me uncomfortable for some years. I felt that I had aimed at a natural life and completely failed – that I might somehow have escaped from this blessed civilization altogether – and now I was tied up worse than ever, on its commercial side.

In the long term, though, he did not regret the life he had chosen, thinking it fortunate

I was not drifted away by [Thoreau] and stranded, too far from the currents of ordinary life.... Instead of escaping into solitude and the wilds of nature – which would have satisfied one side – but perhaps not the most persistent – of my character, I was tied to the traffic of ordinary life, and thrown inevitably into touch with all sorts of people.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> MDD, p. 217.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115–16. For Morris’s very similar criticism of Thoreau: *CLWM*, II: 1885–1888, p. 430 (but see also p. 453).

incidents. Early in 1892, in the case of the Walsall Anarchists, four men, who included a Frenchman and an Italian, received lengthy prison sentences for conspiring to manufacture a bomb; and four days after Henry’s *attentat* in Paris, a young French anarchist, Martial Bourdin, who was carrying a bomb in Greenwich Park, was killed by it, an affair on which Conrad drew in *The Secret Agent*.<sup>66</sup> Wilde’s comment that ‘the dynamite policy is very absurd indeed’ came a month later.

Also, on 31 December 1891 a young poet had discharged five rounds from a revolver at the wall of the House of Commons near the Speaker’s Residence. He proceeded to hand the weapon to a police constable, saying, ‘I am an anarchist, and I intended shooting you; but then I thought it a pity to shoot an honest man. What I have done is to show my contempt for the House of Commons.’ John Evelyn Barlas, who used the *nom-de-plume* of Evelyn Douglas, was remanded in custody and next appeared in court on 7 January, supported by Wilde, John Gray and John Davidson. Nine days later he was bound over to be of good behaviour and keep the peace for two months for a surety of £200, £100 on Wilde’s recognisance and the other half being guaranteed by the prominent socialist H.H. Champion.<sup>67</sup> It was Champion, once secretary of the SDF, who, previously unknown to Wilde, had called at Tite Street to get him to go to Westminster Police Court, thereby making him late for the reading of *Lady Windermere’s Fan* to the actor-manager George Alexander.<sup>68</sup> There is no evidence that Wilde was in-

<sup>66</sup> See John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse* (London: Paladin Books, 1978), chaps. 6, 8; H. Oliver, *The International Anarchist Movement in Late-Victorian London* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), chaps. 4, 5. Paul Gibbard has written an admirable entry on Bourdin in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>67</sup> *The Times*, 1, 7, 15, 16 January 1892.

<sup>68</sup> H.H.C., ‘Men I Have Met, VII: Oscar Wilde’, *Champion* (Melbourne), 13 February 1897; [H.H. Champion], ‘Wilde as I Saw Him’, *Book Lover* (Melbourne), 1 December 1914; Andrew Whitehead (ed.), ‘“Quorum Pars Fui”’: The Autobiography of H.H. Champion’, *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, no. 47 (Autumn 1983), p. 32. For Champion, see H.M. Pelling,

From the viewpoint of Anglosaxony Wilde's adherence to anarchism no doubt seems yet another bizarre characteristic of an extravagant career; but as a natural member of this French cultural milieu it would have been astonishing if he had not done so. Five months after the appearance of 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' in the *Fortnightly Review*, an abridged French translation entitled '*Individualisme*' was published in *La Révolte*, Grave, the follower of Kropotkin, agreeing that 'art is the supreme manifestation of individualism'.<sup>64</sup>

French anarchism in the early 1890s was not only characterized by its appeal to the literary and artistic avant-gardes; between March 1892 and June 1894 nine people died in eleven dynamite explosions in Paris. This terrorist phase was initiated by François-Claudius Ravachol detonating two bombs at blocks of flats where judges lived. Auguste Vaillant's bomb was flung from the gallery into the Chamber of Deputies. In contrast, Emile Henry was responsible for the twenty casualties, one of them fatal, in a station café crowded with lower middle-class and even working-class customers. The period of propaganda by the deed terminated with the assassination of President Sadi Carnot in Lyon by an Italian, Santo Casiero. All four dynamitards were executed, but whereas most anarchists and working people in general admired Ravachol, Vaillant and Casiero, they had serious reservations about Henry's act of February 1894.<sup>65</sup>

Britain was scarcely affected by the anarchist violence of continental Europe, although there were several minor

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Cha-U-Kao and Jane Avril, Wilde seems to have been inserted in the background rather than directly observed.

<sup>64</sup> Gibbard, pp. 164–5; Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897–1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 46. Cf. Wilde, 'Soul', p. 270.

<sup>65</sup> Reliable brief accounts are provided by Woodcock, *Anarchism*, pp. 253–9; Joll, pp. 131–8. For greater detail: Maitron, *Histoire*, part 2, chap. 5; Jean Maitron, *Ravachol et les anarchistes* (Paris: René Juillard, 1964), esp. chaps. 2, 3; J.C. Longoni, *Four Patients of Dr Deibler: A Study in Anarchy* (London; Lawrence & Wishart, 1970); Sonn, esp. chap. 9.

Carpenter has sometimes been accused of living reclusively at Millthorpe. This is obvious nonsense, and one doubts if the charge would have been made if Millthorpe was in the home counties or, say, Sussex, and not the north of England. Although he did admit to feeling isolated in the very early years, his way of life was not the reclusive individualism of Thoreau at Walden Pond. Carpenter always lived with one or more people; there were visits from the Sheffield Socialists and, as time went by, from socialists from all over the north; he began to lecture extensively throughout England and Scotland; he went to London 'for a fortnight or so three or four times a year';<sup>53</sup> and he also always spent a good deal of time travelling outside the British Isles. In addition to his two North American trips (written up in part in *Days with Walt Whitman*, 1906) and 'the usual resorts in Switzerland and Italy', he reached Corsica, Sicily, Spain, Morocco and, with his mounting interest in eastern mysticism, India and Ceylon, describing this last journey in *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta* (1892).<sup>54</sup> The essential thing for him was that, by being based in Millthorpe, he had 'escaped from the domination of Civilization in its two most fatal and much detested forms, respectability and cheap intellectualism'.<sup>55</sup>

The common criticism of Carpenter's life at Millthorpe as a retreat from political struggle and one moreover which encouraged the activists who visited him to do the same is misconceived. On the one hand – and this is the more important objection – what militants were privileged to view was a glimpse of the coming free and communist society and they would be thereby encouraged to increase their exertions to attain it, industrially, socially or politically; on the other – and scarcely anachronistically – it can now be seen that the

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<sup>53</sup> *MDD*, pp. 149–50 (see also p. 254).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 309–10.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

piecemeal, voluntary transformation by individuals of their everyday living cumulatively does offer a possible, notably green, model of how to effect radical social change. What would be seen in the Cordwell Valley, in addition to the beauty of the natural world, was an illustration of Landauer's famous contention (which was to influence Colin Ward profoundly): 'The state is a condition, a certain relationship among human beings, a mode of behaviour between men; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently toward one another.'<sup>56</sup> Carpenter's own gloss on these issues at the age of seventy reveals an extra dimension, still refreshingly hedonistic in puritan Britain (and anticipatory of John Cowper Powys's life-philosophy):

I have sometimes ... been accused of taking to a rather plain and Bohemian kind of life, of associating with manual workers, of speaking at street corners, of growing fruit, making sandals, writing verses, or what not, as at great cost to my own comfort, and with some ulterior or artificial purpose – of reforming the world. But I can safely say that in any such case I have done the thing primarily and simply because of the joy I had in doing it, and to please myself... And this perhaps after all is a good general rule: namely that people should endeavour ... to express or liberate their *own* real and deep-rooted needs and feelings. Then in doing so they will probably liberate and aid the expression of the lives of thousands of others...<sup>57</sup>

Carpenter's new life coincided with the revival of socialism in Britain. He considered that his ideas had 'in a vague

<sup>56</sup> Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1973), p. 226.

<sup>57</sup> *MDD*, pp. 321–2.

historian of French anarchism, comments: 'On *était symboliste en littérature et anarchiste en politique*.'<sup>61</sup>

Even more staunchly anarchist were the neo-impressionist painters – the Pissarro, Paul Signac, Maximilien Luce, Albert Dubois-Pillet, Charles Angrand and Henri-Edmond Cross – championed by the symbolist critic, Félix Fénéon, who was put on trial in 1894 for his anarchism. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who, although not known to have expressed political opinions, is convincingly nominated by Richard D. Sonn as the representative anarchist artist, painted a panel of 1895 for the booth of the dancer La Goulue in which he brings together the highly distinctive figures of Fénéon and Wilde as spectators, 'elbow to elbow' as Fénéon was to put it.<sup>62</sup> Yet in spite of Wilde listing Lautrec among those to receive copies of the first edition of *An Ideal Husband* in 1899, suggestive of an encounter in Le Havre during June, there is no documentary evidence of the two men ever having met.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880–1914)* (Paris: Société Universitaire d'Éditions et de Librairie, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1955), pp. 137–8, 449. See also Sonn, esp. pp. 5, 15–16, 186, 325–6; Woodcock, *Anarchism*, pp. 252–3.

<sup>62</sup> Sonn, pp. 153–80; *Toulouse-Lautrec* (London: South Bank Centre, exhibition catalogue, 1991), pp. 270–1, 276–7; Joan Ungersma Halperin, *Félix Fénéon: Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), plate 19 and pp. 305–6. See also Julia Frey, *Toulouse-Lautrec: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994), pp. 386–7, 396–8, 402–3.

<sup>63</sup> Holland and Hart-Davis, pp. 1157–9; Frey, pp. 383, 477–8. The story that Lautrec visited England and sketched Wilde at the time of his second trial seems entirely apocryphal (and none of the nine portrait drawings that exist give an appearance of having been done from the life) (Frey, p. 383; *Toulouse-Lautrec*, pp. 364–5); but compare the interesting, though frequently unreliable, David Sweetman, *Toulouse-Lautrec and the 'Fin de Siècle'* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999) [published in the USA as *Explosive Acts: Toulouse-Lautrec, Oscar Wilde, Félix Fénéon and the Art and Anarchy of the Fin-de-Siècle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999)], pp. 409–11 (and also pp. 5, 14, 439–41). Similarly, in an oil of 1892, *Moulin Rouge* (Národní Galerie, Prague), with



timent but often practically as well; and it was the French symbolists who drew attention to Wilde's anarchist position.<sup>57</sup>

Wilde, whose French was fluent, had already visited Paris several times before, enabled by his earnings from his American lectures, he spent almost four months there in 1883, meeting among others Edmond de Goncourt, Edgar Degas, Camille and Lucien Pissarro and Paul Verlaine; and the following year he honeymooned in Paris, avidly reading Joris-Karl Huysmans's newly published *A Rebours*. The really significant stays were to come in 1891, when in February he gained the respect of Mallarmé, who was to be impressed by *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, described by Ellmann as 'a central document in symbolism', and then in November and December, writing *Salomé* and being hailed as 'le "great event" des salons littéraires parisiennes' of the season.<sup>58</sup> By this last visit it is known that he had become friendly with such prominent symbolists as Jean Moréas, Henri de Régnier, Pierre Louÿs, Rémy de Gourmont, Adolphe Retté, Marcel Schwob, and the Americans Stuart Merrill and Francis Vièle-Griffin (as well as Marcel Proust and André Gide).<sup>59</sup> Merrill, Retté and Louÿs were to revise the French of *Salomé* while Schwob, to whom 'The Sphinx' was dedicated, corrected the proofs.<sup>60</sup> Of these writers Régnier, de Gourmont, Retté, Merrill and Vièle-Griffin were all actively anarchist at the time, while Mallarmé subscribed to Jean Grave's anarchist-communist *La Révolte* (as did Huysmans, Anatole France and the elderly Parnassian, Leconte de Lisle). As Jean Maitron, the outstanding

<sup>57</sup> Gibbard, p. 168.

<sup>58</sup> Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 319, 326.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Stuart Merrill, 'Some Unpublished Recollections of Oscar Wilde', in Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, II, pp. 469–70; Adolphe Retté, 'Salomé', in Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, I, pp. 190–1; Fong and Beckson, p. 307.

form...been taking a socialistic shape for many years' and that he had given his 'first semi-socialistic lecture' to the Sheffield Secular Society in March 1883, when he advocated the formation of producers' co-operatives: '...the true cause of Co-operation...is no other than the emancipation and redemption of labour...' It must have been after this lecture that he read Hyndman's *England for All*, which had been distributed at the foundation conference of the Democratic Federation in 1881 and of which one element was a popularization of Marx, and with the chapter on the theory of surplus value 'the mass of floating impressions, sentiments, ideals, etc., in my mind fell into shape – and I had a clear line of social reconstruction before me'.<sup>58</sup> Later in 1883 he dropped in at a committee meeting of the Federation and, although he did not join the organization, it was £300 from him which enabled its weekly, *Justice*, to be launched in January 1884, with Morris underwriting the considerable losses.<sup>59</sup>

Given his libertarian sympathies – as well as his 'great admiration and friendship' for Morris – one would have expected him to have sided with Morris and the other dissentients when, outraged by Hyndman's high-handedness, they seceded from the SDF at the end of 1884 to form the Socialist League. Although he did eventually agree, in September 1885, to join the League his initial reaction had been uncompromisingly against the split:

I feel almost certain that [Morris] has had his mind poisoned against Hyndman and the others by certain schemers, and he has led out into the wilder-

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114–15; Edward Carpenter, *Co-operative Production: With References to the Experiment of Leclair: A Lecture Given at the Hall of Science, Sheffield, Sunday, March 18, 1883* (London: Modern Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1886), p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> See H.W. Lee and E. Archbold, *Social-Democracy in Britain: Fifty Years of the Socialist Movement* (London: Social-Democratic Federation, 1935), pp. 56–7, for the importance of Carpenter's role.

ness a body of men who undoubtedly have done very little in the cause, and several of whom are ambitious and designing... There is a certain colour in the charges against Hyndman ... but I have come to the conclusion that he is at bottom genuine and faithful to the cause... There must not be any break-up of the Federation. The men who have worked so hard in it all along still stick together, and are ready to continue working. *Justice* must be kept going.... We regret the departure of Morris from the Federation, but I do not myself think that we lost much in the others.<sup>60</sup>

This analysis typifies Carpenter's undoctrinaire outlook and foreshadows the way in which for the rest of his life he supported all sections of the labour movement and all trends within it.

He was much involved in the communitarian and lifestyle Fellowship of the New Life, a natural home for him – his close friends Henry and Kate Salt and Olive Schreiner, as well as Havelock and Edith Ellis, were members – and from which the political Fabian Society had broken away in 1884, the year following its formation, but he was also to publish a Fabian Tract (*The Village and the Landlord*, 1907).<sup>61</sup> He wrote 'England Arise!', British socialism's first anthem, in 1886 and edited the popular *Chants of Labour: A Song Book of the People* (1888), with a frontispiece and particularly fine cover by Walter Crane, for the new movement. He was present in Trafalgar Square on 13 November 1887, 'Bloody Sunday', when he was struck by a police baton. He represented the Sheffield Socialists in 1889 in Paris at the revolutionary Socialist Congress which led to the

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71; *CLWM*, II: 1885–1888, p. 453.

<sup>61</sup> For an excellent account of the origins and early history of the Fellowship of the New Life, see Grosskurth, pp. 60–71.

archism in their wording, fifty-two opted for 'free and spontaneous organization', while eleven grouped themselves as 'the partisans of absolute liberty, of anarchy'.<sup>55</sup>

An essential dimension to understanding Wilde is to situate him in the context of France. In England he always appeared an outlandish figure: in his appearance, his behaviour, his writings, his politics. The French were accustomed to such flamboyant and larger-than-life personalities and he blended into the overall literary and artistic scene, although that is not to say that they were not strongly appreciative of his genius. In France his sexuality was not against the law. In France his literary output fitted naturally into symbolism modulating into decadence (and Paul Gibbard very properly considers him a symbolist writer),<sup>56</sup> whereas across the Channel the only comparable major artist, Aubrey Beardsley, was an equally exotic and alien flowering. In France, too, the symbolist writers of the late 1880s and 1890s and the concurrent neo-impressionist painters were strongly committed to anarchism, not just in sen-

<sup>55</sup> Gibbard, p. 168; John G. Hutton, *Neo-Impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), pp. 51–2; Richard D. Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 186–7; Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, ed. Heiner M. Becker (London: Freedom Press, 1996), p. 213.

<sup>56</sup> Gibbard, pp. 163–78. For classic studies on the history and importance of symbolism, see Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899; London: Archibald Constable, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1908), and Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930* (1931; London: Collins, 1961). The standard academic treatment is provided by A.G. Lehmann, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885–1895* (1950; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1968). Much more recently two fine works are Patrick McGuinness (ed.), *Symbolism, Decadence and the Fin de Siècle: French and European Perspectives* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000); and Pamela A. Genova, *Symbolist Journals: A Culture of Correspondence* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) (although it should be noted that Genova, pp. 48–9, systematically misspells Jean Grave's surname).

Orwell, who told George Woodcock that he had ‘always been very pro-Wilde’, in 1948 considered ‘The Soul of Man’ to have worn ‘remarkably well’, serving to ‘remind the Socialist movement of its original, half-forgotten objective of human brotherhood’, and describing it as ‘Utopian and anarchistic’.<sup>53</sup>

While Sherard has Wilde referring approvingly to ‘the instinctive anarchy which lies at the bottom of the hearts of most men’ and Stuart Merrill remarked that ‘I even believe that between two glasses of champagne’, at the height of his fame, he ‘would willingly profess himself an anarchist’, there are only two known occasions when he explicitly referred to himself as an anarchist. He told an interviewer in 1894: ‘We are all of us more or less Socialists now-a-days...I think I am rather more than a Socialist...I am something of an Anarchist, I believe; but, of course, the dynamite policy is very absurd indeed.’<sup>54</sup> The previous year he had stated less hesitantly: ‘Autrefois, j’étais poète et tyran. Maintenant je suis artiste et anarchiste’ (In the past I was a poet and a tyrant. Now I am an artist and an anarchist). This was his answer in a ‘Référéndum artistique et sociale’, conducted by the Parisian literary journal *L’Ermitage*, and enquiring ‘Which is the better condition of social good – a spontaneous and free organization, or an organization that is disciplined and methodic? Which of these conceptions should be the preference of the artist?’ Of the ninety-nine artists who responded to these questions, very much weighted towards an-

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‘Introduction’, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. X: *The Soul of Man under Socialism and Other Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1923), p. xiii. See also John Cowper Powys, *One Hundred Best Books: With Commentary and an Essay on Books and Reading* (1916; London: Village Press, 1975), p. 59.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell* (London: Secker & Warburg, 20 vols., 1998), XIX, pp. 157, 333–4.

<sup>54</sup> Sherard, *The Real Oscar Wilde*, p. 191; Stuart Merrill, ‘Oscar Wilde’, *La Plume*, 15 December 1900, in Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, II, p. 466; Percival W.H. Almy, ‘New Views of Mr Oscar Wilde’, *The Theatre*, XXIII (March 1894), in Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, I, p. 232.

foundation of the Second International.<sup>62</sup> He supported the Independent Labour Party (ILP) from 1893, the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) from 1900 and the Labour Party, which it became, from 1906. The first, short-lived Labour government of 1924 was in office at the time of Carpenter’s eightieth birthday and every member, not just those in the cabinet, personally signed a congratulatory autograph book.

His influence on the socialists of the 1880s and the 1890s had been profound – second only to that of Morris among socialist writers, although the utopian Tory Ruskin, to whom both men were indebted, was extensively read and immensely admired. The future Katharine Bruce Glasier was converted to socialism by the SDF-aligned Bristol Socialist Society, with which Carpenter had close contacts, and recalled: ‘Far into the night I sat reading the dynamic essays gathered in *England’s Ideal*. Assuredly they gave definite form and shape to my thinking. But it was the life of Edward Carpenter as I felt it among that little group of his comrades that gave the book its power.’ She also considered: ‘It is no exaggeration for many of us inside and outside the political Socialist movement to say that Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* and Edward Carpenter’s *Towards Democracy* have become as a kind of Twentieth-Century Old and New Testament...’ Her husband, a key figure in the early ILP, was equally a votary and they were even to spend several days of their honeymoon at Millthorpe.<sup>63</sup>

Of the cabinet of 1924, Fred Jowett, First Commissioner of Works, had read ‘Desirable Mansions’ and ‘England’s Ideal’

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<sup>62</sup> ‘An International Socialist Congress’, Carpenter, *Sketches*, pp. 184–95; Tsuzuki, p. 85–60.

<sup>63</sup> Katharine Bruce Glasier, ‘Edward Carpenter’s Influence’, in Beith, pp. 85–6, 88; Laurence Thompson, *The Enthusiasts: A Biography of John and Katharine Bruce Glasier* (London: Gollancz, 1971), pp. 69–70, 82, 84. Cf. Fenner Brockway’s description of *Towards Democracy* as the ‘Bible’ of his generation (A.F.B., ‘A Memory of Edward Carpenter’, *New Leader*, 5 July 1929 [MC]).

in their original pamphlet form to an illiterate workmate in a Bradford mill; Philip Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer, named *England's Ideal and Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* – improbable as that may seem! – as two of the books from which he had ‘derived much help and information’; and Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, a contributor to the memorial volume of 1931, had been a friend since a teenager, having been appointed librarian to the Bristol Socialists when Carpenter donated £5 in 1885 to start a library and succeeding Edith Ellis as secretary of the Fellowship of the New Life in 1892.<sup>64</sup> A late visitor, at Guildford in 1923, was Hugh Dalton, the Fabian who was to become Attlee’s first Chancellor, but he was currently cultivating the Chesterfield parliamentary constituency and most probably hoping to enlist Carpenter’s support.<sup>65</sup> Carpenter’s trade-union contacts were not so wide or so deep as those with socialists. All the same, his admirers included at least two prominent trade unionists: George Barnes, general secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, 1896–1908, and C. T. Cramp, first industrial secretary and then secretary *tout court* of the National Union of Railwaymen, 1920–33;<sup>66</sup> the Trades Union Congress of 1924 congratulated him on reaching eighty; and when he died in June 1929 the annual conference of Trades’ Councils, meeting at Transport House in London, passed a resolution of regret.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Fenner Brockway, *Socialism over Sixty Years: The Life of Jowett of Bradford (1864–1944)* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1946), pp. 20, 29; Philip, Viscount Snowden, *An Autobiography* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 2 vols., 1934), I, p. 61; J. Ramsay MacDonald, ‘The Living Man’, in Beith, pp. 132–5. For Carpenter’s letter to MacDonald, at the LRC conference, transmitting Kropotkin’s urgent appeal in the early days of the 1905 Revolution for financial support by British trade unions, see Jane Cox (ed.), *A Singular Marriage: A Labour Love Story in Letters and Diaries: Ramsay and Margaret MacDonald* (London: Harrap, 1988), pp. 292–4.

<sup>65</sup> Ben Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 77, 145.

<sup>66</sup> MDD, p. 260; C.T. Cramp, ‘My Earliest Teacher’, in Beith, pp. 19–25.

<sup>67</sup> *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, 5 July 1929 (MC).

puzzled by ‘the extraordinary position’ which he understood it to have taken in ‘the literature of revolution’.<sup>47</sup> For while not regarded as important in Britain, with no significant anarchist movement, the essay was translated into many languages and, as a pamphlet, in many editions, proving especially popular within the radical movements of Central and Eastern Europe and the USA with Jews being, according to Sherard, among its most enthusiastic readers.<sup>48</sup> The German translators were none other than Gustav Landauer and his wife, Hedwig Lachmann.<sup>49</sup>

Not unnaturally ‘The Soul of Man’ was also esteemed by writers and other artists. For while Wilde viewed them in the present society as the only ‘real men, the men who have realized themselves, and in whom Humanity gains a partial realization’, he was going far beyond this by affording them the hope of total economic, intellectual and artistic freedom.<sup>50</sup> The essay so corresponded with his own political position and artistic beliefs that Joyce was granted permission in 1909 to translate it into Italian (although failed to do so).<sup>51</sup> John Cowper Powys, who in 1916 proposed that it was ‘perhaps the wisest and most eloquent revolutionary tract ever written’, proceeded seven years later to write an introduction to an American edition: ‘What the book really represents is a psychological phenomenon of the gravest importance in the history of humanity – nothing less than the going over, to the camp of the disinherited, of the children of the richest inheritance!’<sup>52</sup> And George

<sup>47</sup> Ransome, pp. 211, 213.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Harborough Sherard, *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1911), pp. 119–20; Sherard, *The Real Oscar Wilde*, p. 332; Woodcock, *Paradox*, p. 155.

<sup>49</sup> Sherard, *Life of Oscar Wilde*, p. 402.

<sup>50</sup> Wilde, ‘Soul’, p. 257.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 283; Manganiello, pp. 219–22, 232.

<sup>52</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Suspended Judgments: Essays on Books and Sensations* (1916; n.p.: Folcroft Press, 1969), pp. 410–13; John Cowper Powys,

by Morris as a ‘Herbert Spencerite’ but who was sympathetic to socialism and whose article, ‘Individualism and Socialism’, Morris lectured on (together with Edward Bellamy’s state-socialist *Looking Backward*) in 1889 to the Socialist League. Allen was to congratulate Wilde on ‘The Soul’, which he described as ‘noble and beautiful’, adding ‘I would have written every line of it myself – if only I had known how.’<sup>45</sup> What remains entirely unknown, though, is Wilde’s degree of acquaintance with the powerful strain of non-socialist individualist anarchism, whose major theorists were Stirner and Tucker. While Stirner’s great *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum* remained untranslated into French or English until 1900 and 1907 respectively, Wilde could read German; but it is far from irrelevant that the political writer whom James Joyce most respected was Tucker.<sup>46</sup>

‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ is a surprisingly disjointed, fragmentary essay, lurching from consideration of the socialist emancipation of the masses to its preoccupation with the condition of the artist. Arthur Ransome complains with considerable justice that it is ‘like notes from half a dozen charming, and, at that time, daring talks, thrown together, and loosely brought into some sort of unity by a frail connecting thread’. Yet it is redeemed by the generosity of its vision, by the quality of mind and of spirit displayed, and by its glittering prose and epigrammatic delights. Ransome was

<sup>45</sup> Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde’s Profession: Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 277–80; *CLWM*, III, pp. 59–60; Holland and Hart-Davis, pp. 469–70. For Allen (uncle to the publisher Grant Richards), see esp. John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Harlow: Longman, 1988), pp. 20–1; also John Sloan, *John Davidson, First of the Moderns: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 142–4, 176. He was to disappoint Spencer by becoming a Fabian (Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (London: Longmans, Green, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, n.d.), p. 29).

<sup>46</sup> Dominic Manganiello, *Joyce’s Politics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 74–5 *et seq.*

Yet Carpenter was truly undoctinaire and, as has been said, supported all sections of the labour movement and all trends within it; and so, over a period of forty years, he welcomed equally syndicalism and Guild Socialism, and always maintained good relations with anarchists: ‘Certainly ... I stick up for the Fabians and the Trade Unions just as I do for the Anarchist[s.] I have never disavowed the Anarchists. What can be more obvious? We are all travelling along the same road.’<sup>68</sup> But, more than this, he was strongly inclined to anarchism itself. In 1912 he organized a congratulatory address to Kropotkin, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, and signed by ninety-two of his ‘friends’. Alfred Russel Wallace declined to be included since he had never so much as seen Kropotkin, he did not consider ‘his criticism of Darwin of much value’, and also ‘I am a thorough **Socialist**, and I do not wish to be accused of having *given it up* for “voluntaryism” – which is (I believe) hopeless as against our opponents of wealth privilege and monopoly’. The passage to which Wallace took exception and which Carpenter had drafted runs:

You have taught us to rely in social life on that most important force, the voluntary principle, which has inspired so much of the best life in all ages of the world, and which is now among the modern societies taking its place as the leading factor in their development – in contradistinction to the merely regulative and governmental principle, which in the form of over-legislation certainly tends to render a people deficient in originality and initiative.<sup>69</sup>

If the difference between socialism and anarchism is indeed taken to be the difference between ‘the regulative and govern-

<sup>68</sup> *Commonweal*, 5 December 1891, in Sheffield Archives, Carpenter Collection [hereafter CC], NC f. 67.

<sup>69</sup> CC, MSS 181.

mental principle' and 'the voluntary principle', Carpenter was undoubtedly an anarchist. In his 'first semi-socialistic lecture' of 1883 he had expressed his belief in the existence and primary importance of mutual aid:

Mutual helpfulness and trust underlie our social life; they are planted deep in the human breast... If these things are sentiments they are the sentiments which create society. The wonderful monuments of civilization, – great nations, cities, telegraphs, railroads, the huge machinery of commerce – are but so many expressions of ... the desire and the need of man for dependence on his fellow man ... these desires and needs, though hidden, are really far more than laws and governments, the agents which construct and create our social life as it is...<sup>70</sup>

That Kropotkin recognized some affinity with him is clear from his letter of thanks:

Your personal sympathy with me and your appreciation of my work is a deep source of joy for me. But permit me, in my turn, to express to you how highly I appreciate all the work you have done for the last thirty years by your 'Towards Democracy' and the more so by your personal influence and your readiness always to stand on the side of justice against all the dark forces of the day.<sup>71</sup>

Much as he admired Kropotkin, Carpenter considered him, like Tolstoy, 'almost over-conscious of the governmental evil', attributing this to the 'authority and officialism' of Russia:

<sup>70</sup> Carpenter, *Co-operative Production*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>71</sup> CC, MSS 386, letter of 24 December 1912.

or April 1891, to thank Morris for a presentation volume, once believed to be possibly *News from Nowhere* but now considered to be *The Roots of the Mountain* (1889).<sup>41</sup>

Intellectual sources for the decisive emphasis on individualism are even harder to pinpoint. Isobel Murray has demonstrated that to the traditional list of modern authors most important to Wilde – Ruskin, Pater and Matthew Arnold – must be added Ralph Waldo Emerson and argued that, in particular, his essays 'Self-Reliance' and 'Considerations by the Way' provide the basis for much of Wilde's approach in 'The Soul'. Emerson's own proximity to anarchism has long been appreciated, Kropotkin naming him in his *Encyclopædia Britannica* entry on 'Anarchism' and Marshall including in his history of anarchism a brief treatment of Emerson as an 'American Libertarian'.<sup>42</sup> Then there is Emerson's protégé, Thoreau, who in *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* maintained that 'That government is best which governs not at all,' which is more than echoed in Wilde's 'The form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all.'<sup>43</sup> The expansive individualism of Walt Whitman, whom Wilde had twice visited and definitely admired, should also be mentioned.<sup>44</sup> Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small usefully bring in the unfamiliar name of Grant Allen (1848–99), described

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Salmon with Derek Baker, *The William Morris Chronology* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), pp. 224–32, 234; MacCarthy, *Morris*, p. 583; Hart-Davis, p. 290–1; Holland and Hart-Davis, p. 476. But see also Faulkner, pp. 33–4, 39 n.25; and Philip Henderson, *William Morris: His Life, Work and Friends* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), pp. 228–30.

<sup>42</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man and Prison Writings*, ed. Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. xi–xiii, 198–206; Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchism and Anarchist Communism*, ed. Nicolas Walter (London: Freedom Press, 1987), p. 21; Marshall, *Demanding*, pp. 182–3.

<sup>43</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods, and On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 222.

<sup>44</sup> Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 159–64; Oscar Wilde, 'The Gospel According to Walt Whitman' (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 January 1889), in Ellmann, *Artist as Critic*, pp. 121–5; Marshall, *Demanding*, pp. 183–4.

*Anarchist Morality*. Wilde was to pay a memorable tribute in *De Profundis*:

Two of the most perfect lives I have come across in my own experience are the lives of Verlaine and of Prince Kropotkin: both of them men who passed years in prison: the first, the one Christian poet since Dante, the other a man with the soul of that beautiful white Christ that seems coming out of Russia.<sup>39</sup>

George Woodcock, however, regards William Godwin rather than Kropotkin as the dominant influence. While Peter Marshall agrees that 'The Soul' is 'pure Godwin', he concedes that 'there is no clear evidence of indebtedness'; and Masolino D'Amico contends convincingly that it is improbable that Wilde had direct acquaintance with *Political Justice*, though fully familiar with the poetry of Shelley, whom he certainly admired.<sup>40</sup> In addition, there is the undeniable presence of Morris and *News from Nowhere*, serialized in *Commonweal*, January-October 1890, and published as a book in Boston, Mass., without permission before the end of the year and in London the following March. As has been seen, Wilde admired and knew Morris and attended Socialist League meetings at Kelmscott House. Only one letter between the two men survives, with Wilde writing effusively, in probably March

<sup>39</sup> Holland and Hart-Davis, p. 754. For Kropotkin's influence on Wilde, see Bell, 'OWwW', ff. 31, 93-4, 97, 361, 385, 398-9; James Joll, *The Anarchists* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), pp. 161-2.

<sup>40</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism*, pp. 378-80; Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 391; D'Amico, pp. 128-9. See also F.E.L. Priestley, 'Introduction' to William Godwin, *Enquiry concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 3 vols., 1946), III, p. 113. Wilde refers directly to Shelley in 'Soul', pp. 260, 262-3. Woodcock and Avakumovic, p. 282, suggest cheekily that it was Wilde who influenced Kropotkin.

there is a charming naïveté about Kropotkin. It is so easy – if you believe that all human evil is summed up in the one fatal word 'government' ... to order your life and your theories accordingly. Everything is explained by its relation to one thing. It is easy, but it is misleading. And Kropotkin's writings, despite their erudition, suffer from this naïveté. Whether it be History (his *French Revolution*), or Natural History (his *Mutual Aid*) or economic theory (his *Paroles d'un Révolté*) the reader finds one solution for everything, and countervailing facts and principles consistently – though certainly not intentionally – ignored. This detracts from the value of the writings; though in justice it should be said that the principles on which Kropotkin so vigorously insists – i.e. individual liberty and free association – are of foundational importance.<sup>72</sup>

And thus Carpenter was arguing that Kropotkin '... has brought so much nearer the day when the true human society will be realized on earth – that spontaneous, voluntary, non-governmental society whose germ was first planted ages ago among nearly all primitive peoples, but whose glorious flower and fulfillment awaits us...'<sup>73</sup>

Although Carpenter was undoubtedly the sage and prophet of the Labour Party during its first thirty years, and more especially of the ILP (a federal constituent of the Labour Party over these decades), he was designated as an anarchist not only

<sup>72</sup> *MDD*, pp. 219-20 (Carpenter's emphasis). Nield, in Bellamy and Saville, pp. 89-90, and Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter', pp. 102-3, point to the similarities between Carpenter's theory of social evolution or 'exfoliation' and Kropotkin's conceptions of anarchism and mutual aid. See also Tsuzuki, pp. 58-9, 198.

<sup>73</sup> *Mother Earth*, December 1912 (CC, C Per 18).

by some well-informed commentators but also by friends. For Edith Ellis he was ‘not merely a vegetarian, a socialist, an anarchist [but] a seer’,<sup>74</sup> and H.W. Nevinson, the distinguished libertarian journalist who gave the address at his funeral, repeatedly called him an anarchist: indeed ‘the Complete Anarchist, such was his distrust of all Governments, his dislike of all constricting laws and rules of conduct’.<sup>75</sup> Tom Bell unhesitatingly described him as ‘the greatest of modern British Anarchists’; and S.K. Ratcliffe, a radical journalist who was a signatory to the Kropotkin birthday address and attended Carpenter’s funeral, judged him to have been ‘by nature and conviction... a communist-anarchist’.<sup>76</sup> For his close Whitmanite friend and adviser to his executors, Charles Sixsmith, he could not be labelled, ‘but I think Philosophic Anarchist would describe him more correctly than State Socialist’; Bessie Ward, who had been a visitor at Millthorpe, wrote in the *Freedom* obituary that he had always been ‘more Anarchist than Socialist, though he never cared to label himself’; and G.D.H. Cole similarly considered him ‘rather Anarchist than Socialist in his essential ideas’.<sup>77</sup> Herbert Read named him as one of his four major anarchist influences (with Kropotkin, Stirner and, admittedly, Morris).<sup>78</sup> Robert Sharland, a veteran SDFer who had known him since the early 1880s, put matters – and the problem – particularly well:

<sup>74</sup> Mrs Havelock Ellis, *Three Modern Seers* (London: Stanley Paul [1910]), p. 196.

<sup>75</sup> Henry W. Nevinson: *Essays in Freedom* (London: Duckworth, 1909), pp. 227–32; ‘Work and Freedom’, in Beith, pp. 164–7; and *Fire of Life* (London: James Nisbet and Victor Gollancz, 1935), p. 55.

<sup>76</sup> Bell, p. 3; S.K. Ratcliffe, ‘Edward Carpenter’, *Manchester Guardian*, 29 August 1944 (CC, MSS 387). See also S.K.R., ‘Edward Carpenter at Eighty’, *Manchester Guardian*, 29 August 1924 (MC).

<sup>77</sup> Charles F. Sixsmith, ‘Edward as I Knew Him’, in Beith, p. 223; *Freedom Bulletin*, September 1929 (MC); G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought* (London: Macmillan, 5 vols., 1953–60), III, Part I, p. 143.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Intervista con Herbert Read’, *Volontà*, XII (1959), p. 13.

Traditionally there has been considerable agreement that a lecture by Bernard Shaw ‘probably stimulated him’, as Ellmann puts it,<sup>36</sup> and an exposition of Shaw’s Fabian socialism would have been sure to have provoked Wilde. Shaw himself recalled

a meeting somewhere in Westminster at which I delivered an address on Socialism, and at which Oscar turned up and spoke. Robert Ross surprised me greatly by telling me, long after Oscar’s death, that it was this address of mine that moved Oscar to try his hand at a similar feat by writing ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’.<sup>37</sup>

Shaw’s biographer, Michael Holroyd, asserts that Wilde ‘let it be known that Shaw’s *Quintessence of Ibsenism*... had led him to write *The Soul of Man under Socialism*’; yet if so this could not have been Shaw’s book, which was published in October 1891 after Wilde’s essay had appeared in the February, but might have been Shaw’s original lecture on Ibsen to the Fabian Society on 18 July 1890 at the St James’s Restaurant and which was ‘the first form’ of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*.<sup>38</sup>

Both anarchist and non-anarchist commentators have generally concurred that the principal political and economic debt in ‘The Soul’ is to the great Russian anarchist communist Peter Kropotkin, resident in Britain between 1886 and 1917. The works of his available in English or French before 1891 included *An Appeal to the Young*, *Paroles d’un révolté*, *Law and Authority*, *The Place of Anarchism in Human Evolution* and

<sup>36</sup> Ellmann, *Wilde*, p. 309.

<sup>37</sup> Shaw, ‘My Memories’, p. 400. Cf. Pearson, pp. 159, 163.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw* (London: Chatto & Windus, 3 vols., 1988–91), I, pp. 197–8, and III, p. 191; Bernard Shaw, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (London: Constable, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1913), p. xviii. It should be noted that the letter of 1893 in which Wilde praises *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* and which Holroyd cites makes no mention of ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ (Holland and HartDavis, p. 554).



range of other matters. Disobedience, he says, in terms foreshadowing Alex Comfort, is ‘man’s original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and rebellion.’ This combined with the advocacy of agitation amounts to an espousal of direct action (he is certainly contemptuous of Parliament): ‘Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them ... there would be no advance towards civilization.’ Authority ‘degrades those who exercise it, and degrades those over whom it is exercised’. And as for innate human goodness, people should not be forced to be good: ‘...people are good when they are let alone.’<sup>33</sup>

‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ is, then, unquestionably an anarchist text. What are much less clear are its immediate origins and its theoretical influences. We have seen that the general background is Wilde’s becoming a practising homosexual and the radicalism that this engendered, not just aesthetic but also political. There is some discussion in the essay, pertinent to his unlawful conduct, of criminals – ‘the people whom, in a very arbitrary manner, [humanity] chooses to call criminals’ – and their punishment: ‘As one reads history...one is absolutely sickened, not by the crimes that the wicked have committed, but by the punishments that the good have inflicted; *and a community is infinitely more brutalized by the habitual employment of punishment, than it is by the occasional occurrence of crime*’; and ‘With authority, punishment will pass away.’<sup>34</sup> There is also the impact of the anti-governmentalism and non-action of Chuang Tzu.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 258, 259, 266, 284.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 260, 267 (Wilde’s emphasis).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Woodcock, *Paradox*, p. 148.

It has been suggested ... that Carpenter was not a Social-Democrat, and in a sense that is correct. His teaching savoured more of Anarchist-Communism, but that is akin to the *ideal* of many of us. He always took a keen and helping interest in all phases of the Socialist and Labour movement, realizing that the success of these political and industrial efforts was an essential step to the higher state he ever visualized.<sup>79</sup>

The problem is that even an ‘ideal’ or end welcomed as anarchist by anarchists themselves, such as Morris’s utopian society in *News from Nowhere*, necessitates neither that its holder advocates anarchist means in its attainment – just as Morris himself did not – nor is in general sympathetic to anarchism and anarchists. Therefore the assessment of Carpenter’s socialism as ‘a kind of ideal anarchism, like that of William Morris’ by Robert Blatchford, an old comrade, is not very helpful.<sup>80</sup> The least contentious conclusion is to categorize him as ‘a libertarian socialist’, as in ‘Although ... Edward Carpenter did not call himself an anarchist, his highly personal form of libertarian socialism comes very close to it.’<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> *Social-Democrat*, August 1929 (MC) (Sharland’s emphasis).

<sup>80</sup> *John o’London’s Weekly*, 20 July 1929 (MC).

<sup>81</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 168. Other examples include Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, ed. Heiner M. Becker (London: Freedom Press, 1996), pp. 213, 372; Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 480 n41. For George Woodcock, Carpenter, like Morris, ‘defended libertarian dreams without fully accepting the label of anarchism’ (*Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1986), p. 377). See also George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince: A Biographical Study of Peter Kropotkin* (London: T.V. Boardman, 1950), pp. 226–7; and Raimund Schäffner, *Anarchismus und Literatur in England: Von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997), pp. 287–305. Another anarchist commentator,

In 1892, however, when Carpenter appeared at the trial of the Walsall Anarchists as a character witness for the hapless Fred Charles, of whom he thought highly, *The Times* reported him as declaring: 'He was himself an anarchist'; but this is apparently modified by: 'He had known Charles in connexion with Socialist societies, sympathizing with some views of the Anarchists'. A further explication was: 'He did not sympathize with views of violence or with the use of bombs; nor did he consider such views an integral part of true Anarchism.'<sup>82</sup> In his fragmentary yet noble memoirs, *My Days and Dreams* (1916), Carpenter stated that while 'never myself strictly identified' with the anarchist movement he had been in touch with it 'now nearly thirty years' and explained his position with some precision. From the time of his making contact with the SDF in 1883

I worked definitely along the Socialist line: with a drift, as was natural, towards Anarchism. I do not know that at any time I looked upon the Socialist programme or doctrine as final, and it is certain that I never anticipated a cast-iron regulation of industry, but I saw that the current Socialism afforded an excellent text for an attack upon the existing competitive system, and a good means of rousing the slumbering consciences – especially of

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William O. Reichert, 'Edward C. Carpenter's Socialism in Retrospect', *Our Generation*, XIX, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1987–8), regards Carpenter as inherently anarchist.

<sup>82</sup> *The Times*, 4 April 1892. For Charles's character and career see: *MDD*, p. 132; Edward Carpenter, *A Letter Relating to the Case of the Walsall Anarchists, Reprinted from 'Freedom' of Dec. 1892* (n.p., n.d.) (MC); Geoff Brown, 'Introduction', to Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, *How We Shall Bring about the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), pp. vii–ix, xi, xxv n10. For Carpenter's visits to Charles in Portland Prison: *Freedom*, June 1893, December 1896 (CC, NC I, ff. 1, 14); 'Portland', TD, pp. 468–71.

cusses first the problems of the present capitalist society and its libertarian socialist reconstruction, while the second half is concerned with art and the position of the artist. The most striking, indeed paradoxical, feature of Wilde's essay for those only accustomed to the democratic socialist, Fabian or Marxist forms of socialism has been his insistence on what is regarded as indispensable for those belonging to the anarchist tradition. This is the necessity for individualism being co-existent with, indeed growing out, of socialism:

Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting cooperation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism, and insure the material well-being of each member of the community. It will...give Life its proper basis and its proper environment. But for the full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection, something more is needed. What is needed is Individualism. If the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are Governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial Tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worse than the first.

He rightly considers that 'many of the socialistic views that I have come across seem... to be tainted with ideas of authority, if not of actual compulsion', and concludes that 'no Authoritarian Socialism will do', for under such a system nobody would have any freedom at all: 'It is to be regretted that a portion of our community should be practically in slavery, but to propose to solve the problem by enslaving the entire community is childish.'<sup>32</sup> Wilde maintains typically anarchist views on a

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 260.

sional politicians if we came to the conclusion that there is no such thing as governing mankind at all?’<sup>30</sup>

The demarcation between anarchists and other socialists comes with their attitude to government and the State: for anarchists there can be no role for the State, even in the transition to socialism, and the only form of government that can be tolerated is self-government, that is, government from the bottom up, through voluntary association, rather than from the top down. Wilde’s position on these issues is unambiguously anarchist in both ‘A Chinese Sage’ and ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’, even if sometimes confusingly expressed. He emphasizes in ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’: ‘The *form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all.*’ Citing Chuang Tzu that ‘there is such a thing as leaving mankind alone; there is no such thing as governing mankind’, he considers that ‘the State must give up all idea of government’ – ‘All *modes of government are failures*’ – and instead: ‘The State is to be a voluntary association that will organize labour, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities.’ The central contention is that ‘authority and compulsion are out of the question. All association must be quite voluntary.’<sup>31</sup>

‘The Critic as Artist’ had greatly impressed Frank Harris, now editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, who proceeded to publish ‘Pen, Pencil, and Poison’ and ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ – it has already been seen that Wilde believed the latter belonged with the best essays of *Intentions*. ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’, which appeared in February 1891, dis-

<sup>30</sup> Oscar Wilde, ‘A Chinese Sage’ (*Speaker*, 8 February 1890), in Ellmann, *Artist as Critic*, pp. 223–4, 225, 228. Ellmann inexcusably misidentifies the ‘Chinese Sage’ as ‘[Confucius]’. Wilde also mentions Chuang Tzu approvingly in ‘The Critic as Artist’ (Wilde, *Intentions*, p. 388). See too Woodcock, *Paradox*, pp. 85–7, 146–8; but it is Isobel Murray, ‘Oscar Wilde’s Absorption of “Influences”: The Case History of Chuang Tzu’, *Durham University Journal*, LXIV (1971–2), which provides a detailed discussion of Wilde’s uses of Chuang Tzu.

<sup>31</sup> Wilde, ‘Soul’, pp. 260, 266, 268, 282 (Wilde’s emphases).

the rich; and in that view I have worked for it and the Anarchist ideal consistently.

... Socialism has proposed a guarded public ownership of land and of some of the more important industries (guarded, that is, against the dangers of officialism), and it seems likely that this general programme is the one along which western society will work in the near future; that is, till such time as the State, qua State, and all efficient Government, are superseded by the voluntary and instinctive consent and mutual helpfulness of the people – when of course the more especially Anarchist ideal would be realized.

... the general Socialist movement (including therein the Anarchist) has done and is still doing a great and necessary work – and I am proud to have belonged to it. It has defined a dream and an ideal, that of the common life conjoined to the free individuality, which somewhere and somewhen must be realized, because it springs from and is the expression of the very root-nature of Man.<sup>83</sup>

He explained in August 1892 to visitors at Millthorpe that ‘strictly speaking’ he

...could not accept socialism as a formula, as a theory of government ... he was more of an anarchist than anything else as regards government. But, one could not rest in abstractions. To descend into the practical arena it was necessary to work with people whose opinions differed from one’s own.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *MDD*, pp. 115, 127, 130, 218.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted by Paul Salveson, *Loving Comrades: Lancashire’s Links to Walt Whitman* (Bolton: Paul Salveson and Bolton Branch of WEA, 1984), p. 8.

Part of the difficulty in defining Carpenter's political position is that the degree of his emphasis on either State-regulated socialism or voluntary and co-operative socialism, in an overall position which embraced both, varied over the years. After the trauma of the split within the SDF in 1884, despite joining the Socialist League he otherwise held aloof and concentrated his efforts on local organizations, especially the Sheffield Socialist Society in which anarchist influence became increasingly strong. This was congenial to Carpenter until the rise of the violent, illegalist anarchism of Dr John Creaghe, the Bingham brothers and others in the early 1890s led to his enthusiastic support for the parliamentarianism of the ILP, conveniently founded in 1893, and thereafter of the LRC and Labour Party. As he commented of another: 'While sympathizing with the general aim of the Anarchist section of the labor [*sic*] movement, Maguire was too practical to adopt their current methods; and when the time came, threw his energies into the support of the Labour Electoral League and the Independent Labour Party.'<sup>85</sup> Concurrently Carpenter's interests shifted relatively from the socio-political not only to writing on sexuality but also to the mystical and religious, leading eventually to three major books: *The Art of Creation* (1904), *The Drama of Love and Death* (1912) and *Pagan and Christian Creeds* (1920). Yet the resultant bureaucratization of Labour politics and its increasing distance from the 'spontaneous, voluntary, non-governmental society' which he sought eventually caused him to react in favour of the

<sup>85</sup> Tom Maguire, *A Remembrance: Being a Selection from the Prose and Verse Writings of a Socialist Pioneer: With Memoirs* (Manchester: Labour Press, 1895), p. xi. For the anarchists and the Sheffield Socialist Club (as they renamed it) see esp. Tsuzuki, chap. 8, and Sheila Rowbotham, 'Anarchism in Sheffield in the 1890s', in Sidney Pollard and Colin Holmes (eds.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Sheffield: South Yorkshire County Council, 1976), pp. 159–72; also D.K. Barua, 'Edward Carpenter and the Early Sheffield Socialists', *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, X (1971–9), pp. 58–62.

... this curious thinker looked back with a sigh of regret to a certain Golden Age when there were no competitive examinations, no wearisome educational systems, no missionaries, no penny dinners for the people, no Established Churches, no Humanitarian Societies, no dull lectures about one's duty to one's neighbour, and no tedious sermons about any subject at all. In those ideal days, he tells us, people loved each other without being conscious of charity, or writing to the newspapers about it...In an evil moment the Philanthropist made his appearance, and brought with him the mischievous idea of Government.

Wilde quotes Chuang Tzu as saying: 'There is such a thing...as leaving mankind alone: there has never been such a thing as governing mankind'; and comments:

All modes of government are wrong. They are unscientific, because they seek to alter the natural environment of man; they are immoral because, by interfering with the individual, they produce the most aggressive forms of egotism; they are ignorant, because they try to spread education; they are self-destructive, because they engender anarchy.

The 'two pests of the age' are 'Governments and Philanthropists'; and by trying 'to coerce people into being good', Governments 'destroyed the natural goodness of man'. Wilde concludes that Chuang Tzu 'is a very dangerous writer, and the publication of his book in English, two thousand years after his death, is obviously premature, and may cause a great deal of pain to many thoroughly respectable and industrious persons' and asks 'What would be the fate of governments and profes-

offence' in 1873 and had consequently been forced into destitution.<sup>27</sup> In 'Pen, Pencil, and Poison' Wilde celebrated the Romantic forger and poisoner, Thomas Griffiths Wainwright and thereby the criminality of the artist in general. What Wilde wrote of Wainwright applies equally to Wilde himself: 'His crimes seem to have had an important effect upon his art. They gave a strong personality to his style, a quality that his early work certainly lacked.'<sup>28</sup> It is this realization of his homosexual self that provides the explanation for not only his being able to move forward to the aesthetic radicalism of *Intentions* but also the advocacy of anarchism in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism'.

Wilde's opposition to government *qua* government is first expressed in 1890 when reviewing the writings of the Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu (or Chuang Tsü, in the transliteration of Wilde's day, or later Kwang-Tze), who was to be one of the most important influences on John Cowper Powys. Taoist thought, as has been noted in chapter 1, particularly the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tzu, has been customarily regarded as having much in common with classical, western anarchism.<sup>29</sup> In 'A Chinese Sage' Wilde paraphrases Chuang Tzu and explicates with great approbation:

<sup>27</sup> Holland and Hart-Davis, p. 713. Even before 1885 any male homosexual act could be prosecuted and neither did the Act lead to an increase in the number of prosecutions until well into the twentieth century (A.D. Harvey, 'Homosexuals and the Police: The Increase of Police Action in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', *London Magazine*, n.s., XXXIX, nos. 11 and 12 (February/ March 2000), pp. 66–7; Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Picador, 2003), pp. 20–1, 272–5).

<sup>28</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, p. 338. See also Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 282–3; and Richard Ellmann, 'Introduction: The Critic as Artist as Wilde', in Ellmann, *Artist as Critic*, pp. xviii–xix.

<sup>29</sup> See Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 6–12; Marshall, *Demanding*, pp. 53–60; John Clark, *The Anarchist Moment: Reflections on Culture, Nature and Power* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1984), chap. 7; John A. Rapp, 'Daoism and Anarchism Reconsidered', *Anarchist Studies*, VI (1998), pp. 123–51.

anti-parliamentarianism of syndicalism from 1911 as well as of the milder-mannered Guild Socialism.<sup>86</sup> He displayed considerable ambivalence towards the Great War, expressed in *The Healing of Nations* (1915), and the wartime extension of 'the regulative and governmental principle' intensified his disquiet with the policies of state socialism still further.<sup>87</sup>

This long-term fluctuation between the poles of socialism and anarchism is illustrated by the successive versions, each a little more anarchist, of 'Non-Governmental Society'. The essay first appeared in 1897 as 'Transitions to Freedom';<sup>88</sup> in 1905 it was considerably revised as 'Non-Governmental Society', a chapter of *Prisons, Police and Punishment*, the publisher reissuing the text as a booklet in 1911;<sup>89</sup> and in 1917 it was included, with slight revision, in his final collection of social and political articles, *Towards Industrial Freedom*.<sup>90</sup> It was reading the booklet in 1911 or 1912 to which Herbert Read attributed his conver-

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Tsuzuki, p. 197. Carpenter's syndicalist statements are: Edward Carpenter, 'Long Live Syndicalism!', *Syndicalist*, May 1912; 'Edward Carpenter on Syndicalism', *Anarchist*, 3 May 1912 (CC, C Per 5); 'Co-operation and Syndicalism: Interview with Edward Carpenter', *Co-operative News*, 29 June 1912 (CC, C Per 5). See also 'Famous Author on Socialism: Prospects of a General Strike', *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, 28 October 1911 (MC). His three-part 'Object Lessons in Guild Socialism' appeared in the *Daily Herald*, 22 September, 19 October, 27 November 1919 (MC).

<sup>87</sup> See Marie-Françoise Cachin, 'Non-Governmental Society: Edward Carpenter's Position in the British Socialist Movement', in Brown, pp. 60–1. For some indication of police surveillance of Carpenter during the war: Sheila Rowbotham, *Friends of Alice Wheeldon* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), pp. 41, 46.

<sup>88</sup> In [Edward Carpenter (ed.)], *Forecasts of the Coming Century: By a Decade of Writers* (London and Manchester: Walter Scott, Clarion Office and Labour Press, 1897).

<sup>89</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Prisons, Police and Punishment: An Inquiry into the Causes and Treatment of Crime and Criminals* (London: Arthur C. Fifield, 1905), pp. 90–113; Edward Carpenter, *Non-Governmental Society* (London: A.C. Fifield, 1911).

<sup>90</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Towards Industrial Freedom* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1917), pp. 76–98. For an analysis of the changes see Cachin, pp. 61–3.

sion to anarchism;<sup>91</sup> and Nicolas Walter (grandson of S.K. Ratcliffe and himself one of the best-known anarchists of the late-twentieth century) considered that ‘Non-Governmental Society’, of all Carpenter’s writings, was ‘the one which comes closest to true anarchism’.<sup>92</sup> What is original about this essay, in addition to its splendid title (the term is exclusive to Carpenter), is the concept of a ‘double collectivism’: he sees a ‘voluntary collectivism’ (the emphasis is his) of the trade unions and co-operative movement, with ‘the development of productive as well as distributive industries, and by the interchange of goods with each other on an ever-growing scale...working within and parallel with the official collectivism of the State’.<sup>93</sup> Otherwise it is the insistence that law needs to be replaced by custom that is distinctive about ‘Non-Governmental Society’, but this derives from a significantly earlier work, with the astonishing title of *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*.

The essays of *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*, collected in 1889 and written over the previous four years, constitute his most original socio-political book, provocative and anarchistic. Nevinson, writing in 1923, named it as his favourite among Carpenter’s works and judged it reasonably as ‘the keenest and most far-reaching utterance of all those years [the 1880s] when the leaven of social thought began to stir and seethe and “work” again’:

In it he questioned the accepted nostrums, fashions, laws, codes, and conventions of the society called civilized – its dress, its medicine, its science,

<sup>91</sup> Herbert Read, *The Cult of Sincerity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 76.

<sup>92</sup> In his introduction to a reprinting of ‘Non-Governmental Society’ in *Freedom*, 27 February 1981. In the opinion of Cachin (p. 65) the text is of ‘fundamental importance...in Carpenter’s written works’.

<sup>93</sup> Carpenter, *Towards Industrial Freedom*, p. 94. The same passage appears in *Forecasts of the Coming Century*, p. 188, and *Prisons, Police and Punishment*, p. 108.

full co-operation of Ross, links the transition he too perceives in the quality of the writing to first Wilde’s ‘experiments’ in and then his becoming ‘an habitual devotee’ to homosexuality. ‘One can fancy an intense personality being created out of sin.’ Ransome quotes this sentence from ‘Pen, Pencil, and Poison’, which he then lists with the other two great essays of *Intentions*, the revision of ‘The Sphinx’, some of the stories of *A House of Pomegranates* and *Salomé*:

These things are among his best work. It is possible that a consciousness of separation from the common life of men is a sufficient explanation of an increased vividness in a man’s self, a heightened ardour of production.<sup>25</sup>

For Richard Ellmann:

Homosexuality fired his mind. It was the major stage in his discovery of himself... At last he knew where he stood. His new sexual direction liberated his art. It also liberated his critical faculty.<sup>26</sup>

Sodomy had been a capital offence from 1533 until 1861 (although death sentences had been commuted after 1835), but with the Criminal Justice Act, passed as recently as 1885, all male homosexual practices became illegal with the creation of the new offence of indecency between males. Wilde’s homosexual emancipation therefore brought him into potential conflict with the State: his sex life was now criminal and against the law. He would have been all too aware of the sorry story of the Pre-Raphaelite artist, Simeon Solomon, some of whose work he was to own, who was prosecuted for an ‘unnatural

<sup>25</sup> Arthur Ransome, *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study* (London; Methuen, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1913), pp. 106–7. Ransome’s quotation comes from Wilde, *Intentions*, p. 338.

<sup>26</sup> Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 265, 270.

brain of another, and draws this man by his hatred of injustice, and his neighbour by his faith in the future, and a third, it may be, by his love of art or by his wild worship of a lost and buried past. And all of this is well. For, to make men Socialists is nothing, but to make Socialism human is a great thing.<sup>23</sup>

Of the major British socialists of his day, Wilde was the only one to push beyond and declare for the anarchist position. (Carpenter's essential libertarianism was camouflaged, as we have seen, by his undocinaire outlook and his support for all trends within the labour movement, revolutionary and reformist alike.) How and why was he able to do so? In 1884 Wilde had married Constance Lloyd; his first son, Cyril, was born in 1885 and a second, Vyvyan, in 1886; he took up the editorship of the *Woman's World* in 1887; and he had by then deliberately abandoned the outfit of the 'professor of Aesthetics' for that of the 'florid out-of-date dandy'.<sup>24</sup> This period of change was marked by an even more notable turning-point when, in 1886, Wilde, aged thirty-two, was seduced by the seventeen-year-old Robert Ross (who, after their affair had ended, was to be Wilde's staunchest friend and eventual literary executor).

Wilde had previously been sexually ambivalent, yet this was his initiation into homosexuality and the effect on his art and thought was startling. It is from the late 1880s and after that his finest work dates: this is the work upon which his reputation as a writer rests, and the loss of the earlier poetry, plays and articles would be insignificant to his literary standing. In his pioneering study of 1912 Arthur Ransome, who had the

<sup>23</sup> 'Poetical Socialists' (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 February 1889), in Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. Linda Dowling (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), pp. 18–19. For Wilde's relationship to socialism, see also Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 116, 273–4.

<sup>24</sup> Moers, p. 299.

its social penalties, its prisons, its prescribed notions of virtue and vice. The number of our doctors proved what wretched invalids we are. Crawling phenomena like policemen showed the rottenness of our State. Compared with the cat, we are degenerates of nature, having lost our unity, our integration.<sup>94</sup>

In *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* Carpenter does at least four major things. He launches an assault on Victorian positivist science and this in terms anticipatory of twentieth-century philosophers of science, such as Popper, Kuhn and even Feyerabend. Tolstoy, unlike Carpenter hostile to all science, wrote a preface for the Russian translation of the chapter, 'Modern Science: A Criticism', and hailed Carpenter as 'a worthy heir of Carlyle and Ruskin' (as also did Nevinson).<sup>95</sup> Aldous Huxley was to consider that if scientists and technicians could be persuaded to read *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* (together with some other texts) 'the disastrous notion that the contemporary scientific world picture is a complete representation of reality, and the no less disastrous habit of "nothing-but" evaluations of social and psychological facts, might perhaps be eliminated, to the great advantage of suffering humanity'.<sup>96</sup> Secondly, in the title paper, which had gone down very badly when delivered to the Fabian Society, Carpenter asserts that we are living in 'a somewhat peculiar state of society, which we call Civilization ... a kind of disease which the various races of man have to pass through – as

<sup>94</sup> Henry Woodd Nevinson, *Between the Wars* (London: Hutchinson, 1936), pp. 194–5. Cf. Nevinson, *Essays*, p. 229.

<sup>95</sup> *MDD*, pp. 204–5; Tsuzuki, p. 2; Nevinson, *Between the Wars*, p. 195.

<sup>96</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Science, Liberty and Peace* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1947), pp. 30–31. See also Harold Picton, 'Edward Carpenter as Man and Scientific Thinker', in Beith, pp. 176–9, and Christopher E. Shaw, 'Identified with the One: Edward Carpenter, Henry Salt and the Ethical Socialist Philosophy of Science', in Brown, pp. 33–57.

children pass through measles or whooping cough'.<sup>97</sup> This he contrasts entirely unfavourably with primitive societies, whose degeneration he attributes to the institution of private property. Humankind will only be able to live fully and holistically in the imminent communist society.<sup>98</sup> A third theme is the necessity for the rigidity of law to be superseded by the flexibility of custom, since custom adapts more readily and humanly to changes in conditions and attitudes, as well as exemplifying social solidarity, again as in primitive societies. Fourthly, this is linked to 'Defence of Criminals: A Criticism of Morality'. Moral judgments are shown to be relative – not only 'from age to age and from race to race' but also 'from class to class of the same society' – and so 'a permanent moral code' is rejected: 'If the landlord class regards the poacher as a criminal, the poacher ... looks upon the landlord as a selfish ruffian who has the police on his side...'<sup>99</sup>

Law represents... the code of the dominant or ruling class, slowly accumulated, no doubt, and slowly modified, but always added to and always administered by the ruling class ... though there are ... in the England of today, a variety of classes and a variety of corresponding codes of public opinion and morality, one of these codes, namely that of the ruling class whose watchword is property, is strongly in the ascendant.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Carpenter, *Civilization*, p. 15. See *MDD*, p. 202–3, and Tsuzuki, pp. 79–80, for the reception by the Fabians.

<sup>98</sup> In *The Art of Creation: Essays on the Self and Its Powers* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1907), esp. chaps. 4 and 13, Carpenter, developing the argument of Whitman's Canadian friend, R.M. Bucke, in *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901), elaborates this threefold categorization of society in terms of consciousness.

<sup>99</sup> Carpenter, *Civilization*, pp.155–7.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152–4.

enticing'.<sup>20</sup> According to Shaw, Wilde was the only literary figure in London whom he could get to sign the petition in the international working-class campaign of 1887 for the reprieve of the Chicago Anarchists, sentenced to death after a travesty of a trial. Shaw was to comment: 'It was a completely disinterested act on his part; and it secured my distinguished consideration for him for the rest of his life.'<sup>21</sup> In 1889 May Morris invited Wilde to join a committee to promote a series of lectures by Kropotkin, and although he declined saying he was too busy to attend its meetings, he insisted that 'if you think my name of any service pray make any use of it you like'.<sup>22</sup> Wilde's first public declaration of socialism came in 1889 in a review of Edward Carpenter's anthology, *Chants of Labour: A Song-Book of the People*, remarking that 'it is for the building up of an eternal city that the Socialists of our day are making music', but, approving of the variousness of the poets and their contributions, he already expresses his libertarianism eloquently:

This is, on the whole, very promising. It shows that Socialism is not going to allow herself to be trammelled by any hard and fast creed or to be stereotyped into an iron formula. She welcomes many and multiform natures. She rejects none and has room for all. She has the attraction of a wonderful personality and touches the heart of one and the

<sup>20</sup> Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 522; Peter Faulkner, 'William Morris and Oscar Wilde', *Journal of the William Morris Society*, XIV, no. 4 (Summer 2002), pp. 34, 39–40.

<sup>21</sup> George Bernard Shaw, 'My Memories of Oscar Wilde', in E.H. Mikhail (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2 vols., 1979), II, p. 403. For the efforts of Morris, who did secure the signature of Ford Madox Brown, see *CLWM*, II: 1885–1888, pp. 706–9.

<sup>22</sup> Holland and Hart-Davis, p. 396. For the background to this, see *CLWM*, III: 1889–1892, pp. 38–9; George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince: A Biographical Study of Peter Kropotkin* (London: T.V. Boardman, 1950), p. 220.



receptivity to radical ideas; and it was from this starting-point that the revival of socialism in Britain was responsible for shifting Wilde much further to the left. Although the socialist organizations – the SDF, founded in 1881 but not committed to socialism until 1883, and the Fabian Society and Socialist League, both of 1884 – were minuscule, the decade saw the conversion to socialism of some of the most able intellectuals of Wilde’s generation, including R.B. Cunninghame Graham, Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb (for Beatrice Webb it was not to be until 1890) and the architect W.R. Lethaby, all born during the 1850s, as well as the significantly older William Morris and Edward Carpenter and equally younger C.R. Ashbee and Raymond Unwin. A surprising and little-known example of the phenomenon was Wilde’s future editor, friend and biographer, Frank Harris, who was briefly a member of the Marylebone branch of the Marxist SDF and a valued outdoor orator before being lost to Toryism.<sup>18</sup>

As early as 1883 Wilde could, when passing the Tuileries, which had been burned down by the Communards, ‘whose hands profane [had] plant[ed] the red flag upon the piled-up street’, declare: ‘There is not there one little blackened stone which is not to me a chapter in the Bible of Democracy.’<sup>19</sup> He was recalled as attending a Socialist League lecture at Kelm-scott House, wearing ‘a large crimson dahlia’ as a buttonhole, ‘an incongruous figure’, looking like ‘a basket of fruit, ripe and

<sup>18</sup> Henry Mayers Hyndman, *The Record of an Adventurous Life* (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 345; H.W. Lee and E. Archbold, *Social-Democracy in Britain: Fifty Years of the Socialist Movement* (London: Social-Democratic Federation, 1935), p. 55; Bell, ‘OWwW’, ff. 92a, 68–70; Philippa Pullar, *Frank Harris* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), pp. 69–70.

<sup>19</sup> Robert H. Sherard, *Oscar Wilde: The Story of an Unhappy Friendship* (London: Greening, 1905), p. 35; Robert Harborough Sherard, *The Real Oscar Wilde: To Be Used as a Supplement to, and in Illustration of ‘The Life of Oscar Wilde’* (London: T. Werner Laurie [1917]), p. 36.

Carpenter concludes that ‘in general we call a man a criminal, not because he violates any eternal code of morality – for there exists no such thing – but because he violates the ruling code of his time’.<sup>101</sup> His moral radicalism derives partly from his proximity to the working class but most of all from his homosexuality – all homosexual acts between males had been criminalized in 1885. ‘The Outcast of one age is the Hero of another,’ he declares.<sup>102</sup> Among his readers was Oscar Wilde, who at the very end of his life remarked: ‘What a charming book Edward Carpenter’s *Civilization, Cause and Cure* [sic] is: it is most suggestive. I constantly read it.’<sup>103</sup> Wilde would probably have also concurred with Carpenter’s dislike of absolute rules and ‘a strong (perhaps a too strong) objection to *principles* generally’.<sup>104</sup>

It can be seen that *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* is a text for a revolutionary working class rather than for the British Labour Party and will be read with most profit, not by a Philip Snowden, but by artists, bohemians and anarchists. In New York, certainly, Carpenter’s books were admired by and influenced the early-twentieth-century avant-garde, including in the visual arts Alvin Langdon Coburn, Max Weber and Marsden Hartley (and Coburn took one of the best portrait photographs of the extremely photogenic Carpenter).<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>103</sup> Letter to George Ives, 8 September 1900, in Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (eds.), *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 1197. Carpenter’s two published comments contemporary to Wilde’s trials and conviction were a letter, signed ‘Hevellyn’, to the *Star*, n.d., and ‘Some Recent Criminal Cases’ in the, significantly, anarchist *Freedom*, June 1895 (CC, NC I, ff. 14–15, 66).

<sup>104</sup> *MDD*, pp. 100–1. Henry Pelling writes unhappily, but accurately, of Carpenter’s ‘anarchic ethics’ (*The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880–1900* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1965], pp. 142–3).

<sup>105</sup> See Linda Dalrymple Henderson, ‘Mysticism as the “Tie That Binds”’: The Case of Edward Carpenter and Modernism’, *Art Journal*, XLVI (1987), pp. 29–37.

Emma Goldman paid visits in 1925 to both Havelock Ellis and Carpenter, 'the fulfillment of a wish cherished for a quarter of a century'. She was disappointed by Ellis, whom she found 'as cold as a cucumber', but charmed by the aged Carpenter, a rare supporter of her anti-Soviet lecture tour:

I attempted to tell him how much his books had meant to me – *Towards Democracy*, *Angel[s]' Wings*, [*My Days with*] *Walt Whitman*. He stopped me, gently putting his hand over mine. Instead I should rather tell him about Alexander Berkman, he said. He had read his *Prison Memoirs*, 'a profound study of man's inhumanity and prison psychology, and of his own martyrdom, portrayed with extraordinary simplicity'. He had always wanted to know 'Sasha' and 'the Girl' in the book.

'Sasha' and 'the Girl' were, of course, Berkman and Goldman herself. The British publication of *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, with a preface by Carpenter, followed in 1926.<sup>106</sup>

Carpenter was, then, a writer and a theorist of considerable originality and his lifestyle, in addition, was and continues to be of both interest and importance. But the spate of fine publications about him between 1970 and 1980 failed to start a revival in his reputation; and neither has, much more surprisingly, his pioneering status as an indefatigable advocate of the naturalness of homosexuality, a gay who, in effect, came out as early as 1898.<sup>107</sup> Instead of being commonplaces, praise by

<sup>106</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (1931; New York: Dover edn, 2 vols., 1970), II, pp. 979–80 (see also pp. 964, 967); Richard and Anna Maria Drinnon (eds.), *Nowhere at Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), pp. 127–8. *Angels' Wings* collects Carpenter's essays on music and the visual arts.

<sup>107</sup> For assessments of Carpenter as a gay activist: Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1989), esp. pp. 171–5; *idem*, *Coming Out*, chaps. 6, 10, 11. The Gay Men's

ism at the expense of the ultra-radicalism of the masses. The sonnet, 'Libertatis Sacra Famis', first published in 1880, provides an illustration:

Albeit nurtured in democracy,  
And liking best that state republican  
Where every man is Kinglike and no man  
Is crowned above his fellows, yet I see,  
Spite of this modern fret for Liberty,  
Better the rule of One, whom all obey,  
Than to let clamorous demagogues betray  
Our freedom with the kiss of anarchy.  
Wherefore I love them not whose hands profane  
Plant the red flag upon the piled-up street  
For no right cause, beneath whose ignorant reign  
Arts, Culture, Reverence, Honour, all things fade,  
Save Treason and the dagger of her trade,  
Or Murder with his silent bloody feet.

Speranza was a typical middle-class nationalist in fearing the popular movement and its potential revolutionary excesses and in this her son follows her. 'Sonnet to Liberty' concludes with an expression of their dilemma:

... and yet, and yet,  
These Christs that die upon the barricades  
God knows it I am with them, in some things.<sup>17</sup>

*Vera* and the early poetry, despite these strictures, do manifestly indicate an interest in revolutionary agitation and a

<sup>17</sup> Fong and Beckson, 148–9. See Woodcock, *Paradox*, 141–2; Gibbard, pp. 165–7; Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 115–16. The remaining poems collected under 'Eleutheria' are 'Sonnet on the Massacre of the Christians in Bulgaria' and 'Ave Imperatrix'.

*plus*, with ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ ‘*qui contient une partie de mon esthétique*’ and which had appeared at the beginning of the year.<sup>15</sup>

The progress of Wilde’s politics was initially even more timid than that of his aesthetics. In 1880 he had written his first play, *Vera; or, The Nihilists*, which was performed in New York for a week in 1883 and never in London. This dire effort, in which the Wildean wit of the prime minister, Prince Paul Maraloffski, is incompatible with the primary melodrama, has attracted surprisingly generous attention from those who have been most concerned with Wilde’s political ideas. Clearly inspired by the Populists (or Narodniks) and Vera Zasulich, who launched the period of propaganda by the deed with her attempted assassination of General Trepov in 1878, the play transposes them as the Nihilists, the purely intellectual movement of the 1860s, and, in the early editions, specifies the action as occurring in 1800, although railways exist and the serfs are said to have been emancipated. For myself I am unable to treat *Vera* as meriting serious attention of any kind.<sup>16</sup>

The verse of the late 1870s and 1880 with political themes, published in *Poems* (1881) under the collective title of ‘*Eleutheria*’ (that is, ‘Freedom’) and probably inspired by the example of his mother, has also been perceived as anticipatory of eventual anarchism; but this unremarkable poetry (while largely technically competent in a way that *Vera* is not) – and including ‘Quantum Mutata’, ‘To Milton’, ‘Theoretikos’ and ‘Louis Napoleon’ – apotheosizes Liberty, Democracy and Republican-

<sup>15</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Intentions*, in Ellmann, *Artist as Critic*, pp. 290n, 432; Holland and Hart-Davis, p. 487; Ellmann, *Wilde*, 249.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Thomas H. Bell, ‘Oscar Wilde without Whitewash’ [hereafter ‘OWwW’] (typescript, c.1935–8, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles) [hereafter Clark], f. 106. But see, especially, Eltis, chap. 2; and also Pearson, pp. 61–3; Woodcock, *Paradox*, pp. 142–3; Gibbard, pp. 165–7; and Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 115–19.

commentators of discernment – such as Paul Thompson’s well-judged description of *Love’s Coming-of-Age* as ‘remarkable’ – have been so rare as to be worthy of note.<sup>108</sup> Most recently, however, in his contribution to *The New Oxford History of England*, G.R. Searle has very properly taken Carpenter, ‘that fertile questioner of all established procedures and structures’, as a representative figure for the period 1886–1918, while Marcus Collins, in a pioneering ‘intimate history’ of twentieth-century men and women, derives his organizing concept of ‘mutuality’ from the triple prophecy in *Love’s Coming-of-Age* of heterosexual mixing, companionate marriage and shared sexual pleasure.<sup>109</sup>

The concluding evaluation of the *Manchester Guardian*’s obituary of Carpenter has still not been bettered:

... he was a very remarkable writer. He had a keen intuitive sympathy with most of the main influences which in modern life and thought point forward. Such different spirits as those of Whitman and Tolstoy, Nietzsche and William Morris, Shelley and Ruskin, seem to meet in his, their discords blurred and their adumbration of a common ideal emphasized with a touch at once

Press published Carpenter’s *Selected Writings*, vol. 1: *Sex*, with a lengthy introduction by Noël Greig, in 1984 and the following year reissued *Towards Democracy* (1985), but projected volumes on ‘Society’ and ‘Spirit’ failed to materialize.

<sup>108</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Work of William Morris* (London: Quartet Books, 1977 edn), p. 53 (see also pp. 257–9). Three fairly recent discussions of *Love’s Coming-of-Age* are: Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 149–71; Beverly Thiele, ‘Coming-of-Age: Edward Carpenter on Sex and Reproduction’, in Brown, pp. 100–25; Michael Bush, ‘The Rise of the Sex Manual’, *History Today*, February 1999, pp. 40–42.

<sup>109</sup> G.R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 2 (see also esp. pp. 602–4); Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003), pp. 1–9.

gentle, shrewd, and courageous. It is rare to find with such a sure instinct for 'advanced' ideals and causes so much breadth and serenity. Equally rare was the consistency and quiet success with which Carpenter obeyed his own teaching. He lived just as he asked others to live, and the consequent note of sincerity in all his work makes...a very dignified appeal.<sup>110</sup>

Morris, having met Carpenter at Chesterfield and been told about his way of life at Millthorpe, commented:

It seems to me that the real way to enjoy life is to accept all its necessary ordinary details and turn them into pleasures by taking interest in them: whereas modern civilization huddles them out of the way, has them done in a venal and slovenly manner till they become real drudgery which people can't help trying to avoid.<sup>111</sup>

Morris's remark relates to another aspect of what still needs to be learned from Carpenter. In his essay, 'The Art of Life', he was to insist:

*Life is expression....* To obtain a place, a free field, a harmonious expansion, for your activities, your tastes, your feelings, your personality, your Self, in fact, is to Live ... The thing to remember is that primarily Life must be an expression of one's Self ... To pass through one's mortal days, like a fugitive through the camp of the enemy, in continual

<sup>110</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 June 1929 (MC). There are a number of preceding reservations, searching but not altogether consistent with the passage quoted. For another fine assessment, see 'An Eminent Victorian', *New Statesman*, 30 August 1924 (MC).

<sup>111</sup> *CLWM*, II: 1881–1884, p. 353.

This would seem, to even the most intelligent, a doctrine almost blasphemous. So incorporated with our education has the supposed aphorism become, that its belief is held to be part of our moral being, and the words themselves have, in our ear, the ring of religion. Still, seldom does Nature succeed in producing a picture.

This key passage Wilde overlooked in his article the following day, referring in general to Whistler's 'clever satire and amusing jests'. In contrast was the reaction of a great poet. Stéphane Mallarmé was also in the audience and, according to his companion Henri de Régnier, 'instantly succumbed to Whistler's magic', to the extent that he translated the lecture as the influential *Le Ten O'Clock de M. Whistler* (1888).<sup>14</sup>

Mallarmé was the central symbolist writer and an anarchist sympathizer; Wilde was not able to reach a position of equivalent artistic radicalism until January 1889 when, in 'The Decay of Lying', he too asserted the supremacy of art over nature as well as life. This essay was collected in 1891 with 'Pen, Pencil and Poison' and 'The Critic as Artist', of January 1889 and 1890 respectively, in the brilliant *Intentions*. The concluding essay, 'The Truth of Masks' of 1885, does not belong with this volume, to the extent that Wilde appended a conclusion: 'Not that I agree with everything that I have said in this essay. There is much with which I entirely disagree,' and he instructed his French translator, as early as 1891, to replace it, as '*je ne l'aime*

<sup>14</sup> [J.A.McN. Whistler,] *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (London: William Heinemann, 1919 edn), p. 143; Oscar Wilde, 'Mr Whistler's Ten O'Clock', in Ellmann, *Artist as Critic*, pp. 13–16; Robert Craft, 'Le Ten O'Clock de M. Whistler', *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 February 2001. See also Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* (New York: published by the author, 2 vols., 1916), I, pp. 77–80. For the relationship between Wilde and Whistler, see Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 75–8, 125–8, 225, 254–8, 307–8, 316–19; and for their dandyism, Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960), pp. 287–308.

William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement.<sup>11</sup> Another important influence on Wilde was indeed Morris, who met him as early as 1881, reporting: ‘...as the devil is painted blacker than he is, so it fares with O.W. Not but what he is an ass: but he certainly is clever too.’<sup>12</sup>

Wilde’s continuing admiration for and indebtedness to Ruskin, who was delighted to hear from Lady Wilde in 1882 that ‘Oscar was still the faithfulest of my disciples’,<sup>13</sup> must contribute to an explanation of the venomous animosity that developed between Wilde and Whistler. Like Wilde a dandy with a brilliant wit, Whistler came to be affronted by the younger man; but he had been awarded derisory damages against Ruskin in the libel action of 1878 that occasioned his bankruptcy and, despite his admiration for Whistler’s paintings and etchings, Wilde still adhered to Ruskinian aesthetics to a significant extent. In 1885 Whistler delivered the lecture at the Queen’s Hall which became known as his ‘Ten O’Clock’ and which Wilde reported for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Whistler contended:

That Nature is always right, is an assertion, artistically, as untrue, as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted. Nature is very rarely right, to such an extent even, that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong: that is to say, the condition of things that shall bring about the perfection of harmony worthy of a picture is rare, and not common at all.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Ross was to publish ‘The English Renaissance of Art’, ‘House Decoration’ and ‘Art and the Handicraftsman’ in Oscar Wilde, *Essays and Lectures* (London: Methuen, 1908).

<sup>12</sup> *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, ed. Norman Kelvin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 4 vols., 1984–96) [hereafter CLWM], II: 1881–1884, p. 38. See also Holland and Hart-Davis, p. 476.

<sup>13</sup> Hilton, p. 439.

fear of discovery, in continual concealment of one’s own thoughts and feelings, or like a slave under continual compulsion from others, is not to live: it is only to exist.<sup>112</sup>

Carpenter’s death coincided with publication of the expurgated edition of Lawrence’s *Pansies* and a discerning parallel was drawn (by S.K. Ratcliffe, it would seem):

It is but a step from Edward Carpenter to D.H. Lawrence. Though their periods are so far apart, and in many aspects of their work they differ greatly, they have essential unity of purpose.... To stand on one’s feet, to fear nothing, to let the sun of heaven shine upon us and the sun of life light our minds, to worry about nothing and to let alone the things other men are so busy about is what Lawrence invites us to do, as Edward Carpenter did, too.<sup>113</sup>

Carpenter was the early Labour Party’s guru, but he supported all sections within the labour movement and at core was an anarchist communist, seeking the emergence of a ‘non-governmental society’; and his art of everyday living points forward equally to the individualist anarchism of John Cowper Powys.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Carpenter, *Angels’ Wings*, pp. 211–12 (Carpenter’s emphasis). Cf. Desmond MacCarthy, ‘Edward Carpenter: Minor Prophet’, *Listener*, 7 September 1944 (MC).

<sup>113</sup> ‘Editorial Notes’, *Everyman*, 11 July 1929 (MC).

<sup>114</sup> ‘Non-Governmental Society’ was actually included in a French individualist anthology of 1927, edited by E. Armand (David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917–1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 309, and information of the author).

## 4. Oscar Wilde

Forty to fifty years ago Oscar Wilde's reputation in Britain depended largely on his dazzling wit, dandyism and brilliant plays. Since then the movement for and the attainment of homosexual liberation in Western Europe and North America have led, particularly given the brutality of his two years' imprisonment with hard labour, to his canonization as a gay 'icon'; but the same period has additionally seen his acceptance as a major all-round writer. This second process began with the publication in 1962 of Rupert Hart-Davis's magisterial edition of Wilde's correspondence, not only printing for the first time the full text of one of his masterpieces, *De Profundis*, but also revealing him as a superb letter-writer; continued in 1969 with Richard Ellmann's selection of the essays in *The Artist as Critic*; and concluded with Ellmann's magnificent critical biography in 1987, it being very relevant that Ellmann's two previous subjects had been W.B. Yeats and James Joyce and that his *James Joyce* was recognized as one of the great achievements of contemporary literary biography. So the centenary of Wilde's death was in part marked in 2000 by the inauguration of a nine-volume Oxford English Texts edition of *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, indicative of the full, albeit belated, acceptance of his oeuvre by the academic establishment.<sup>1</sup> For some twenty years twin

<sup>1</sup> Rupert Hart-Davis (ed.), *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962); Richard Ellmann (ed.), *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Random House, 1969) [published in London in 1970 by W.H. Allen]; Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987); Bobby Fong and Karl Beckson (eds.) *The Complete Works*

which has had such a strange influence over my life'. Wilde only got to know Pater in his third year at Oxford, whereas John Ruskin and Pater never met at all. For Ruskin, the first Slade Professor of Fine Art, and twenty-one years Pater's senior, much as he explicated and celebrated the work of art, ethics and nature both took precedence: good art could only be produced by good men and truth to nature was fundamental. Wilde attended Ruskin's lectures on 'The Aesthetic and Mathematic Schools of Florence' in his first term, eagerly accepted the call to join in building the road at Ferry Hinksey and thereby became one of Ruskin's undergraduate friends, assuring him in 1888 that 'the dearest memories of my Oxford days are my walks and talks with you'.<sup>10</sup>

Wilde's aestheticism dates, then, from his Oxford years; and since it was necessary for him to earn money – on Sir William's death in 1876 his inheritance was a meagre £200 per annum – he proceeded to do so by moving to London and promoting himself in a very hard-headed manner as an 'aesthete'. A year-long lecture tour of North America, dressed in outrageous 'aesthetic' garb, proved extremely lucrative in 1882 – his share of the receipts amounted to a substantial \$5,600 – and this was followed by tours of the British and Irish provinces, lasting on and off for two years during 1883–5. As such titles as 'The English Renaissance of Art', 'The House Beautiful', 'The Decorative Arts', 'Dress' and 'The Value of Art in Modern Life' indicate, Wilde was expounding in his lectures not just the ideas of Pater and aestheticism proper but also those of Ruskin and

<sup>10</sup> Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 46–50, 80–82; Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Later Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 230, 263, 292–4; Ellmann, *Artist as Critic*, pp. xi–xv, 229–30; Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 186–90, 274, 457; Holland and Hart-Davis, 349, 735.

international reputation – he was knighted in 1864 – as well as a pioneer archaeologist and folklorist. Jane Wilde (née Elgee), like her husband an Irish nationalist, was an even more notable personality and, extravagant in dress and behaviour, very much her son's mother. Using 'Speranza' as her pseudonym, she was a poet, had also written political articles for the *Nation*, Young Ireland's organ, intervening in court during Charles Gavan Duffy's trial in 1848, and translated from the French and German.

Both of the Wildes' sons were boarded at the Portora Royal School, Enniskillen, whence they proceeded to Trinity College, Dublin. An outstanding three years for Oscar at Trinity were followed by a triumphant further four at Magdalen College, Oxford, to which he won a scholarship, again reading classics, receiving a double first and crowning his academic career with the award of the Newdigate Poetry Prize in 1878 for *Ravenna*, which was to be his first independent publication.

Teaching at Oxford in the 1870s were two of Wilde's major intellectual influences, both progenitors of the doctrine and the movement of aestheticism, but at the same time inhabiting different moral universes. Walter Pater, a fellow of Brasenose, homosexual and aged thirty-five in 1874, had the previous year brought out *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, whose 'Conclusion', which Wilde supposedly knew by heart, was omitted when the book was reprinted four years later since 'it might possibly mislead some of the young men into whose hands it might fall'. For Pater: 'Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end' and: 'To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.' What he advocated was 'the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake'. Wilde described Pater's *Renaissance* as 'my golden book', and in prison as 'that book

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Hesketh Pearson, *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (1946; Harmondsworth: Penguin, revised edn, 1960).

industries, one gay, the other academic, and frequently both, have been generating publications on Wilde with ever more furious intensity. The lack of verbal elegance and the contorted thinking displayed by many of these are markedly at odds with Wilde's own aphoristic lucidity.

In all of this a notable absence has been informed discussion of Wilde's politics – other than sexual – given that one of his most celebrated and widely read works is his political essay, 'The Soul of Man under Socialism'. His advocacy of both socialism and individualism has tended to be viewed as a prime Wildean paradox and misconceptions of this basic anarchist formulation and the anarchist position he advocated abound. The dust-wrapper of the American edition of Ellmann's *The Artist as Critic*, for example, describes 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', which the collection includes, as Wilde's 'argument for social reform', whereas in actuality he argues forcefully against it: '...remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it. Indeed ... remedies are part of the disease.... *The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible.*'<sup>2</sup> Again, in a recent popular selection of Wilde's writings, a British academic, author of a book on Wilde, can conclude her discussion of 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' thus: 'The socialism that emerges from these pages

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of *Oscar Wilde*, vol. I: *Poems and Poems in Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a useful discussions of the turnaround in Wilde's critical fortunes, see Joseph Bristow, 'Memorializing Wilde: An Explosive History', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, V (2000), and Ian Small, 'What Kind of Writer Was Wilde? Editorial Practice and Canon-Formation', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, V (2000); and for some significant reservations concerning Ellmann's biography by Wilde's grandson, see Merlin Holland, 'Biography and the Art of Lying', in Peter Raby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', in Ellmann, *Artist as Critic*, p. 256 (Wilde's emphasis).

is highly idiosyncratic ... impossible to align with any kind of party politics.<sup>3</sup>

This state of affairs is all the more surprising in that anarchists from the outset recognized – indeed acclaimed – ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ as an important anarchist statement, Kropotkin describing it as ‘that article that O. Wilde wrote on Anarchism’.<sup>4</sup> The anarchist George Woodcock published an insightful book on Wilde in 1949, discussed the politics in his major history of anarchism in 1962, and included an extract from ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ in a well-known anthology of anarchist texts in 1977.<sup>5</sup> Peter Marshall effectively replaced Woodcock’s impressive *Anarchism* with his massive *Demanding the Impossible*, in which he devotes several pages to Wilde as a ‘British Libertarian’, declaring that ‘his libertarian socialism is the most attractive of all the varieties of anarchism and socialism’.<sup>6</sup> Marshall tells me that the three things which made him personally become an anarchist were the Parisian uprising in May 1968 (described by Christopher Pallis in his eyewitness account, *Paris: May 1968*), reading Nicolas Walter’s pamphlet, *About Anarchism* (1969), and reading ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’. Masolino D’Amico concluded unhesitatingly in 1967, but in the obscure

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<sup>3</sup> Ann Varty, ‘Introduction’, to Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis, The Ballad of Reading Gaol, and Other Writings* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1999), p. xx.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Kropotkin to Robert Ross, 6 May 1905, in Margery Ross (ed.), *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends: Letters to Robert Ross, Art Critic and Writer, Together with Extracts from His Published Articles* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> George Woodcock, *The Paradox of Oscar Wilde* (London: T.V. Boardman, 1949) [reissued, by an anarchist press, as *Oscar Wilde: The Double Image* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1989), with Woodcock’s 1948 edition of *The Soul of Man under Socialism* as an appendix]; George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (1962; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1986), pp. 378–80; George Woodcock (ed.), *The Anarchist Reader* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), pp. 72–4, 381.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 180.

Italian *English Miscellany*, that Wilde was ‘an Anarchist, not a Socialist’; while Owen Dudley Edwards, in his judicious entry for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* of 2004, describes ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ as ‘perhaps the most memorable and certainly the most aesthetic statement of anarchist theory in the English language’.<sup>7</sup> Recently two outstanding Oxford doctoral theses, by Sos Eltis and Paul Gibbard, have identified Wilde as an anarchist and discussed his politics with considerable intelligence. It is to be hoped that Eltis’s and Gibbard’s work, together with the current chapter, which is able to go considerably further than they did, will eventually percolate into the general academic consciousness and beyond.<sup>8</sup>

Wilde is so much better known than any of the other writers examined at length in this book, and most readers will be so familiar with the principal events, sometimes notorious, of his life and the course of his career that these will be treated less extensively than the other subjects and only discussed in detail where they are pertinent to his politics. Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in 1854 in Dublin to Protestant parents and, as he was to stress in 1897, ‘inherited from my father and my mother a name of high distinction in literature and art’.<sup>9</sup> William Wilde was an ear and eye surgeon of

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<sup>7</sup> Masolino D’Amico, ‘Oscar Wilde between “Socialism” and Aestheticism’, *English Miscellany*, XLVIII (1967), p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> Sos Eltis, *Revising Wilde: Society and Subversion in the Plays of Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), esp. chap 1, ‘Oscar Wilde: Anarchist, Socialist and Feminist’; Paul Gibbard, ‘Anarchism in English and French Literature, 1885–1914: Zola, the Symbolists, Conrad and Chesterton’ (Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 2001), pp. 163–75. See also Raimund Schöffner, *Anarchismus und Literatur in England: Von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997), pp. 305–27.

<sup>9</sup> Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (eds.), *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p.780. See also pp. 721, 762. Unless otherwise specified biographical details are throughout drawn from Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, supplemented by the still very useful and perceptive



become his joint literary executor) and Max Plowman, and in which fifty or so of his articles were to appear. The *Adelphi* was a socialist periodical, increasingly identified with the ILP, but Blair described himself to those who worked on it as ‘a Tory Anarchist’, while conceding that he ‘admitted the *Adelphi*’s socialist case on moral grounds’; Rees remembering him as having ‘a kind of Bohemian Anarchist attitude’; and Jon Kimche, with whom he worked in a Hampstead bookshop in the mid-thirties and later to become editor of *Tribune*, considering him ‘a kind of intellectual anarchist’.<sup>39</sup> Orwell in his maturity was also to call Swift ‘a Tory anarchist’ explaining that this meant ‘despising authority while disbelieving in liberty, and preserving the aristocratic outlook while seeing clearly that the existing aristocracy is degenerate and contemptible’.<sup>40</sup>

Yet during the first half of the 1930s Orwell’s tolerance of any other variety of anarchist would have been very limited, for he complained that for an ‘ordinary man, a crank meant a Socialist and a Socialist meant a crank’: ‘One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words “Socialism” and “Communism” draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, “Nature Cure” quack, pacifist and feminist in England.’<sup>41</sup> While few anarchists would have been all, still fewer would have satisfied none of these despised categories. He told the

<sup>39</sup> ‘Jack Common’s Recollections’, in Audrey Coppard and Bernard Crick (eds.), *Orwell Remembered* (London: Ariel Books, 1984), p. 142; Rayner Heppenstall, *Four Absentees* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1960), pp. 32, 62; Richard Rees, ‘“A Fugitive from the Camp of Victory”’, in Coppard and Crick, p. 124; Crick, pp. 102, 163. See also Richard Rees, *George Orwell: Fugitive from the Camp of Victory* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), pp. 29, 48; Crick, pp. 126, 130–1, 146–7, 164; *CWGO*, V, p. 137 (*The Road to Wigan Pier*). For the *Adelphi* and its circle, see Crick, pp. 160–1; *CWGO*, X, pp. 181–2; John Newsinger, *Orwell’s Politics* (Basingstoke and London, 1999), pp. 22–3.

<sup>40</sup> *CWGO*, XVIII, p. 425.

<sup>41</sup> *CWGO*, V (*The Road to Wigan Pier*), pp. 161–2. See also *ibid.*, pp. 150–1, 169, 201.

‘sometime in the summer of 1900’, when there was ‘an hour or so of conversation’ in Harris’s rooms at the Elysée Palace Hotel.<sup>103</sup> Two or three days later there was a second meeting there but now between Wilde and Bell alone. Bell was not to see Wilde alive again because of the non-operation of the collaboration. But late in November ‘my friend, Bell’, as Harris calls him, was dispatched with money for the importunate Wilde. He arrived at the Hôtel d’Alsace, two or three hours too late, to find a nun sitting at the side of Wilde’s corpse.<sup>104</sup>

The crucial encounter was, then, in summer 1900 when Wilde and Bell met alone and Bell got him talking about politics in what he describes as ‘a real long talk.’<sup>105</sup> Bell regarded ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ as ‘in its day...bold and original’ despite the fact that ‘Wilde was too much concerned with aesthetics to concern himself with economics, too full of wit to deal seriously at any length with any social question’:

Harris had told Wilde that I had been accepted as a friend by William Morris, by Peter Kropotkin and by Edward Carpenter. Wilde spoke of them to me, particularly about Morris, laughing with me, with tender memory, at Morris’s blunt ways and the terribly rough language, the quite incredibly, quite impossibly rough language, he could use on appropriate occasion.

Bell considered that ‘in his political and social views’ Wilde ‘had just the same outlook as ... Kropotkin, and though natu-

<sup>103</sup> Bell, ‘OWwW’, f. 11; Bell, ‘OWUP’, p. 139.

<sup>104</sup> Harris, II, p. 535. Sherard’s dismissal of the account given in Bell’s article is to be rejected in turn (Robert Harborough Sherard, *Oscar Wilde, ‘Drunkard and Swindler’: A Response to George Bernard Shaw, Dr. G. J. Renier, Frank Harris, etc.* (Calvi, Corsica: Vindex Publishing, 1933), pp. 9–10, and Robert Harborough Sherard, *Oscar Wilde Twice Defended from André Gide’s Wicked Lies and Frank Harris’s Cruel Libels...* (Chicago, IL: Argus Book Shop, 1934), pp. 67–9.

<sup>105</sup> Bell, ‘OWwW’, f. 5.

rally he deals more with art than with economics his teaching is on just the same line and is just as clear and strong and plain spoken'. He 'had evidently read [*Love's Coming of Age*] and spoke warmly of Carpenter'. Indeed, Wilde was to write in September 1900: 'What a charming book Edward Carpenter's *Civilisation, Cause and Cure* is: it is most suggestive. I constantly read it,' and he is known to have annotated his copy. Bell 'mentioned also a mutual friend, John Barlas ... of whom [Wilde] spoke with warm affection'.<sup>106</sup>

While Bell had no doubt that the primary anarchist influence on Wilde came from Kropotkin, he also brings in a fairly new name: that of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon:

I told him in our talk that I was not a Kropotkinian but had arrived where I was through Proudhon. He evidently understood quite well the difference between the two, and there was some little talk about them... The influence of Proudhon on him is plain. Wilde probably did not get much of a grasp of Proudhon's economic theory; he was neither an economist nor a business man to be interested in the details of Mutual Banking, but in the *Soul of Man* the Proudhon influence in political theory – and in style – is very evident. It is true that Wilde might have got the political theory indirectly; his bosom friend Barlas was well read in Proudhon and he must have met other Libertarians who could explain this. But he had himself read at least some of Proudhon's works, including certainly the famous *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?* – which had to be read by every well educated radical of

<sup>106</sup> Bell, 'OWUP', p. 141; Bell, 'OWwW', ff. 29, 31; Holland and Hart-Davis, p. 1197.

of Orwell's anti-Communism but Secker & Warburg brought it out on 25 April 1938. In a letter of 3 May Goldman wished that 'the book could circulate in tens of thousands of copies. At least it would show the calibre and the quality of the CNT-FAI and expose the conspiracy against them to the world.' Yet it was to achieve an astonishingly poor sale: gross royalties probably fell short of an advance of £150 by £20, and what was left of the print run of 1,500 was eventually remaindered after Orwell's death in 1950, with Freedom Press acquiring the stock. Goldman also hoped that *Homage to Catalonia* would be published in the USA, but that was not to be until as late as 1952.<sup>37</sup>

In 1927 Eric Blair, aged 24 and after five years service in Burma, had resigned from the Indian Imperial Police, having come to hate the 'tyranny and exploitation' of imperial rule with, as he was to recall, 'a bitterness which I probably cannot make clear'.<sup>38</sup> During 1928 and 1929 he lived in Paris, working as *aplongeur*, and went on the tramp in England, experiences recounted in his striking first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, eventually published in 1933 under the pseudonym of 'George Orwell'. From 1930 he became closely associated with the *Adelphi*, founded and owned by John Middleton Murry and, between 1930 and 1936, co-edited by Richard Rees (who was to

<sup>37</sup> CWGO, XI, pp. 53, 81, 135, 260; GA, XXVII A, letter from EG to Rose Pesotta, 3 May 1938; Peter Davison, *George Orwell: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996), p. 86. According to George Woodcock, *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell* (Harmondsworth: Penguin edn, 1970), p. 103, only 900 copies were sold during Orwell's lifetime; but cf. CWGO, XX, p. 60.

<sup>38</sup> CWGO, V (*The Road to Wigan Pier*), pp.134, 139. Unless otherwise attributed details of Orwell's life are drawn from Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980) or the chronologies at the beginning of each volume, X-XX, of Peter Davison's magnificent edition, CWGO, and a version of which appear in his brief but authoritative study, Davison, *George Orwell*, pp. xv–xxvii. While Jeffrey Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), and D.J. Taylor, *Orwell* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2003), are all accomplished literary biographies, Crick's outstanding work remains essential for the politics.

Unlike Huxley and Read, George Orwell refused to participate in *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*. He told its instigator, Nancy Cunard, to ‘stop sending me this bloody rubbish’:

I was six months in Spain, most of the time fighting, I have a bullet-hole in me at present and I am not going to write blah about defending democracy or gallant little anybody. Moreover, I know what is happening and has been happening on the Government side for months past, i.e. that Fascism is being riveted on the Spanish workers under the pretext of resisting Fascism; also that since May a reign of terror has been proceeding and all the jails and any place that will serve as a jail are crammed with prisoners who are not only imprisoned without trial but are half-starved, beaten and insulted.<sup>35</sup>

From March to September 1938 Orwell was in a sanatorium, having fallen ill with a tubercular lesion. There is therefore no correspondence between him and Goldman, his wife Eileen acting as intermediary, but he told Stephen Spender: ‘I’m all for this SIA business if they are really doing anything to supply food etc., not like that damned rubbish of signing manifestos to say how wicked it all is.’<sup>36</sup>

Orwell had begun to write *Homage to Catalonia* shortly after his return home in July 1937 and completed it early the following year. This was a book turned down (before a word of it was written!) by his publisher, Victor Gollancz, because

<sup>35</sup> CWGO, XI, p. 67 (letter of August 1937).

<sup>36</sup> GA, XXVII A, letters from Eileen Blair to EG, 17 March, 12 April, 10 May 1938, and from EG to Eileen Blair, 21 March, 8, 14 April, 17 May 1938; GA, XXXIII A, letter from EG to Eileen Blair, 3 May 1938; CWGO, XI, p. 131 (letter of 2 April 1938). Orwell thought mistakenly that Spender was also a SIA sponsor, presumably believing that since Auden was (temporarily) Spender would be too.

that time. Sherard has him quoting Proudhon;<sup>107</sup> according to von Liebig<sup>108</sup> he had read quite a good deal of Proudhon and spoke about him often. A short examination of Proudhon will show that Wilde’s criticism of democratic government in the *Soul of Man* is that made by Proudhon long years before; and in so far as the style in it had any origin other than his own genius it is surely that of the great French master of the epigram and the paradox...<sup>109</sup>

It comes as no surprise when Bell remarks that he ‘never heard that Wilde understood [the] importance’ of the British retail (or consumers’) co-operative movement, but he goes on to report his interest in ‘the idea of the self-governing co-operative workshop’, or producers’ co-ops. Bell says that Wilde called his attention to the account in Chernyshevsky’s novel *What Is To Be Done?* of the description of the dressmaker’s co-operative workshop which the middle-class heroine, Vera Pavlovna, sets up for needlewomen. *What Is To Be Done?* had been translated into English from the French edition by none other than Benjamin Tucker, serialized in his *Liberty* and published in book form in 1886.<sup>110</sup> Wilde also spoke of another novel, Sir Walter Besant’s *All Sorts and*

<sup>107</sup> “‘La propriété, c’est le vol”, he would sometimes say, quoting from Proudhon’ (Sherard, *The Real Oscar Wilde*, p. 67). Pace the assessment of D’Amico, p. 131, Kever Hartley, *Oscar Wilde: L’Influence française dans son œuvre* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1935), pp. 50, 237, does no more than assert that Wilde read Proudhon and cite this best-known aphorism of his.

<sup>108</sup> For Rudolf von (Frank) Liebig, a pianist friend of Barlas and John Davidson, see Sloan, pp. 37–42, 48–9, 69, and Liebig, *op. cit.* (Clark).

<sup>109</sup> Bell, ‘OWwW’, ff.398–9. Cf. George Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1987), p. 51.

<sup>110</sup> Bell, ‘OWwW’, f.440; N.G. Chernyshevsky, *What Is To Be Done? Tales about New People* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), esp. 153–62 (see also pp. 138–9, 281–2, 304–8); Nicolas Walter, ‘The Man Who Did’, *Freedom*, 25 December 1982.

*Conditions of Men* (1882), in which Angela Messenger, ‘the richest heiress in England’, establishes the Stepney Dress-makers’ Association, another co-operative workshop, which was ‘to be self-governed, and to share the proceeds among them...with regard to skill and industry’ and the idea of which Wilde said had been taken from *What Is To Be Done?*, but which in Besant’s version is equipped with a tennis court and gymnasium.<sup>111</sup> Bell quotes several passages from *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, suggesting that Wilde was influenced by these and Besant’s wit when he wrote ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’:

‘... ask her if she wants to do the grandest thing ever done for men; ask her if she will, as a new and startling point of departure, remember that men want joy. If she will ask me, I will deliver a lecture on the necessity of pleasure, the desirableness of pleasure, the beauty of pleasure.’

‘You think that Governments can do everything for you. You FOOLS! Has any Government ever done anything for you? ... Can it give you what you want? No.’

‘We could make them discontented, at least’, said Angela. ‘Discontent must come before reform.’

‘We should leave them to reform themselves,’ said Harry. ‘The mistake of philanthropists is to think that they can do for people what can only be done by the people.’

<sup>111</sup> Bell, ‘OWwW’, f. 440. Walter Besant, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men: An Impossible Story* (1882; London: Chatto & Windus, 1891 edn), pp. 45, 80, and, for the workshop, see esp. chaps. 9, 11, 13.

Ethel, from the first, was more inclined to make allowances for Emma than I was. She bore patiently with Emma’s conceit, her perpetual demands, her ungraciousness, her browbeating and her bullying.<sup>32</sup>

Reynolds’s swingeing attack cannot be easily dismissed as sexist, anti-American or anti-Semitic – he was a notably unconventional, radical man, a Quaker and anti-imperialist – particularly as Mannin’s treatments of Goldman in two of her novels are remarkably similar in tone.<sup>33</sup> It is also relevant that Vernon Richards, whose founding and editing of *Spain and the World* Goldman praised as exemplary, concurred at the time with – and continued to express – Reynolds’s criticisms.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Reginald Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes* (London: Jarrolds, 1956), pp. 153–4.

<sup>33</sup> Ethel Mannin, *Comrade O Comrade* (London: Jarrolds [1947]), pp. 117–21, and *Lover under Another Name* (London: The Book Club edn [1953]), pp. 136–9. For Mannin on Reynolds on Goldman,

<sup>34</sup> Wexler, pp. 214, 285 n55, cites but does not quote from two remarkable letters in the possession of Heiner Becker (Vero Richards to EG [8 August 1939]; EG to Vero Richards, 29 August 1939); and Richards also made clear his antipathy in several conversations with the present writer during the last fifteen years of his life. A milder – but barbed – view of Goldman in London is provided by Albert Meltzer in his two volumes of memoirs: *The Anarchists in London, 1935–1955* (Sanday, Orkney: Cienfuegos Press, 1975), pp. 14–16, 18, and *I Couldn’t Paint Golden Angels: Sixty Years of Commonplace Life and Anarchist Agitation* (Edinburgh and San Francisco: AK Press, 1996), pp. 45–50, 53–4, 62–3. Evidence concerning the thickness of Goldman’s English accent is contradictory, yet there is virtual consensus that she was, throughout her life, an outstanding public speaker (see, for example, the testimonies in Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 52, 54, 62, 67, 70, 71, 78, 185, 201, 459). Reactions to her personality varied wildly, but for a thoroughly approving assessment see the autobiography of a sponsor of her anarchist front organizations: S. Vere Pearson, *Men, Medicine and Myself* (London: Museum Press, 1946), pp. 192–3).

this is provided by Reginald Reynolds, Ethel Mannin's husband and himself a sponsor of the SIA:

She stamped through life, aggressive and domineering as any dictator, meeting criticism ... with a stiff lower lip, a hostile glare and an irrelevant comment... How the 'Red Emma' legend ever came into being is puzzling, but it is true that she drew good-sized audiences, though her arrogant behaviour on the platform was an outrage. She fidgeted impatiently while other speakers were on their feet; and if they went a minute beyond their allotted time... she would pass notes to the Chairman. The Chairman was generally Ethel. When, at last, her turn came ... Emma would rise and glare at her audience, a short, stout and quite hideously ugly old woman, with an incredible amount of whisky under her corset, for she never went to any meeting without a flask to flush the springs of invective. Then it would begin, 'You English people...' How she hated the English, especially her own audience! She reviled them in her pidgin American, her voice something between a bleat and a bellow. She accused them of ignorance, apathy, treachery, hypocrisy and – with reference to collections which anybody else would have thought rather generous – personal stinginess. The rest of the long, long rant would consist of strings of clichés, with scarcely a scrap of useful information, about the Spa-anish people. In spite of her objection to any other speaker exceeding his or her ten or fifteen minutes, Emma's hour always seemed interminable. The harsh voice of the old ham orator is something I can still hear. She was a mob to herself.

And Angela, the philanthropist, writes: 'Without discontent, nothing can be done.' Undoubtedly there is a relationship between the two texts.<sup>112</sup>

Proudhon has been scarcely mentioned and producers' cooperation, Chernyshevsky and Besant are all quite new in discussions of Wilde's anarchism; but none of this is implausible and it significantly extends our knowledge of his political ideas and interests. It must be mentioned, however, that on one matter Bell strains confidence in his reliability by going entirely over the top. He writes of Frank Harris's misjudgment in publishing in the *Fortnightly Review* an article by the French anarchist, Charles Malato, rhapsodizing Ravachol and Henry and contributing in 1894 to Harris's dismissal as editor. He later added as an afterthought a handwritten footnote that 'Ravachol was the man in whom Wilde was so much interested, whose body he went to see after the execution'.<sup>113</sup> Ravachol was guillotined far away from Paris in the small town of Montbrison (Loire) on 11 July 1892; the execution was public; Wilde was that month taking a cure at Bad Homburg (near Frankfurt am Main) with Alfred Douglas; he was eighteen months later to pronounce that 'the dynamite policy is very absurd indeed' (although in 1898 he was to meet a young poet who was 'the intimate friend of Emile Henry...and has told me wonderful things about him and his life').<sup>114</sup> Bell also says that his friend Rudolf von Liebich 'taught music to Wilde's children and French to his wife', yet this seems most unlikely since it is unmentioned in Liebich's brief memoir of Wilde.<sup>115</sup>

As with Carpenter, Wilde can also be regarded as anarchist in his 'sexual philosophy' and, while Bell did not talk to him

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<sup>112</sup> Bell, 'OWwW', f.440. Besant, pp. 82, 99, 103, 197. For Wilde and Besant, see also Wilde, *Intentions*, p. 402; Holland and Hart-Davis, pp. 318, 356, 362n, 409, 488, 868, 1177; Sherard, *The Real Oscar Wilde*, p. 364.

<sup>113</sup> Bell, 'OwwW', ff. 179a-80; Pullar, p. 154.

<sup>114</sup> Ellmann, *Wilde*, pp. 368-9; Holland and Hart-Davis, pp. 530-5, 1108.

<sup>115</sup> Bell, 'OWwW', ff. 115-16; Liebich, *op. cit.* (Clark).

about this, he did with ‘two or three of his friends – among them Harris’.<sup>116</sup> Bell reports that they agreed that ‘Wilde went further than Carpenter. Carpenter merely defended the person who chose homosexuality instead of heterosexuality. Wilde, I was told, declared in theory for both.’ That is, Wilde was an advocate of bisexuality:

He was quoted to me as speaking of ‘the enjoyment in music of the tenor as well as the soprano’, as being for ‘the possibility of passionate friendship between any two human beings’. I was told that when it was objected to him that he was merely ‘proposing to use the left hand instead of the right’, he had declared himself ‘for the seizure of enjoyment boldly with both hands’.

Most anarchist of all, and anticipatory of Aldous Huxley, Christopher Pallis and particularly Alex Comfort: ‘He had explained that he was for “the liberation of the sexual emotions over the greatest possible area” – for “the opening up of a new region of voluptuous and aesthetic sensation”’.<sup>117</sup>

The heterosexual Bell explains that when he spoke to Wilde alone he was ‘on a footing quite different to that of our first meeting’:

It was the acceptance of each other by two men between whom there was no need of discussion and explanation, who knew that they had the same general attitude to the problems of life and society as opposed to that of a hostile outside world, two men who knew that each had at least sometimes

<sup>116</sup> Who besides Harris were these friends? Liebich, also living in Los Angeles in the 1930s, was almost certainly one.

<sup>117</sup> Bell, ‘OWwW’, f. 337.

ship upon which Goldman so depended. After being contacted early in 1938, Herbert Read, as the sole significant anarchist intellectual in Britain, was soon working closely with Goldman. After she had left for Canada, Goldman told Read that he and Mannin were the only two ‘real comrades and friends’ that she had made during the entire three-year period in London.<sup>29</sup> Outside the capital John Cowper Powys, whom she was never to meet in his own country, proved through his letters to be an invaluable morale-booster, fully cognizant of her American status (and she, of course, aware of *his*), as well as endorsing her savage critique of the English character. So she commented: I know few English to whom I can appeal easily...somehow I always feel there is a wall between most of them and me.... Of course you are Welsh. That may make a difference, or perhaps it is due to the fact that you have lived in America long...<sup>30</sup> She must also have appreciated the nonconforming, exuberant, unrestrained, utterly unbuttoned-down style of her correspondent. As she herself said: ‘Yes, Powys has been a great support, just by his beautiful spirit, and the encouragement he has given me’; and again: ‘Yes, the letters from John Cowper Powys are very beautiful indeed. It has been a great help in my life and work in England to have his friendship.’<sup>31</sup>

To evaluate fully the contribution Mannin, Read and Powys made to making Goldman’s life in Britain more tolerable, it should be understood quite how much the English, for their part, disliked Goldman. An exceptionally striking example of

<sup>29</sup> Letter of 5 June 1939, cited by Wexler, *Goldman in Exile*, p. 214. For a discussion of the relationship between Goldman and Mannin, see Kathleen Bell, ‘Ethel Mannin’s Fiction and the Influence of Emma Goldman’, in H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight (eds.), *To Hell with Culture’: Anarchism and Twentieth-Century English Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), esp. pp. 82–90.

<sup>30</sup> GA, XXVIII D, letter from EG to JCP, 29 April 1937 (*LJCP*, p. 75).

<sup>31</sup> GA, XXVI, letter from EG to unknown correspondent, n.d.; GA, XXVII D, letter from EG to Mr Rosenberg, 8 August 1938.

institutions. She contrasted 'this blood-freezing country' with 'the South of France where it is warm out of doors and where one might meet people with red blood in their veins and not water which the British certainly seem to have'.<sup>26</sup> As she had explained in 1933: 'Being Russian by birth and having lived in America during my most impressionable years I may have been spoiled by the warmth and an easy friendliness of both. I feel at home with Russians and Americans. I have never yet felt that with any English person...'<sup>27</sup>

An imperative need of hers had always been for confidants, of either gender, who were on the same emotional and intellectual wavelength. She had to begin establishing herself in Britain in 1936–7 more-or-less afresh, as friends she had made during previous visits to London, such as Rebecca West (the author of the introduction to Goldman's *My Disillusionment in Russia*, published in London in 1925) and Stella Churchill (a medical psychologist who had been a Labour member of the London County Council and a parliamentary candidate), distanced themselves now that she was the emissary of Spanish anarchism:

Rebecca? You ask what she is doing? NOTHING. I think she gave her name [as a sponsor of the SIA] because she could not refuse me being face to face with me. I have tried and tried to get in touch with her on the phone. But she was either out or about to go out, or in the country.<sup>28</sup>

In the place of those old friends, three people were to play essential roles for her in or after 1936.

It was the novelist Ethel Mannin who became her intimate political associate and was able to provide the intense friend-

<sup>26</sup> GA, XXVII B, letter from EG to the *Vanguard* Group, 22 April 1938; GA, XXXXI, letter from EG to Millie Rocker, n.d. [spring 1936].

<sup>27</sup> GA, XXVI, letter from EG to Ethel Mannin, 3 December 1933.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, letter from EG to Ethel Mannin, 2 March 1938.

bidden defiance to that hostility. I talked with him, in short, as one rebel to another.<sup>118</sup>

Bell's testimony in his unpublished book is unique, for here a committed and knowledgeable anarchist reports, even if thirty-five years later, a conversation with Wilde about anarchism. His overall conclusion as to Wilde's political position is as convincing as it is judicious:

... in his maturity he was undoubtedly an Anarchist, an Anarchist of the type of Edward Carpenter or Elisée Reclus, an Anarchist philosophic and humanitarian but clean-cut and plain-spoken, though avoiding the use of the term Anarchism itself as one likely to cause misunderstanding in the minds of his readers.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 30.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 93.

## 5. John Cowper Powys I: His life-philosophy and individualist anarchism

Two chapters in this book are devoted to John Cowper Powys, whom most readers are likely to consider an improbable choice for even one. Such attention is justified for three reasons: the originality and importance of his life-philosophy and its contribution to anarchist thought; the reformulation of his socio-political outlook as a result of the Spanish Revolution and the resultant impact on his fiction and other writings; and the still insufficient appreciation of his literary achievement.

Between 1929 and 1951 Powys published a series of major novels: *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Weymouth Sands*, *Maiden Castle*, *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*. These are such as to place him for many notable critics and fellow writers – J.B. Priestley, Henry Miller, G. Wilson Knight, Angus Wilson, Iris Murdoch, George Steiner and A.N. Wilson have been prominent advocates – amongst the greatest novelists of his century. For some it is the *Autobiography* of 1934, memorable for its far-reaching candour, that remains his exceptional achievement. Since Powys's death in 1963, the republication of all his books, an increasing flow of monographs, and indications of fundamental shifts in general critical assessment, make it increasingly probable that the claims of this minority tradition will eventually become the accepted opinion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Boris Ford (ed.), *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 8 vols., 1983), VII, pp. 86, 99, 187–

of the May Days, Largo Caballero was overthrown; the CNT left the Valencia government (although it was to re-enter in March 1938); Juan Negrin became prime minister; and Communist influence was very considerably increased. There were even more far-reaching consequences: the Communists proceeded to liquidate the POUM (with whom Orwell had fought); anarcho-sindicalist supremacy in Catalonia was broken; and the social revolution was reversed everywhere with the dismantling of the collectives.

On 29 May 1937 Goldman summed up to Powys:

I been have extremely distressed over the events in Spain early this month; not that they have come as a surprise. I saw clearly that entering any Ministries and making concessions to the various political Parties would bring dire results to the [CNT and FAI].... Frankly, if the revolution should prove lost life will hardly have any further meaning. It is not sentiment at all on my part, it is merely facing issues.<sup>25</sup>

All, eventually, was lost, but Goldman kept battling on until the end. She made a third visit to Spain in September 1938, spending seven weeks in Barcelona. On 8 April 1939 she sailed from Britain for Canada. Barcelona had fallen to the Nationalists on 26 January and by 1 April the victorious Franco was able to declare the end of the war; but now it was necessary to raise aid in North America for the tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of Spanish libertarian refugees who had streamed over the frontier into France. Goldman continued in Canada, probably still hoping to be readmitted to the USA; but on 14 May 1940 she died in Toronto, at the age of seventy.

Emma Goldman detested England, endlessly complaining of having to work in 'the barren spiritual soil' of its people and

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<sup>25</sup> GA, XXVIII D (*LJCEG*, pp. 78–9).



I often wonder; how could it happen that you, EMMA GOLDMAN, who for *forty five years* has been preaching against forming a Government during a Revolution, and certainly against the participation of Anarchists in it, COULD NOW BE WILLING TO REPRESENT THE GENERALITAT and accept credentials from it? For a Government it is, Emmotchka – no matter what is called.<sup>24</sup>

It was during the winter of 1936–7 that the Spanish Communist Party – a minuscule, unimportant organization at the beginning of the year – was able to extend its influence dramatically, largely since, on account of the adherence of the liberal democracies to the policy of non-intervention, Republican Spain was obliged to depend on Russian arms supplies and advisors. As early as September 1936 a Soviet agent had been detailed to Spain to establish the NKVD, the political police. From her first visit Goldman abhorred the Communist presence in the Popular Front and the lionization of the USSR (even in revolutionary Barcelona); and she warned ceaselessly against the mushroom growth in Spain of Stalinist power.

The crisis came in the May Days of 1937. Fighting erupted in Barcelona from 3 May between, on the one hand, the CNT-FAI rank and file and the dissident Marxist POUM and, on the other, the Communist-controlled Assault Guards, leaving five hundred killed and over a thousand wounded. It was suppressed by 7 May with the dispatch of troops by the Popular Front government (now in Valencia). As a result

<sup>24</sup> GA, XXVIII D, letter from EG to Thomas H. Bell, 8 March 1937; letter from Mollie Steimer to EG, 14 January 1937. Robert W. Kern, 'Anarchist Principles and Spanish Reality: Emma Goldman as a Participant in the Civil War 1936–39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 11, nos. 2 and 3 (July 1976), is illuminating on the way in which Goldman was 'caught in the middle'; but he makes such bad factual errors that the article should only be consulted by those with specialist knowledge. Wexler, *Goldman in Exile*, chap. 9, is, in contrast, entirely reliable.

It is virtually impossible to convey the nature of such distinctive fiction. Powys combines twentieth-century introspection and analysis of the relations between men and women with the social panoramas, humour and prolixity of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelists. The uninitiated might do worse than to attempt to imagine an amalgam of Lawrence and Dickens, Hardy and Dostoievsky, Proust and Scott. To these great names two others need to be added: that of Wordsworth, in order to suggest Powys's characteristic attention to and communion with the natural world, animate and inanimate; and Blake's, since Powys shares his reverence for life and belief that 'everything that lives is holy', as well as his radical rejection of the established order.<sup>2</sup> It is also a commonplace of Powys criticism that he possesses an empathy with women, an entry into the minds and feelings of women, unrivalled by any other male writer.<sup>3</sup>

Powys was born in 1872 at Shirley, Derbyshire. His surname is certainly Welsh and later in his life he liked to consider himself Welsh, yet both his parents were clearly English and

90, and VIII, pp. 68, 100; Boris Ford (ed.), *The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 9 vols., 1992), VIII, pp. 37–8. The writers are John Holloway, the Leavisite Denys Thompson, and Wilfrid Mellers and Rupert Hildyard.

<sup>2</sup> For Blake, cf. Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 105–6. The other principal work of literary analysis is G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest: A Chart of the Prose Works of John Cowper Powys* (London: Methuen, 1964). See also the seven items on Powys in G. Wilson Knight, *Neglected Powers: Essays on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971); and Jeremy Hooker, *John Cowper Powys* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> This, admittedly, is something that has usually been said by men – but see Belinda Humfrey (ed.), 'Introduction', *Essays on John Cowper Powys* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972), pp. 24–5; and Carole Coates, 'Gerda and Christie', in Belinda Humfrey (ed.), *John Cowper Powys's 'Wolf Solent': Critical Studies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), esp. p. 159. Alice Wexler has commented to me that, while Powys 'obviously' had an empathy with women, 'it was stronger than that', 'more an identification with women' (letter of 22 July 1992).

he himself had never lived in Wales before 1935. His father, Charles Francis Powys, was a wealthy Anglican clergyman, descended from landed proprietors on the Welsh Borders in Shropshire. His mother, Mary Cowper Johnson, came from Norfolk and through her he was related to the poets John Donne and William Cowper. In 1879 the Revd. Powys moved the family to his native Dorset, when he accepted a curacy at Dorchester so as to be close to his widowed mother in Weymouth, and then in 1885 to Montacute, Somerset, where he became vicar; and it was Wessex which was to provide the setting for many of John Cowper's novels. Powys's younger brothers Theodore Francis (T.F.) and Llewelyn were also to become professional writers, and together they form a remarkable literary trio comparable only with the Brontës and much lesser Sitwells, but in addition no fewer than four of the other seven Powys siblings to survive childhood were published authors.<sup>4</sup>

J.C. Powys was educated at Sherborne School and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where he read history. On graduating in 1894, instead of entering the Church for which he had been intended, he gave lectures at several girls' schools in Brighton and Eastbourne, supplemented by an allowance of £60 per annum from his father. He moved on in 1898 to work full-time for the Oxford University Extension Delegacy, spend-

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<sup>4</sup> Morine Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory: The Life of John Cowper Powys* (New York, Woodstock and London: Overlook Duckworth, 2007), the first full-length biography has now appeared; but Richard Perceval Graves, *The Powys Brothers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), is an ambitious collective biography, and Herbert Williams, *John Cowper Powys* (Bridgend: Seren, 1997), an excellent brief one. The major source for the first fifty years of his life is John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (1934; London: Macdonald, 1967 edn). Malcolm Elwin, *The Life of Llewelyn Powys* (London: John Lane, Bodley Head, 1946), esp. chap. 1, is also useful for the family background.

Nationalist victory and defeat of the Spanish Republic. The cumulative effect was shattering. As early as 14 May 1937, writing about the May Days to her most trusted political correspondent, the German anarchist Rudolf Rocker, by then living in the USA, Goldman declared that she could not continue as official representative of the CNT-FAI on account of 'the worst betrayal of the Revolution since Russia' – 'it is a repetition of Russia with the identical method of Lenin against the Anarchists and the SR[s] who refused to barter the Revolution for the Brest Litovsk Peace' – but was meanwhile 'too grieved and shaken' over the assassination in Barcelona, almost certainly by the Communists, of Camillo Berneri, signing herself 'your heart broken comrade'.<sup>22</sup> By the end of year, in letters to Rocker, the carbons of which she marked 'under no circumstances are these...to be circulated', she confessed, referring to Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means*: '...he holds the same position as Sasha and I do, that the means must harmonize with the ends. Alas I have gone back on that much to my shame and inner misery.'<sup>23</sup>

The CNT had entered the Catalan government (the Generalitat) on 27 September 1936 and then, on 4 November, Largo Caballero's Republican government in Madrid. This negated the fundamental anarchist tenet of opposition to the state, but Goldman, although privately an undoubted critic of 'the labyrinth of Compromise', occupied something of an intermediate position, oscillating between pragmatic defence of the CNT-FAI leadership and sharing the views of its purist opponents. She provoked in consequence the anger of both extremes, for example, the historian Max Nettlau on the former side and, on the other, Mollie Steimer, one of her dearest friends and a fellow Russo-American, in Paris:

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<sup>22</sup> GA, XXXXI.

<sup>23</sup> GA, XXVII A, letters of 21, 30 December 1937.

did not belong to that generation – they belonged to the generation of its parents or, even, grandparents. And rather than resistance to Fascism, it was the social achievements of the Spanish Revolution that inspired them. In that they stand alone, among figures of the front rank, with Read and Orwell (and it will be seen how he and *Homage to Catalonia* fared, on the left at least, his reputation only taking off when *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were taken up as being anti-Soviet at the onset of the Cold War).

Goldman was ecstatic about the first – and, to date, only – thoroughgoing, successful anarchist revolution:

Here I am again in England after three months in Spain. I may say, without exaggeration, the three most exultant months of my entire career ... it was the first time in my life that I could see an attempt being made to realize the ideal and ideas for which I have struggled all my life....The very thing which our opponents declared to be impossible and of which Anarchists are supposed to be incapable is now being demonstrated all through Catalonia...I was a witness to the colossal efforts made by my people – people, maligned, misrepresented, charged with every crime in the calendar. Why, then, should I not feel proud?<sup>21</sup>

Yet it was very far from being the case that Spain provided Goldman with uncomplicated comfort and a revolutionary haven after her years of exile. The CNT and FAI compromised their principles by entering government, a process which contributed to the ensuing disaster; the Revolution was succeeded by counter-revolution, with the purge of revolutionaries and suppression of the collectives; and all this before the ultimate

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<sup>21</sup> Bissell Collection, Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, letter from EG to JCP, 5 January 1937 (*LJCP*, p. 59).

ing the winters lecturing in history and literature all over England.<sup>5</sup>

From 1905 he began lecture tours in the USA and was phenomenally successful there, travelling incessantly throughout the country, speaking mainly about the classic writers of Europe and America to popular audiences, until his retirement in 1930. As a result, his reputation – certainly as a speaker, but initially also as a writer – was much higher in the USA than in Britain. Henry Miller always maintained that the principal influences on him as a youth were Powys and Emma Goldman:

I remember most vividly the way [Powys] wrapped himself in his gown, closed his eyes and covered them with one hand, before launching into one of those inspired flights of eloquence which left me dizzy and speechless.... Leaving the hall after his lectures, I often felt as if he had put a spell upon me. A wondrous spell it was, too. For, aside from the celebrated experience with Emma Goldman in San Diego, it was my first intimate experience, my first real contact, with the living spirit of those few rare beings who visit this earth.

Powys, needless to say, had his own select luminaries whom he raved about. I use the word ‘raved’ advisedly. I had never before heard any one rave in public, particularly about authors, thinkers, philosophers. Emma Goldman, equally inspired on the platform, and often Sibylline in utterance, gave nevertheless the impression of radiating from an intellectual centre. Warm and

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<sup>5</sup> The authoritative treatment is provided by Stuart Marriott and Janet Coles, ‘John Cowper Powys as University Extension Lecturer, 1898–1909’, *Powys Journal*, IV (1994). See also the syllabuses printed in Derek Langridge, *John Cowper Powys: A Record of Achievement* (London: Library Association, 1966), pp. 21–52.

emotional though she was, the fire she gave off was an electrical one. Powys fulminated with the fire and smoke of the soul, or the depths which cradle the soul. Literature was for him like manna from above. He pierced the veil time and again. For nourishment he gave us wounds, and the scars have never healed.<sup>6</sup>

Powys, atypically for an upper-middle-class Englishman, loved America and Americans – as his *Autobiography* makes abundantly clear. Moreover, he lived with an American woman for forty years. He had married Margaret Alice Lyon in 1896, a son, Littleton Alfred, was born in 1902, but the couple were disastrously mismatched and once Powys's lecturing career was entirely switched to the USA in 1909, they were in effect separated, although the lion's share of his large earnings, while they lasted, was returned to England to maintain his wife and son in considerable comfort. In 1921 Powys met Phyllis Playter, a woman of about twenty-eight who lived independently of her family, working as a secretary, in her birthplace, Kansas City.<sup>7</sup> They were soon living together, but never married, even after Margaret Powys's death in 1947.<sup>8</sup>

It has long been apparent that it was Powys's relationship with Phyllis Playter that enabled him to proceed to the production of his great novels; and since the publication in 1987 of

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Miller, *The Books in My Life* (1951; London: Icon Books edn, 1963), pp. 146–7. See also Paul Roberts, *The Ideal Ringmaster: A Biographical Sketch of Geoffrey Arnold Shaw (1884–1937)* (Kilmersdon, near Bath: Powys Society, 1996), pp. 10–29, for the years of American lecturing.

<sup>7</sup> For the background and character of this remarkable, deeply unorthodox woman, see Graves, pp. 150–1, 162–4; Williams, pp. 72–7; Belinda Humfrey (ed.), *Recollections of the Powys Brothers: Llewelyn, Theodore and John Cowper* (London: Peter Owen, 1980), pp. 31–2; obituary tributes, *Powys Review*, no. 10 (Spring 1982), pp. 4–8.

<sup>8</sup> For Powys's marriage, see Susan Rands, *John Cowper Powys, the Lyons and W.E. Lutyens* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2000).

now partially estranged from it on account of its participation in the Republican government; and, in any case, the success of apparently non-political, humanitarian Spanish relief bodies, often Communist-dominated, had shown their value.

*Left Review* had published the celebrated *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* during 1937, but only three of the 149 British and Irish writers who participated mentioned the anarchists favourably: Ethel Mannin, Aldous Huxley and, obliquely, Herbert Read, who then proceeded to publish his forthright article, 'The Necessity of Anarchism'. Goldman had already known Mannin for several years, but now wrote to Huxley and Read. Although Huxley responded warmly, he declined to become a sponsor for SIA since he was currently living in the USA and did not wish to be 'just a sleeping partner'. Read, already a prominent man of letters – poet, literary critic and propagandist for modern art – immediately replied by inviting her to tea.<sup>19</sup> The roll of honour of the British sponsors of SIA therefore reads: West, Ellis, Churchill, Pearson, Mannin (the treasurer), Powys and his brother Llewelyn, Herbert Read, George Orwell, Reginald Reynolds, Louis Golding, Sidonie Goossens, Brian Howard, Laurence Housman, C.E.M. Joad, Miles Malleson, Thomas Burke and Rev. James Whittle. W.H. Auden and Nancy Cunard were included initially through a misunderstanding (on the part of Brian Howard) and they, both Communist sympathizers, insisted on their names being removed.<sup>20</sup>

The Spanish Civil War shaped the political consciousness of a whole generation, which overwhelmingly saw it as representing heroic resistance to Fascism. Goldman and J.C. Powys

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<sup>19</sup> GA, XXVII A, letter from EG to Huxley, 11 January 1938; GA, letter from EG to Read, 19 January 1938, and letter from Read to EG, 20 January 1938; GA, XXXI, letter from Huxley, 28 January 1938.

<sup>20</sup> Berry, p. 209 nn44, 45, gives the names of the twenty-five patrons of the French section of SIA as well as of the nineteen countries in which sections of SIA were established.

tion of her old friend Paul Robeson, twelve months after he had sung for a fund-raising concert of April 1937.<sup>17</sup>

In Britain Goldman established what can only be described as anarchist front organizations: bodies not employing the bogey word ‘anarchism’ but which existed to aid libertarian (that is, anarchist) Spain. An important feature of these and similar bodies was the list of supporting sponsors. In 1937 there was the Committee to Aid Homeless Spanish Women and Children, whose dozen sponsors included a distinguished trio from the stage: Dame Sybil Thorndike, John Gielgud and Sir Barry Jackson. The other nine were Rebecca West, Havelock Ellis, Robert Nichols, Dr Stella Churchill (who was treasurer), Dr S. Vere Pearson, Ethel Mannin, Lady Playfair, the Earl of Listowel and John Cowper Powys.

In December 1937 Goldman returned from Spain to form the English section of the Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista (International Anti-Fascist Solidarity) or SIA. This, with an eventual eighteen sponsors, was the more important of the two aid organizations; and during 1938 Goldman produced four issues of a four-page bulletin, *SIA*. Since there was already an international anarcho-syndicalist organization in the form of the International Workingmen’s Association (Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores) (IWMA [AIT]), the anarcho-syndicalist international set up belatedly in Berlin in 1922 – and of which the CNT was the Spanish section – the establishment of the SIA in June 1937 is at first sight puzzling. As Goldman confided to Rudolf and Millie Rocker: ‘I rather think it a mistake to have brought [the SIA] to life. The comrades outside of Spain feel very much hurt that their effort[s] in raising funds are being taken out of their hands. That the whole thing is taken away from the [IWMA].’<sup>18</sup> But the IWMA, before 1936 critical of the CNT’s insurrectionism, was

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<sup>17</sup> See *LJCPEG*

<sup>18</sup> GA, XXVII D, letter of 19 November 1937.

the initial instalment of his *Diary*, it has been revealed that she also exercised a decisive critical impact on the form the novels actually took. Powys and Playter worked on them in such a way that the books were more like a collaboration than anything else.<sup>9</sup> Powys returned permanently to Britain in 1934 and settled with Playter in Corwen, a tiny and, although on the A5, fairly remote town in North Wales. In 1955, however, they removed to the less accessible slate-quarrying town of Blaenau Ffestiniog, where they lived in poverty until his death in 1963.

Powys was an all-round, prolific man of letters. Originally aspiring to be a poet, before turning to novels in his forties, he published half-a-dozen volumes of poetry, the first two appearing in 1896 and 1899.<sup>10</sup> His works of literary appreciation (as opposed to criticism) – *Visions and Revisions* (1915), *Suspended Judgments* (1916), *The Pleasures of Literature*, entitled equally significantly *Enjoyment of Literature* in the USA (1938) – seem reliable indicators of the scope and tone of his lectures.<sup>11</sup> He also wrote many ‘philosophical’ books expounding to the ordinary man or woman his personal philosophy of individual self-liberation, and it is principally these that are discussed in this chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> See, especially, Frederick Davies, ‘Introduction’, to Frederick Davies (ed.), *The Diary of John Cowper Powys, 1930* (London: Greyhound Books, 1987). The ensuing publication history of the *Diaries* is: *The Diary of John Cowper Powys, 1931* (1990); Morine Krissdóttir (ed.), *Petrushka and the Dancer: The Diaries of John Cowper Powys, 1929–1939* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1995) [selections]; Anthony Head (ed.), *The Diary of John Cowper Powys for 1929* (1998); Morine Krissdóttir and Roger Peers (eds.), *The Dorset Year: The Diary of John Cowper Powys, June 1934 – July 1935* (Kilmersdon, near Bath: Powys Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> See Kenneth Hopkins (ed.), *John Cowper Powys: A Selection from His Poems* (London: Macdonald, 1964); Roland Mathias, *The Hollowed-Out Elder Stalk: John Cowper Powys as Poet* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1979).

<sup>11</sup> See also John Cowper Powys, *Singular Figures: Six Lectures* (Colchester: Footprint Press, 1989); Ann M. Reed, ‘From the Front Row: Notes from the Lectures of John Cowper Powys’, ed. Melvon L. Ankeny, *Powys Journal*, VII (1997), pp. 43–59.

The claim that Powys is a major writer, though, must rest on his best novels, his autobiography, his diaries and his marvellous letters. Powys was an insatiable correspondent: it is estimated that he wrote upwards of 40,000 letters in the course of his ninety years.<sup>12</sup> After his return to Britain he would have written on average between ten and twenty letters each day to a great range of people: brothers and sisters, literary friends, admirers of his books (mostly uncelebrated and unlearned, but passionate readers). What makes his letters so remarkable is the full, unrestrained, playful display of his personality, idiosyncrasies, concerns. They exhibit exuberance, eloquence, a penetrating intellect, humour, generosity, goodness, utter lack of self-regard. Reading them, one is reminded of two of his favourite authors, Rabelais and Sterne. A Powys letter is unmistakable, visually as well as verbally; but, chameleon-like, he adapts himself to the character and interests of the recipient. Collections of the letters to seventeen correspondents have already appeared, the outstanding ones being the *Letters to Louis Wilkinson, 1935–1956* (1958), published during Powys's lifetime, and the two volumes of *Letters to His Brother Llewelyn* (1975), but the two volumes of *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Frances Gregg* (1994–6), *Letters to Philippa Powys* (1996) and *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Dorothy Richardson* (2008) are also important.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Blackmore (ed.), *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to G.R. Wilson Knight* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1983), pp. 10–11. This assertion as to the major status of Powys's letters has, I am surprised to find, rarely been made in print even by his greatest admirers. One example, though, is Blackmore, pp. 8–11.

<sup>13</sup> The other published volumes are: *Letters to Nicholas Ross* (1971); *Letters to Glyn Hughes* (1971; enlarged edn, 1994); *Letters 1937–1954* [to Iorwerth C. Peate] (1974); *Letters to Henry Miller* (1975); *Letters to C. Benson Roberts* (1975); *Letters to Clifford Tolchard* (1975); *Letters to Sven-Erik Täckmark* (1983); *Letters to G.R. Wilson Knight* (1983); *Letters to Ichiro Hara* (1990); *Letters to Hal W. and Violet Trovillion* (1990); *Letters to Frank Warren* (1998); *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman* (2008).

Otherwise, among Liberals, trade unionists, members of the Labour Party – all the natural supporters of the Spanish Republic – the CNT and FAI were synonymous with the worst excesses of the popular fury released by the attempted military coup: the burning of churches, the murder of priests, monks and nuns, and a total of 55,000 deaths which it has been estimated took place behind the Republican lines. These atrocities received exaggerated publicity in the press, which failed to report that in Nationalist Spain an even bloodier terror was occurring, in which it is thought the number killed was in the order of 75,000.<sup>16</sup> In any case, most progressives in Britain believed that change must come through constitutional, parliamentary procedures and firmly rejected revolutionary means of any kind.

The Communists did not share these reformist scruples, but injected into the politics of the Civil War a virulent intolerance of their revolutionary rivals. Always contemptuous of the socialist credentials of any opponents – and here in danger of being outflanked by the constructive achievements of the Spanish Revolution – Communists could, quite plausibly, argue that the anarchists impeded the waging of a conventional war. In addition, Communism's subordination to the policy needs (domestic and foreign) of the Soviet Union ensured the exportation to Spain of Stalinism and the purge of 'Trotskyists' then raging in Russia, as well as the curbing of the Revolution. Among the consequences were two 'civil wars' within the Civil War (the 'May Days' of 1937 in Barcelona and in March 1939 in Madrid) and the dismantling of the collectives. In her letters to Powys and other correspondents Goldman was eloquent concerning Communism's disastrous impact on Spain and its malign influence elsewhere. A striking example of the latter was the defec-

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<sup>16</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1977), pp. 265, 270–1; Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War, 1936–39* (London: Weidenfeld, 1986), p. 122.

During the 1940s anarchism was to exert a minor, but very real, influence, primarily cultural, in Britain. Even then, though, and still more in the period of the Spanish Civil War, it was Communism which possessed a magnetic appeal on the far left of politics. This was a crucial factor affecting the second aspect of Goldman's dual problem: the hostility to anarchism on the British left. It was only the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and, particularly, its general secretary, Fenner Brockway, whom she found willing to collaborate with her; but the ILP, after disaffiliating from the Labour Party in 1932, was spinning into marginality, and in Spain was linked to the quasi-Trotskyist POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista), object of the purge following the events of May 1937. As early as January 1937 Goldman went so far as to say:

You can see Fenner making love to the CNT-FAI. Well, you and I know the motivation....The ILP is affiliated with the POUM and you know how persecuted the latter is by their erstwhile comrades, the Stalinites. As long ago as two months or more the POUM already had a change of heart towards the CNT-FAI. And now it is altogether hanging on to the coat tails of our people.<sup>15</sup>

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Press, 1944); M.L. Berneri, 'Sexuality and Freedom', *NOW*, no. 5 [1945]. See also *Marie Louise Berneri, 1918–1949*, p. 20, for Reich.

<sup>15</sup> GA, XXVIII C, letter from EG to Alexander Schapiro, 9 January 1937. See also Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London: New Leader, 1947 edn), chaps. 30, 31. The problems in 1937 for the ILP, caught between the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain, are discussed by Tom Buchanan, 'The Death of Bob Smillie, the Spanish Civil War, and the Eclipse of the Independent Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, XL (ii) (1997), pp. 442–4, 455–61. Given its manifest importance in British political and social history the ILP has in general been strangely neglected by historians, although there is Robert E. Dowse, *Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party, 1893–1940* (London: Longmans, 1966).

Powys's novels are notoriously long, yet difficult to excerpt, and although some of his admirers, most forcefully George Steiner, impressed by the model of Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner* (three years after which William Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize), argue for an anthology not only has one never been published, but it is far from obvious that this would be a helpful initiative. Would one, despite his undeniable longueurs and other barriers to the common reader, consider selecting choice passages from Proust?<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the best letters and all of the diaries too can be dipped into and enjoyed for their high-spirited spontaneity and profundity. Morine Krissdóttir's excellent selection, *Petrushka and the Dancer*, from a decade of the journals, now allows the ordinary reader to do just this.<sup>15</sup>

Powys's essential socio-political position is one of individualist anarchism: from the period before the First World War, during the years when he was a Communist sympathizer, even from the late 1930s to the end of the 1940s, through the 1950s and down to his death. It is noticeable that – unlike the other non-fiction works of the previous fifteen years – *In Spite Of* (1953) contains not a single reference to anarchism, yet the socio-political philosophy remains the same; and the philosophy to which I am referring is Powys's life-philosophy or life-technique.

A major impediment to the public understanding of anarchism is the way in which anarchists have divided into a variety of frequently widely divergent tendencies. The majority tendency has been anarchist communism, advocating the common ownership of the means of production, not of course under the control of the State but in a free co-operative commonwealth. In syndicalism the emphasis is on the trade unions, not

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<sup>14</sup> See George Steiner, 'The Problem of Powys', *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 May 1975. But cf. George D. Painter, 'The Oar and the Winnowing-Fan', *Dock Leaves*, Spring 1956, pp. 44–5.

<sup>15</sup> Krissdóttir, *Petrushka and the Dancer*.

only as the instruments of daily industrial struggle but also as providing the institutional structure of the future free society, which would be achieved by means of a revolutionary general strike. Whereas anarchist communism and anarcho-syndicalism are socialist ideologies relating to – and were in the past espoused by substantial sections of – the organized working class, individualist anarchism assumes that, while human beings should certainly be free and equal, they can become so only by their own individual effort, not through the action of collective organizations. Nicolas Walter's comment is that this is 'an anarchism for intellectuals, artists, and eccentrics, for people who work alone and like to keep themselves to themselves'.<sup>16</sup> This description could clearly include Powys.

The individualist current was influential in the USA, where its adherents, although as opposed to authority, capitalism and finance as European anarchists, supported the institution of private property (to the extent of the product of the individual's own labour).<sup>17</sup> The outstanding American advocate of individualist anarchism was Benjamin Tucker, who edited between 1881 and 1908 the irregular but admired periodical *Liberty*, to which Shaw was a contributor and among whose subscribers was Whitman, who remarked: 'I love him: he is plucky to the bone.'<sup>18</sup> I am not aware of Powys ever mentioning Tucker's

<sup>16</sup> Nicolas Walter, *About Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2002), p. 53.

<sup>17</sup> The authoritative work on American individualism is James J. Martin, *Men against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827–1908* (Colorado Springs, CO: Ralph Myles, 1970).

<sup>18</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 389. Inexplicably there is no full-length work on Tucker, but see: Benjamin R. Tucker, *Instead of a Book: By a Man Too Busy to Write One: A Fragmentary Exposition of Philosophical Anarchism* (New York: Benj. R. Tucker, 1893); Paul Eltzbacher, *Anarchism: Exponents of the Anarchist Philosophy* (London: Freedom Press, 1960), chap. 8; Rudolf Rocker, *Pioneers of American Freedom: Origin of Liberal and Radical Thought in America* (Los Angeles: Rocker Publications Committee, 1949), pp. 118–

centre of the new group of energetic young anarchists which had emerged around *Spain and the World*, to be joined in the 1940s by John Hewetson, Tony Gibson, George Woodcock, Philip Sansom and Colin Ward.<sup>12</sup> Richards, over a long life, was to produce a mass of journalism as well as translations and books; but his two most important works were, significantly, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*, an unsparing critique of the anarcho-syndicalism of the CNT, and *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, still remarkably the only book in English on the great Italian anarchist.<sup>13</sup> Berneri's major work was to be a survey of the classic utopias, the posthumous *Journey through Utopia*, although there was also *Workers in Stalin's Russia*, an incisively pioneering demolition of 'the Russian myth'. Her intellectual adventurousness is indicated by her early interest in the work of Wilhelm Reich.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> For Emidio Recchioni, see Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 232, 238, 288. For Marie Louise Berneri, see *Marie Louise Berneri, 1918–1949: A Tribute* (London: Marie Louise Berneri Memorial Committee, 1949), esp. p. 28; NW and HB, 'Marie Louise Berneri, 1918–1949', *Freedom*, Centenary Edition, October 1986; Vernon Richards, *Beauty Is More than 'in Eye of the Beholder': Photographs of Women and Children* (London: Freedom Press, 1999), p. 8; Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell* [hereafter *CWGO*] (London: Secker & Warburg, 20 vols., 1998), XVIII, p. 368. Obituaries of Vernon Richards appeared in *Freedom*, 12 January 2002; *The Times*, 12 December 2001; *Independent*; and (by Colin Ward) *Guardian*, 4 February 2002. See also Brian Bamford, 'Seven Decades of Vernon Richards', *Freedom*, 26 January 2002. [Vernon Richards (ed.)] *Spain 1936–1939: Social Revolution and Counter-Revolution: Selections from the Anarchist Fortnightly 'Spain and the World'* (London: Freedom Press, 1990) is an ample sampling of *Spain and the World*.

<sup>13</sup> Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution (1936–1939)* (1953; London: Freedom Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1983); Vernon Richards (ed.), *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* (London: Freedom Press, 1965). The latter was supplemented by Errico Malatesta, *The Anarchist Revolution: Polemical Articles 1924–1931*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Marie Louise Berneri, *Journey through Utopia* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950); M.L. Berneri, *Workers in Stalin's Russia* (London: Freedom



a few cities in the States. But we have nothing in London or the provincial cities. Since my return here in Dec[ember] we have the London CNT-FAI Committee, nearly the same comrades that used to be in [the] Freedom Group. That group has been pretty much of a dead letter for years.<sup>11</sup>

The events in Spain were largely responsible for some revival of interest in anarchism in Britain. In December 1936 Vero, the 21-year-old son of Emidio Recchioni, an old Italian anarchist militant and comrade of Malatesta who had escaped from the prison island of Pantelleria to London in the 1890s, launched *Spain and the World*, the paper which was to publish many articles by Goldman – and even one by Powys – and to have a circulation of 2,000. Vero Recchioni had been expelled from France the previous year for anti-Fascist activity, promptly anglicized his name to Vernon Richards and begun publication of his first paper, *Free Italy/Italia Libera*, in collaboration with the brilliant Italian anarchist philosopher, Camillo Berneri, then in exile in Paris. Berneri's daughter, Marie Louise (originally Maria Luisa), also outstandingly gifted, left France in 1937 to live with Richards in London (until her wastefully premature death in 1949). With the Nationalist victory *Spain and the World* became *Revolt!* for six issues, being succeeded for the duration of the Second World War by *War Commentary*, which reverted in 1945 to the famous old title of *Freedom* – and as such has enjoyed uninterrupted publication down to the present day. It was Marie Louise Berneri who was said to have been 'the principal theoretical influence' behind *War Commentary* and *Freedom*; and she and Richards were at the

<sup>11</sup> GA, XXVIII D, letter from EG to Augustine Souchy, 16 April 1937. For a discussion of the relationship between Spanish anarchism and the weak international movement, including Goldman's role, see Robert J. Alexander, *The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Janus Publishing, 2 vols., 1999), II, pp. 1134–62.

name, but James Joyce, who unlike Powys was well-read in anarchist theory, is reported to have said of him, 'Oh! he was the great political thinker!' and Tucker's was 'the only political philosophy he ever spoke of favourably'.<sup>19</sup> The American version of individualist anarchism, with which it is proper to associate Emerson and Thoreau, was deeply rooted, growing out of the values of the American Revolution and Jeffersonian democracy; and the first academic monograph on the subject had the (then) appropriate title of *Native American Anarchism*.<sup>20</sup> This tradition of individualism, moderate and rational, withered under a threefold challenge at the end of the nineteenth century. There was the spectacular growth of big business, trusts and plutocracy. There was mass immigration – of Germans, Italians, Russians, Jews – from continental Europe carrying with them an anarchism that was violent both verbally and physically and much involved in bitter labour struggles. And there was during the 1890s exposure in the pages of *Liberty* to the egoism of Max Stirner.

Egoism, the most extreme form of individualist anarchism, was expounded by Stirner in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (Leipzig, 1845), traditionally translated as *The Ego and His Own*. Max Stirner was the pseudonym of Johann Kaspar Schmidt, who lived between 1806 and 1856 and emerged out of the ranks of the Young (or Left) Hegelians. Stirner, who anticipated Niet-

38; Martin, chaps. 8, 9; William O. Reichert, *Partisans of Freedom: A Study in American Anarchism* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976), pp. 141–200; Michael E. Coughlin, Charles H. Hamilton and Mark A. Sullivan (eds.), *Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty: A Centenary Anthology* (St Paul, MN: Michael E. Coughlin, n.d.); Wendy McElroy, *The Debates of 'Liberty': An Overview of Individualist Anarchism, 1881–1908* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Dominic Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 74, 209.

<sup>20</sup> Eunice Minette Schuster, *Native American Anarchism: A Study of Left-Wing American Individualism* (1932; New York: Da Capo Press, 1970). See also Rocker.

zsche (although it seems that there was no direct influence)<sup>21</sup> and certainly was a precursor of much of twentieth-century existentialism, rejected not simply nation, religion, class, and ideology, but all abstractions including ‘morality, justice, obligation, reason, and duty, in favour of an intuitive recognition of the existential uniqueness of each individual’. Walter’s assessment is that this is ‘an anarchism for poets and tramps...It is anarchy here and now, if not in the world, then in one’s own life’.<sup>22</sup> Admirers of Powys will recognize that this fits him even better.

Stirner belongs with the half-dozen major anarchist theorists; and *The Ego and His Own* is one of the most original – and one of the most extreme – books ever written, its iconoclastic egoism exhilarating and its intellectual acuteness piercing, its expression harsh, combative and frequently similar to Powys’s:

History seeks for Man: but he is I, you, we. Sought as a mysterious *essence*, as the divine, first as God, then as Man...he is found as the individual, the finite, the unique one.

I am the owner of humanity, am humanity, and do nothing for the good of another humanity. Fool, you who are a unique humanity, that you make a merit of wanting to live for another than you are.<sup>23</sup>

... every one is ego; and, if only this ego has rights, then it is ‘the ego’, it is not I. But I am not an ego along with other egos, but the sole ego: I am unique. Hence my wants too are unique, and my deeds; in short, everything about me is unique. And it is only as this unique I that I take

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<sup>21</sup> Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual against Authority*, ed. James J. Martin (New York: Libertarian Book Club, 1963), p. xv.

<sup>22</sup> Walter, p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Stirner, p. 245.

November 1937, she spent a further seven weeks in Spain; but in January 1938 she was back again in London. Goldman tried, in a great variety of ways, to mobilize moral and material support for the Spanish anarchists. The problem which she confronted in Britain was twofold: the lack of an indigenous anarchist movement to assist the CNT-FAI and the hostility to anarchism amongst those who did support the Spanish Republic.

Anarchism, as I have explained in chapter 1, had been a mass force internationally in the half-century preceding the First World War, but afterwards – the apparent success of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was the principal reason – it contracted dramatically, entering a terminal decline. Only in the Hispanic world was it able to maintain its former hold; and in Spain the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, founded in 1911, actually grew in strength. The FAI was formed in 1927 as a ginger group of pure anarchists to counter reformist tendencies within the mass trade-union organization, its militants after 1930 winning control of the CNT.

Unlike such countries as France or Italy, Britain had never had a numerically significant anarchist movement; and so in the 1930s there was neither a tradition of sympathy for libertarian ideas and aspirations let alone, as in France, the resurgence of a major movement to provide solidarity for the Spanish Revolution.<sup>10</sup> In Britain even the principal anarchist journal, *Freedom*, founded back in 1886, had folded in 1927. As Goldman explained in 1937:

... there is no Anarchist movement in England. Not even as much as in America and heaven knows we have never had much of a movement there since Sasha and I had been kicked out of the country. Still we do have a few groups of young people in

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<sup>10</sup> For France, see David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917–1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), chaps. 8–12.

Goldman's attempt 'to break through the British reserve' in a lecture tour came to nothing; and on 28 June 1936 her beloved Berkman, an invalid and in pain after two operations, committed suicide in Nice. At the age of 67 this formidable, indomitable woman had reached the lowest point in her tumultuous life.

Then, on 17 July, came the military rising in Spanish Morocco; on 19 July the people were armed to resist the rebels and the Spanish Revolution had begun. For in those areas where the revolt was crushed, the working-class organizations (especially the anarchists, but also the socialists) proceeded to carry out a total social revolution: '...a proletarian revolution more profound than the Russian Revolution itself...the last revolutionary Iliad of the West.'<sup>8</sup> Goldman had previously had minimal contact with the Spanish anarchist movement, and she knew no Spanish. But by 1936 she was the foremost international anarchist activist; and, a month after the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution (and the ensuing Civil War), she received separate requests to take charge of English-language propaganda from the joint organizations of Spanish anarchism, the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) and the FAI (Federación Anarquista Ibérica). In September Goldman was welcomed in Barcelona by a mass meeting of ten thousand: a stark contrast to her reception in Britain.<sup>9</sup>

In December 1936 Goldman returned from Spain and opened a propaganda office for the CNT-FAI in London, where she remained until June 1937. Then, from September to

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Goodway (ed.), *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2008) [hereafter *LJCPEG*], pp. 35, 95).

<sup>8</sup> Cited by Raymond Carr, *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective* (London: Weidenfeld, 1993 edn), p. 95. This fine, exact description is unattributed; Carr's promise to provide full notes in the Spanish translation did not materialize; and in 1996 he confessed that they seemed 'irretrievably lost' in a letter to the writer.

<sup>9</sup> *CNT-AIT-FAI Boletín de Información*, 25 September 1936.

everything for my own, as I set myself to work, and develop myself, only as this. I do not develop men, nor as man, but, as I, I develop – myself.

That is the meaning of the – *unique one*.<sup>24</sup>

The purpose of life for Stirner is the individual's enjoyment of it:

My intercourse with the world, what does it aim at? I want to have the enjoyment of it...

My intercourse with the world consists in my enjoying it, and so consuming it for myself-enjoyment... *Intercourse* is the *enjoyment of the world*, and belongs to my – self-enjoyment..When one is anxious only to live, he easily, in this solicitude, forgets the enjoyment of life. If his only concern is for life, and he thinks 'if I only have my dear life', he does not apply his full strength to using, that is, enjoying, life. But how does one use life? In using it up, like the candle, which one uses in burning it up. One uses life, and consequently himself the living one, in *consuming* it and himself. *Enjoyment of life* is using life up.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361 (Stirner's emphasis).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 318–20 (Stirner's emphasis). For Stirner see also Herbert Read, *The Tenth Muse: Essays in Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), chap. 9; R.W.K. Paterson, *The Nihilist Egoist: Max Stirner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); John Carroll, *Max Stirner: The Ego and His Own* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971) [a controversial abridgement]; John Carroll, *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace: The Anarcho-Psychological Critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974); John P. Clark, *Max Stirner's Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1976); Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), chap. 3; David Leopard, 'Introduction', to Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Powys was familiar with Stirner's famous book, which had a considerable impact on Anglophone writers – Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis are examples – during the decade after its first appearance in English in 1907, when it was published by Tucker in New York.<sup>26</sup> (Tucker brought *Liberty* to an end the following year, when he emigrated to France, dying in Monaco in 1939.) Publication of *The Ego and His Own* in London followed in 1912; and by 1918 it had entered Boni and Liveright's 'Modern Library of the World's Best Books'. Isobel Powys Marks, daughter of A.R. Powys, remembered that about the time she was eight (that would have been around 1914) there was a book on her father's shelves which she took to be *THE EGG AND HIS OWN SISTER*. Later she came to realize that the spine really read *THE EGO AND HIS OWN – STIRNER*. She did not believe that Bertie Powys would have bought the book: it would have been either a gift or left unintentionally by a visitor.

Powys employs, interestingly, its non-sexist title *The Ego and Its Own* (under which it is currently available from both the Rebel Press and Cambridge University Press) and links it to two of the authors he most esteemed, Dorothy Richardson and Montaigne, while mentioning a third, Pater:

The chances are ... that ... it will be left to some more reckless and daring thinker than any produced by our generation to do full justice to the new gospel of the art of life which these nine volumes [of *Pilgrimage*] contain ... a whole new way of taking life is revealed here for those who have

<sup>26</sup> See Tom Kinninmont, 'Max Stirner and *The Enemy of the Stars*', *Lewisletter*, no. 1 (December 1974); Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 145–8, 154–9. For Joyce, as well as others, there is Jean-Michel Rabaté, *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. chaps. 2, 3.

the Atlantic. So her New York attorney, Harry Weinberger, could write to Goldman:

It was good to get your letter ... with its fine letters of John Cowper Powys. I remember doing some legal work for him a long time ago so when you see him give him my best. I have always admired his lecturing as well as his writings, not to mention his fine idealism.<sup>5</sup>

By 1938, however, Goldman had made a more realistic assessment when she informed the New York anarchists of *Vanguard*: 'I am also sending you a copy of a message sent by John Cowper Powys, probably better known in America than in his own country...'<sup>6</sup>

Goldman was in a comparable position to Powys. In the USA she was a 'household name', but in Britain Emma Goldman was scarcely known. After almost thirty years' familiarity with America, though, Powys was clearly flattered both by Goldman's initial approach and by her continuing correspondence with him: 'I was so honoured & pleased to get a letter from you....I have the greatest admiration for you'; and

Everyone in America from President to truck-driver, from the great magnates to the hotel bell-boys knows 'Emma Goldman'! You are a *Household word* over there like all the great American figures that have caught the popular imagination. And I am perfectly ready to confess that I derive and get a real *snobbish thrill* of *proud delight* (intellectual snobbishness anyway!) to be actually named her friend by the famous 'Emma'!<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> GA, XXVII C, letter of 19 July 1938.

<sup>6</sup> GA, XXVII B, letter of 21 April 1938.

<sup>7</sup> GA, XIX 3, letter from JCP to EG, 3 January 1936, and XXVII B, letter from JCP to EG, 4 February 1938 (Powys's emphasis) (reprinted in David

published *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama*, ‘the first book of the kind to appear in English’.<sup>2</sup> In 1919, however, she was deported during the ‘Red Scare’ to Soviet Russia. Initially a supporter of the Bolshevik Revolution, she fast became a rebel in this second man-made ‘paradise’, escaping with Berkman after less than two years there to Western Europe. Thereafter she was ‘nowhere at home’, excluded from the USA (to which she persistently endeavoured to return –for that is where she *was* at home), Russia, and then the Netherlands (for speaking out against Nazi Germany). Although she lived for most of these years in France, she had acquired British citizenship in 1925 through a marriage of convenience to an anarchist coal-miner.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1936 Goldman was hard up, wanted to earn money by lecturing in England and sought Powys’s advice: ‘Would you mind “divulging” your secret?’ she asked. Aware of his reputation in the USA as a writer but above all as a lecturer – in 1937 she could describe him as ‘a great English writer and an old friend of Sasha’s [i.e. Berkman’s] and mine’<sup>4</sup> – she naturally expected (and this she for long continued to believe) Powys to enjoy the same esteem and pull of a wide group of influential friends in his own country as he did across

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<sup>2</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, *The Confident Years, 1885–ig15* (London: J.M. Dent, 1952), pp. 217–18.

<sup>3</sup> The standard biography now consists of the two volumes by Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* (London: Virago, 1984), and *Emma Goldman in Exile: From the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989). But see also Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Candace Serena Falk, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1990); Richard and Anna Maria Drinnon (eds.), *Nowhere at Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam: Goldman Archive [hereafter GA], XXVIII D, letter from EG to Augustine Souchy, 3 April 1937.

the wit to catch its drift... They contain the seed of a new philosophy of the senses, indeed of a new philosophy of life. That crude, disagreeable and yet suggestive book, Max Stirner’s *Ego and Its Own*, might have inaugurated this philosophy. It missed its aim, as did also the work of Walter Pater, by a certain curious distance, on account of his masculine scrupulosity and his masculine fastidiousness.<sup>27</sup>

It is, indeed, hard to overrate the moral and philosophical importance of the particular kind of egoism advocated by Montaigne.

It is *the Ego and Its Own* [sic] of Max Stirner; only in Montaigne’s case this super-individualism is mitigated by his reverence for the Laws of his Country, by his love of the old traditions, by his hatred of innovation, and by his profound distrust of the insane logic of that dangerous tyrant, the human reason.<sup>28</sup>

Powys also contrasts favourably a fourth revered writer with Stirner when he assesses Rousseau’s ‘emotional, feminine, psychological kind’ of ‘anarchy’ as ‘far more dangerous’ than that of ‘a genuine and logical anarchist, such as Max Stirner’.<sup>29</sup> And in *Mortal Strife* he writes:

Modern apologists for religion are marvellously deft at constructing artificial navel-strings! Thus the poor escaped free anarchistic soul – the ‘Ego

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<sup>27</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Dorothy M. Richardson* (1931; London: Village Press, 1974 edn), p. 32. Cf. John Cowper Powys, *Suspended Judgments: Essays on Books and Sensations* (1916; n.p.: Folcroft Press, 1969 edn), pp. 23–5.

<sup>28</sup> John Cowper Powys, *The Pleasures of Literature* (London: Cassell, 1938), p. 329.

<sup>29</sup> Powys, *Suspended Judgments*, pp. 89–90.

and its Own' – mustn't be allowed to breathe its deep happy breaths in the dark, sweet, natural spaciousness of that divine loneliness, from which sex and love and birth enticed it into bondage!<sup>30</sup>

Powys was a 'reckless and daring thinker' and it was he, definitely not Dorothy Richardson, who revealed a 'new gospel of the art of life...a whole new way of taking life' and developed 'a new philosophy of the senses, indeed...a new philosophy of life'. This he did in a series of publications from the 1920s to the 1950s: *The Art of Happiness* (1923) and *The Secret of Self Development* (1926), two of the Haldeman-Julius Little Blue Books; 'The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant' (1928), the title essay of a third Little Blue Book; *The Meaning of Culture* (1929); *In Defence of Sensuality* (1930); *A Philosophy of Solitude* (1933); *The Art of Happiness* (1935), a short book which is entirely different from the pamphlet of 1923; *Mortal Strife* (1942); *The Art of Growing Old* (1944); 'My Philosophy Up to Date: As Influenced by Living in Wales', a long essay included in *Obstinate Cymric* (1947); and *In Spite Of* (1953).

Each of these works is entirely distinct from the others. They do not repeat themselves; rather they expound in different ways and develop Powys's philosophy of life over thirty years, yet not so that the last, *In Spite Of*, is inconsistent with the first, *The Art of Happiness* of 1923. In John Cowper's contribution to *Confessions of Two Brothers* (1916) the life-philosophy is well advanced although essential aspects of his later overall thinking, such as free will and the multiverse, are rejected unhesitatingly. *The Complex Vision* (1920), on the other hand, does not belong to this sequence of manuals for his life-technique. It is a philosophical work more compatible

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<sup>30</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Mortal Strife* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1942), p. 206. Cf. John Cowper Powys, *The Art of Growing Old* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), pp. 136–7; and Louis U. Wilkinson, *The Buffoon* (1916; London: Village Press, 1975 edn), p. 407.

## 6. The Spanish Revolution and Civil War – and the case of George Orwell

On the first day of 1936 Emma Goldman wrote to John Cowper Powys from London, having been given his address in North Wales by their mutual friend, Maurice Browne, the English founder of the important avant-garde Chicago Little Theatre.<sup>1</sup> Goldman had been born in 1869 in Lithuania, and at the age of sixteen emigrated with a sister from St Petersburg to the USA. On her arrival three years later in New York she was converted to anarchism by the German Johann Most and met Alexander Berkman, a fellow Lithuanian Jew, who became first her lover and later her lifelong intimate. During the 1890s Goldman emerged as an outstanding anarchist agitator and propagandist; and by 1906, the year of Most's death, she and Berkman had become the central figures in American anarchism. The decade down to the First World War marks the apogee of her revolutionary career: she published the monthly *Mother Earth*, was involved in free-speech struggles from coast to coast, and played a prominent part in the birth-control campaign. Her impact was as much cultural as political, Van Wyck Brooks, the historian of American literature, considering: 'No one did more to spread the new ideas of literary Europe that influenced so many young people...at least the ideas of the dramatists on the Continent and in England...'; and in 1914 she

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<sup>1</sup> For Maurice Browne, see his memoirs, *Too Late to Lament: An Autobiography* (London: Gollancz, 1955).

The collapse of organized supernaturalism and the absence, from the organized polities of the world, of any essential social liberty or culture, throws the individual back upon himself. For himself and in himself he can re-discover the secrets of faith, of hope, of happiness.

The most magical powers, values, sensations of these secrets of life are still to be found in Nature; and can be enjoyed by the weak as much as the strong. The freshwater-springs of a mystical personal life are entirely beyond the power of the passing fashions of thought to destroy; and they can exist under any system of political and economic organization or disorganization....No rational fashions of the passing hour have the least importance when it is a question of the individual consciousness adapting itself to Nature, finding its own work, its own beauty, its own truth, its own righteousness, its own happiness, and treating everything else with ironic diffidence and indulgence.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Powys, *In Spite Of*, p. 68; Dante Thomas, p. 153.

with the twentieth-century academic understanding of the scope of 'philosophy', yet its pluralist and animist metaphysics are so extraordinarily heterodox as to put it far beyond the pale of the contemporary discipline. Philosophy was, though, together with history and literature, one of the subjects on which Powys lectured; and Terry Diffey, a professional philosopher himself, has, in a very interesting article, shown how philosophically knowledgeable he was as well as acute in philosophical analysis and argument, while considering that his most interesting use of philosophy takes place in the fiction and literary criticism, not the works of life-philosophy that are my principal concern in this chapter.<sup>31</sup>

Equally the exposition and practical application of the life-philosophy takes place throughout the fiction and literary appreciation, not being confined to the specialist works devoted to it. Powys goes so far as to assert in the *Autobiography*: 'My writings – novels and all – are simply so much propaganda, as effective as I can make it, for my philosophy of life'; and added, 'I certainly feel conscious of conveying much more of the cubic solidity of my vision of things in fiction than it is possible to do in any sort of non-fiction.'<sup>32</sup> He felt – and in this I believe he was correct – that he had discovered something of profound importance, something which was both readily intelligible to the ordinary man or woman and which would transform their everyday lives through a process of self-liberation. He commented while writing *In Defence of Sensuality*:

I have put the most secret things of my secretest life into this book. It is much truer than superficial readers will ever know and it is much nearer the secret of life than they will ever guess. It is really a very serious book and it is really a new phi-

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<sup>31</sup> T.J. Diffey, 'John Cowper Powys and Philosophy', *Powys Review*, no. 2 (Winter 1977), esp. pp. 28, 35–6.

<sup>32</sup> Powys, *Autobiography*, pp. 641–2.

losophy. It is roughly, feebly, stupidly, awkwardly expressed but it is the beginning of a very deep idea by the use of which many people long after we are all dead will be able to steer their lives and get certain thrills of happiness – else perhaps quite unknown to them.<sup>33</sup>

If this is so, the extreme neglect of his ‘philosophical’ writings, even more pronounced than that of the novels, is puzzling. There is no convenient, comprehensive summary. Kenneth White’s pamphlet, *The Life-Technique of John Cowper Powys*, is probably the best. There are also a New Atlantis lecture, *The New Mythology of John Cowper Powys*, by Ellen Mayne; a chapter on ‘The Philosopher at Large’ in H.P. Collins’s critical study; and Paul Roberts’s article, ‘Becoming Mr Nobody: Personality and the Philosophy of John Cowper Powys’.<sup>34</sup> Otherwise Anglophone commentators would seem to concur with Colin Wilson’s opinion that in his non-fiction output Powys is ‘a sentimental third-rater’, giving ‘the impression of having a third-rate mind’.<sup>35</sup>

The interest in the life-technique is concentrated in Scandinavia and Germany. Harald Fawkner has written *The Ecstatic World of John Cowper Powys* (although this impressive book is much more, a study of the philosophy in general); and, for example, *The Art of Growing Old* is the most recent and prize

<sup>33</sup> Davies, *Diary*, p. 68.

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth White, *The Life-Technique of John Cowper Powys* (Swansea: Galloping Dog Press, 1978); Ellen Mayne, *The New Mythology of John Cowper Powys* (Richmond, Surrey: New Atlantis Foundation, 1968); H.P. Collins, *John Cowper Powys: Old Earth-Man* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1966), chap. 10; Paul Roberts, ‘Becoming Mr Nobody: Personality and the Philosophy of John Cowper Powys’, *Powys Review*, no. 16 (1985).

<sup>35</sup> Colin Wilson, *Eagle and Earwig* (London: John Baker, 1965), p. 115. Cf. Glen Cavaliero’s review of *The Life-Technique of John Cowper Powys*, *Powys Review*, no. 3 (Summer 1978), p. 102.

The resultant amalgam is a major, liberatory body of practical advice which converged with Stirner’s egoism and the individualism of other anarchists, but without being intellectually indebted to them.<sup>109</sup> It is astounding that it has been so little valued and to all intents ignored, not least by anarchists who appear to have been oblivious of its existence. There are obvious problems, most glaringly that it was developed by a bookish solitary, who enjoyed contemplating Nature on long walks, for other bookish solitaries who also enjoy contemplating Nature whilst walking. Might it be applicable, could it be extended, to other personality types with different interests and life-styles?<sup>110</sup> There has never been any discussion of such issues.

But the continuing relevance of Powys’s ‘philosophy of life-tricks’ is particularly well expressed in a letter of 1931 when he was again obliged to condense the explication of his ideas:

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<sup>109</sup> I am not aware of anyone else having made a connection between Stirner and Powys other than the New Atlantis group. New Atlantis believed in a ‘Third Revelation’ in which ‘the individual human being has his value in himself and does not recognize any moral or spiritual authority imposed on him from outside himself’ and among whose exponents were Stirner, Nietzsche, Otto Weininger (author of *Sex and Character* [1901]) and Powys. Wilson Knight goes so far as to include Dimitrije Mitrinović, the Serbian guru of New Atlantis, in a long list of ‘creative artists of different generations and widely differing qualities’ in whom Powys had aroused interest (Andrew Rigby, *Initiation and Initiative: An Exploration of the Life and Ideas of Dimitrije Mitrinović* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1984), esp. p. 179; H.C. Rutherford, *Certainly, Future: Selected Writings by Dimitrije Mitrinovic* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1987), esp. pp. 441–2; H.C. Rutherford, *The Sovereign Self through Max Stirner* (Richmond, Surrey: New Atlantis Foundation, 1956), esp. p. 17; Mayne, esp. 5–7, 14; Knight, *Saturnian Quest*, p. 12). Although Olga Markova, ‘A Russian Perspective on John Cowper Powys’, *Powys Journal*, XIV (2004), p. 122, considers that Powys ‘developed’ Stirner’s ideas, she continues by discussing Mitrinovic. There is also a mention of Stirner by Cedric Hentschel, ‘Introduction’, to Powys, *Powys on Keats*, p. 25.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Priestley, pp. 86–90.



Finally there is Nietzsche, a seismic thinker of whom, in his later years especially, Powys could be sharply critical but who had originally exerted a profound impact: 'When I was at college, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche were the rulers of our spirit'; and he was invited to visit Nietzsche's sister in the house at Weimar. During the First World War he could still 'appreciate Nietzsche's slashing onslaughts upon the gregarious tyranny of weakness' and 'love Nietzsche's pulverizing insight and his noble and aristocratic tone'; and in 1938 he regarded him as 'the most prophetic voice since Blake'. Nietzsche's contribution to the life-philosophy lies in his being 'the poet of rapturous happiness in the midst of suffering': 'We all of us have these moments of strange causeless happiness, when then atrocities of existence are forgotten' and 'this "Happiness of Zarathustra" ... holds the mystery of life!'<sup>108</sup>

Homer, Rabelais and Shakespeare were fundamental, pervasive influences throughout Powys's career, yet it is difficult to isolate specific ways in which they contributed to the life-technique. William James, above all, and also Spinoza, Kant, Bergson and Spengler, shaped Powys's thought but not with respect to his life-philosophy. All the same, it is a large and diverse cast of thinkers and imaginative writers who did contribute along with Powys's own personality and experiences.

†, *Powys Review*, no. 19 (1986), p. 63; Verbeek; Robin Wood, 'Queer Attacks and Fits: Epilepsy and Ecstatic Experience in the Novels of J.C. Powys', *Powys Review*, nos. 31–2 (n.d.), pp. 21–9.

<sup>108</sup> Powys, *Pleasures of Literature*, pp. 138, 555, 568–9, 650; Powys, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. xvii–xviii; Powys, *Autobiography*, pp. 398–7; Powys and Powys, p. 120. See also Powys, *One Hundred Best Books*, p. 24; Powys, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 149–59; Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 386. For Nietzsche's influence on Powys, see Patrick Bridgwater, *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony: A Study of Nietzsche's Impact on English and American Literature* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972), pp. 109–13; Elmar Schenkel, 'Taking Tea with Nietzsche's Sister: John Cowper Powys in Weimar and Saxony', *Powys Society Newsletter*, no. 22 (July 1994), pp. 2–11; Constance Harsh, 'Wrestling with Nietzsche: John Cowper Powys's Engagement with Nietzsche in the Early Years of the First World War', *Powys Journal*, XI (2001), pp. 63–81.

winning addition to a German series of Powys's non-fictional works.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, Powys's publishing history, and thereby what can be deduced about the response of large numbers of readers, indicates a somewhat different story. During his lifetime none of his books were reissued in paperback editions in Britain or the USA. Nor did any of the novels appear in popular series. On the other hand, Jonathan Cape brought out *The Meaning of Culture*, first published in London in 1930, in his Life and Letters Series in 1932 and four years later in the Travellers' Library. Similarly *The Art of Happiness*, published by John Lane in 1935, entered the Bodley Head Library in 1940. It is noteworthy that while Cape took no more of Powys's fiction after *Wolf Solent*, he went on to publish no less than four of the 'philosophical' books: *The Meaning of Culture*, *A Philosophy of Solitude*, *Mortal Strife* and *The Art of Growing Old*. Not only were these books very much shorter than the novels: they would not attract libel actions – as *A Glastonbury Romance* (1933) had done, impoverishing Powys – and, above all, they sold very well. The outstanding bestseller was *The Meaning of Culture* which in the USA went through fifteen impressions, no less than eleven in 1929 – it had been published only in the September – before being reissued in 1939 in a Tenth Anniversary Edition, of which there were to be six impressions and another 6,500 copies by 1970, when it remained in print.<sup>37</sup> Powys was able to tell the translator of a Japanese edition in 1957 that 'it is the *only one of*

<sup>36</sup> H.W. Fawkner, *The Ecstatic World of John Cowper Powys* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1986). See also Janina Nordius, *'I Am Myself Alone': Solitude and Transcendence in John Cowper Powys* (Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> These details derive principally from Langridge. They are supplemented by John Cowper Powys, *The Art of Happiness* (1935; London: John Lane, 1946 edn), p. 6; Dante Thomas, *A Bibliography of the Writings of John Cowper Powys: 1972–1963* (Mamaroneck, NY: Paul P. Appel, 1975), p. 60; and Kenneth Hopkins, *The Powys Brothers: A Biographical Appreciation* (Southrepps, Norfolk: Warren House Press, 1972), p. 150.

*all the books* (Fiction and otherwise) *that I have written* which has never once ceased, year after year, to earn me small sums of money'.<sup>38</sup> One can only assume that so many eager purchasers could not have been fooled by the misleading title; for *The Meaning of Culture* is nothing of the sort, but rather 'The Meaning of Creation' – or 'of Creativeness' – or 'of Personal Liberation'.<sup>39</sup>

Some commentators believe that the 'philosophical' works were no more than 'pot-boilers', into which a reluctant Powys was pressed by publishers. It is, though, the judgment of Frederick Davies, an old admirer who came to know him well in the concluding years of his life, which should be accepted. This is that they were central to his oeuvre: 'They were a compulsion. He could "do no other"'. Whereas his companion Phyllis Playter fulminated against *A Philosophy of Solitude*, telling him that he should be writing great novels, not 'little books...for funny ones', Powys 'felt such profane & egoistic delight in being alive and in such a lovely place & writing a philosophy of Solitude...O if I could only write a good book for forlorn spirits to be helped by!'<sup>40</sup>

The most obvious way in which Powys's thought in his 'philosophical' writings converges with individualist anarchism is in its *exclusive concern with the individual*. There is no consideration of community or society, class or nation, family or friends. The only group he allows to enter his view is no larger than two: the heterosexual couple. His unrelenting

<sup>38</sup> Anthony Head (ed.), *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Ichiro Hara* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1990), pp. 13, 69 (Powys's emphasis).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Roberts, 'Becoming Mr Nobody', p. 40. Hence Frank Gloversmith, 'Defining Culture: J.C. Powys, Clive Bell, R.H. Tawney and T.S. Eliot', in Frank Gloversmith (ed.), *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), is a grotesquely inappropriate comparative study; but, in contrast, see Denys Thompson, 'The Rural Tradition', in Ford, *New Pelican Guide*, VII, pp. 188–9.

<sup>40</sup> Davies, 'Introduction', pp. 12–14; Krissdóttir, *Petrushka*, pp. 107–9, 111.

rational shocks of this confused world'. Emerson was important also for his individualism and emphasis on 'self-reliance'. In *Mortal Strife* Powys links Emerson with Goethe, Nietzsche and Arnold as making 'a veritable cult of withdrawal from the painful and unpleasant' and aiming at 'an habitual cultivation of that selective and aristocratic attitude to life, deliberately ignoring life's refuse and dross, that we enjoy in the poetry of Homer'.<sup>104</sup>

In 1953 Powys asserted that Whitman, 'the wisest human being who has lived since Goethe', had been his greatest influence. Whitman's importance for the life-philosophy was twofold: his supreme individualism and for making a cult of 'our sensations of life-enjoyment'.<sup>105</sup> In *Suspended Judgments* of 1916 he is included with Arnold and Emerson – and indeed Pater – in a list of 'philosophical egoists'.<sup>106</sup>

Dostoevsky was for Powys the greatest of novelists and exerted a profound aesthetic influence on him. Does Dostoevsky's portrayal of ecstasies contribute to the life-philosophy? Powys comments on 'those high, strange, exultant trances', even if often to be attributed to the onset of epilepsy, that Prince Myshkin undergoes, and also the 'mood of ecstasy ... in which Alyosha Karamazov kissed the earth with sobs'. Yet since it seems that Powys may himself have been epileptic and familiar with ecstatic convulsions and hallucinations, he would have had little need of reading about such experiences.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Powys, *Pleasures of Literature*, p. 411 (also p. 518); Powys, *Mortal Strife*, pp. 74–5. See also Powys, *One Hundred Best Books*, p. 26.

<sup>105</sup> Powys, *In Spite Of*, pp. 297, 309; Powys, *Mortal Strife*, p. 140. See also Powys, *One Hundred Best Books*, p. 27; Powys, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 209–15; Powys, *Pleasures of Literature*, pp. 440–78.

<sup>106</sup> Powys, *Suspended Judgments*, pp. 24–5. The text actually has 'ego-tists', but given what Powys has been saying this must be a misprint for 'egoists'.

<sup>107</sup> Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 241. For Powys as an epileptic, see Frederick Davies, 'Recollections of John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter,

tyrant, the human reason'. Montaigne is also valued for making a cult of the sensations – 'one of the first great writers' to do so, 'he became one who *lived for sensations*' – and for appreciating 'how large a part in life the crafty "art of forgetting" is bound to play' (Powys's emphasis).<sup>101</sup>

Charles Lamb was the most important contributor to the cult of everyday, superficially mundane sensations, since 'he redeems the commonplace, he makes the ordinary as if it were not ordinary; and by the sheer genius of his imagination he throws an indescribable glamour over the "little things" of the darkest of our days'.<sup>102</sup>

The Victorian poet Powys especially admired was Matthew Arnold, and, as with all his favourite writers, Arnold contributed something to the life-philosophy, Powys praising

his reiterated assertion ... that our only hope, our only comfort, our only support, in a world so confused and treacherous, is to sink back into our own soul, and draw our strength from that mysterious spring of unconquerable endurance that rises up, as if from some non-human cosmic reservoir, in the depths where the self touches the not-self.<sup>103</sup>

Powys considered that there was 'a very close affinity between Matthew Arnold's attitude to life and that of Emerson', although judging Emerson as perhaps 'nearer to the raw ir-

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<sup>101</sup> Powys, *Pleasures of Literature*, p. 329; Powys, *Mortal Strife*, p. 140; John Cowper Powys, *Rabelais: His Life, the Story Told by Him, Selections Therefrom Here Newly Translated, and an Interpretation of His Genius and His Religion* (London: John Lane, 1948), p. 286; Powys, *Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant* [1928], p. 12. See also Powys, *One Hundred Best Books*, p. 14; Powys, *Suspended Judgments*, pp. 17–43.

<sup>102</sup> Powys, *One Hundred Best Books*, p. 42. See also Powys, *Singular Figures*, chap. 4; Powys, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 83–91.

<sup>103</sup> Powys, *Pleasures of Literature*, pp. 427–8. See also Powys, *Visions and Revisions*, esp. pp. 118–19.

preoccupation is with the 'soul', the 'self', the 'ego', the 'I am I' – for 'the philosophy of the complex vision assumes as its only axiom the concrete reality of the "soul"'.<sup>41</sup>

What we are, in the first place, assured of is the existence within our own individual body of a real actual living being composed of a mysterious substance wherein what we call mind and what we call matter are fused and intermingled. This is our real and self-conscious soul, the thing in us which says, 'I am I'. And since the living basis of our personality is this real soul within us, it follows that all those energies of personality, whose concentration is the supreme work of art, are the energies of this real soul.<sup>41</sup>

He repeatedly describes himself as an 'individualist', less often, but still substantially, as an 'egoist' and his philosophy as 'egoism'. Egoism is 'a mental attitude, not only lawful, but inescapable and inevitable, if we are to be in harmony with the main pressure of the cosmic tide'. 'To be a supremely successful egoist,' Powys maintains, 'it is necessary to combine a devilish cunning with a sublime unscrupulousness and both of these things with the detachment of a saint...'<sup>42</sup>

He recognizes that there is a problem of the existential loneliness of humans, but his answer to the question 'What to do about the loneliness of our individual soul?' is that we must intensify the distance between our consciousness and that of others.<sup>43</sup> Is there any other writer who systematically places the highest value upon everything 'lonely' and 'loneliness', nor-

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<sup>41</sup> John Cowper Powys, *The Complex Vision* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1920), pp. viii, 13.

<sup>42</sup> Powys, *Art of Happiness* (1935), pp. 26–8.

<sup>43</sup> John Cowper Powys, *In Spite Of: A Philosophy for Everyman* (London: Macdonald, 1953), pp. 31–3.

mally eschewing praise of the merely 'solitary' or of 'solitude' (other than in *A Philosophy of Solitude*) in their favour?<sup>44</sup>

But here we are, every one of us, a man, a woman, a child, a unique mind in a unique body; for you, whoever you are, whether man or woman, boy or girl, are like nobody else: standing, sitting, kneeling, lying, or [walking], you are absolutely unique. Your mind has its own secret thoughts, fancies, ideas, impulses, caprices, humours, terrors, horrors, manias, illusions.

It has fearful apprehensions, disgusting memories, appalling visions. And not one single one of these is identical, or nearly identical, with anyone else's. You were born alone, and alone you will die. Why in earth's name, then, do you let yourself give way to this dislike of loneliness? *Practise loneliness!* Never let a day pass without making a defiant effort to snatch at least a few moments of precious loneliness, of sacred loneliness, of divine loneliness, of the loneliness of air, of fire, of water, of the earth, of the sun, of the moon, of the planets, of every star in space, and of heavenly annihilation when you and your body are both dead.<sup>45</sup>

This asociality can become anti-social, harsh and unappealing. A bad-tempered misanthropy and solipsism pervade *In Defence of Sensuality* and *A Philosophy of Solitude*, works that I find as 'crude' and 'disagreeable' as Powys characterized *The Ego and Its Own* in his extended essay on Dorothy Richardson,

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, John Cowper Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1930), pp. 21–3, 29, 33, 97–108, 115, 125–6, 139, 149, 266.

<sup>45</sup> Powys, *In Spite Of*, p. 45 (Powys's emphasis).

Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius were the major thinkers of Stoicism. In contrast there is Epicurus, although Powys insists that Epicureanism did not advocate 'personal happiness as the chief purpose of human life' but rather believed that 'the *negative element* in any wise happiness is more important than the positive element' and that 'every moment we are not in extreme pain and those we love are not in extreme pain is precious and heavenly dispensation'. In fact, he regards the philosophies as both 'opposed' and 'complementary', explaining that he strives 'to buttress up my weakness' with Stoicism and 'to clarify my response to the magic of earthly life' with Epicureanism and that

by following both the true Epicurean and the true Stoical method, by making more of the negative art of forgetting our trials than of the positive art of adding to our felicity we can best cope with these devils [viz. worries]. Nature and our Senses see to it that the moment *worry* is removed 'the pleasure which there is in life itself' begins to flow through us again.<sup>100</sup>

So he regards Epicurus, and the Stoics too, as contributors to his art of forgetting the unpleasant.

Montaigne is a major inspiration of Powys's individualism. As Powys acknowledged it is 'hard to overrate the moral and philosophical importance of the particular kind of egoism advocated by Montaigne'; and both men shared an individualism 'mitigated by his reverence for the Laws of his Country, by his love of the old traditions, by his hatred of innovation, and by his profound distrust of the insane logic of that dangerous

<sup>100</sup> Powys, *Art of Happiness* (1935), pp. 19–20, 208–9; Powys, *In Spite Of*, p. 86; Powys, *Meaning of Culture*, pp. 117, 280. See also Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, pp. 185, 223–4; Powys, *Art of Happiness* (1935), pp. 40–1, 147; Powys, *In Spite Of*, pp. 139, 197, 288;

Granting the great Heraclitean assumption ... that all life is war, why should we not give this 'war' a new twist, a new orientation, and turn it from a struggle to accept into a struggle to escape?

Thus in place of the raptorial pouncing upon life which ... encourages us to treat the universe as our prey, why should we not use that far subtler ... magic of the old Taoists and turn our Heraclitean battle-spirit against life and on behalf of that very 'Beyond Life' which Nietzsche so roundly curses as the non-existent refuge of all misfits? ... Our war is undertaken on [the] assumption ... that the universe is malleable, not only by action but by thought... Having once aroused in our mind enough faith in our own will-power to create a universe of contemplation and forget everything else, there are few limitations to the happiness we may enjoy.<sup>97</sup>

Powys similarly takes from Epictetus an emphasis on mind and will being used by individuals to remodel their lives and to allow happiness to flourish. He summarizes Epictetus's entire philosophy as: 'Reduce your own possessiveness to the limit, simplify your own life to the limit, and concentrate upon the power of our own mind...'<sup>98</sup> Although Powys describes Marcus Aurelius as 'unspeakably unhappy' and indeed 'a philosopher for the unhappy', what he values is his stress on 'the power of the will and the magic of the will': 'One feels that just as Aurelius could endure life and sink back into his own soul with the help of Fate, so we...can sink back upon the magic of our individual will in defiance of Fate.'<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, pp. 23, 39, 41-2, 211-13, 215.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-2, 34.

which dates, ironically, from exactly the same time as he was writing these egoistic books.

The universe ... is only an arbitrary and imaginary congeries, or mass-accumulation, of individual personalities. Any individual personality – that of a bedbug even – is superior to the universe. The universe indeed is less than nothing. The individual is more than everything. Oh, how much greater than any abstract whole is any particular part we know or can imagine! No one can sound or fathom the magical power, beautiful and terrible, of the individual personality.<sup>46</sup>

These sentiments seem very Stirnerite, although pleasingly expressed, unlike the following, equally Stirnerite, passage from 1916:

It is when my pursuit of pleasure crosses, with a direct impact, the instinct of self-preservation in others, that the pinch comes. I am, by disposition and taste, fatally aware of the existence of these other people, of these alien egoists in my path. It is as disagreeable to me to rend and maul them, as it is to break the branches of delicate trees or to pull up the roots of sensitive flowers.

An egoist myself, I know well how egoists suffer when their particular life-illusion is interfered with, or their particular aesthetic vista blocked up. And every man, woman or child I meet is an egoist for me. I suspect them all of living ultimately for nothing but Pleasure – even as I do. They may talk of duty, and self-culture, and the service of

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<sup>46</sup> Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 229.

humanity, and the will of God – I seem to waive aside all that, and perceive under every mask the old eternal pressure of the life-lust.<sup>47</sup>

Central to Powys's thought is his conviction that *the purpose of human life is for the individual to be happy*: 'I must confess it is hard for me to see how what we call Happiness ... can take any place but the highest place in our estimate of life's highest good'. We have the right to be happy yet we live in 'an unhappy world': 'Happiness for human beings is an artificial thing. Man has been separated from happiness in some mysterious cosmic "fall" and his whole life is a struggle to regain what he has lost.' Therefore:

We are not born to be happy. We are born to struggle for happiness. We are born because of pleasure, but we are born in pain. We are surrounded by pain, and we are lucky if our end is painless. But deep within us is a sacred fount, from whose channel, by a resolute habit of the will, we can clear away the litter that obstructs the water of life. Not in what we possess, not in what we achieve, not in the opinion of others, not in hope, not in admiration, not in love, not in anything below or above the sun, is the secret of happiness to be found. It is only to be found in ourselves.<sup>48</sup>

Powys developed his life-technique so that every one of us can 'clear away the litter that obstructs the water of life' and thereby discover the secret of happiness within ourselves. (By the late 1940s he had come to believe that it was not possible

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<sup>47</sup> John Cowper Powys and Llewelyn Powys, *Confessions of Two Brothers* (1916; London: Sinclair Browne, 1982), pp. 64–5.

<sup>48</sup> Powys, *Art of Happiness* (1935), pp. 7–8, 86, 131, 221 (Powys's emphasis). See also Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, pp. 13–15, 69–70.

clever reasoning. 'When water is still it is a perfect Level and the greatest artificer takes his rule from it. Such is the clearness of still water, and how much greater is that of the human Spirit! The still mind of the sage is the mirror of heaven and earth, the glass of all things. Vacancy, stillness, placidity, tastelessness, quietude, silence, and non-action; this is the level of heaven and earth, and the perfection of the Tao and its characteristics... Vacancy, stillness, placidity, tastelessness, quietude, silence, and doing nothing are the root of all things.'<sup>95</sup>

Chuang Tzu, Powys explains, was the 'most famous interpreter' of Lao Tzu, who also taught that 'through withdrawing ourselves rather than asserting ourselves, through retreating rather than pursuing, through inaction rather than through action, through becoming quiet rather than through making a stir...we attain wisdom and spiritual power'. Further, we should 'not only cease competing with others, but flow with them and into them, and through them, and lose our identity in their presence, deliberately becoming undistinguished, unimportant, insignificant.'<sup>96</sup>

Powys admires Heraclitus's 'dark sayings', his 'proud and fierce... loneliness' and his contempt for 'the idols of the market-place', but more fundamentally also allies his thought with Taoism and goes beyond to the power of human thought:

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<sup>95</sup> Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, pp. 21–2 (ellipsis in the original). See also John Cowper Powys, 'The Philosopher Kwang', *Dial*, LXXV (1923), reprinted in *Powys Review*, no. 7 (Winter 1980).

<sup>96</sup> Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, pp. 19–20. For Powys and Taoism in general and Chuang Tzu in particular, see also Head, *Letters to Hara*, pp. 33–4, 62–3, 85–6; Cicely Hill, "'Susukeshi Hina Mo": John Cowper Powys and the Chuang-Tse Legacy', *Powys Review*, no. 7 (Winter 1980); Elmar Schenkel, 'From Powys to Pooh: Some Versions of Taoism in British and American Literature', *Powys Review*, nos. 31–2 (n.d.).

power of concentrating upon lonely cosmic emotions ... Such emotions, and the cold, non-human detachment that dedicates itself to enjoy them, strike the herd-humour of the crowd as grotesque and the herd-humour of the academician as immoral and anti-social.' Powys also approved of 'the delicious abandonment so full of sensuous satisfaction that Goethe expressed so eloquently in portions of *Faust*'. In 1954 he could say that after Rabelais Goethe was 'the *writer of all writers* I have been most *influenced* by' (Powys's emphasis).<sup>94</sup>

Chuang Tzu is for Powys 'one of the profoundest, as he is also one of the most humorous, of all mystical writers'. He appears as a character in *The Owl, the Duck, and – Miss Rowe!* *Miss Rowe!* (1930), *Morwyn* (1937) and *Up and Out* (1957); and *Ducdame* (1925) is dedicated to him as

the only one among philosophers to be at once respectful to his spirit-like ancestors, and indulgent to those who, like the protagonist of this book [Rook Ashover, a character based on Powys himself],

Go where they are pushed,  
Follow where they are led,  
Like a whirling wind,  
Like a feather tossed about,  
Like a revolving grindstone.

Chuang Tzu is therefore the principal inspiration for Powys's quietism, non-action, withdrawal from the affairs of the world:

Over and over again does Kwang teach us how  
superior is stupid contemplation to any lively or

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<sup>94</sup> Powys, *One Hundred Best Books*, p. 53; Powys, *Suspended Judgments*, p. 23; Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, pp. 136–7; Powys, *In Spite Of*, p. 90; Head, *Letters to Hara*, p. 39. See also Powys, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 105–15; Powys, *Pleasures of Literature*, pp. 570–604.

to 'snatch happiness by an act or will, or win it by sagacity and cunning' and that 'in place of aiming at happiness, that mystery of mysteries which comes and goes like a breath from heaven according to its own unpredictable volition, the thing to do is *to force ourselves to enjoy*', but this, especially since he then proceeds to advise how to do so, seems little different from the earlier conception of a 'cult of personal happiness' in which the ideal is viewed as 'a stoical resolve to endure life happily'.<sup>49</sup>

How then are we to struggle to be happy? First, Powys stresses *the importance of forgetting*: 'To attain the secret of the art of life is to attain the secret of the art of forgetting.'<sup>50</sup> He recognizes the existence of pain, terror and horror, but in 'The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant' of 1928, he asserts simply that the unpleasant can be forgotten without giving any indication of how one is to do so. The same advice is proffered in *The Meaning of Culture* and *A Philosophy of Solitude*:

At first it is so hard to forget certain horrors that  
one feels it is a fantastic undertaking even to try.  
But when one begins to believe, lo! in the wink of  
an eyelid the miracle has been half-accomplished.  
Practice, and a certain stubborn fierce, fighting re-  
silience in one's nature will do the rest.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Obstinate Cymric: Essays 1935–47* (Carmarthen: Druid Press, 1947), p. 142; Powys, *In Spite Of*, p. 11 (Powys's emphasis); Powys, *Art of Happiness* (1935), pp. 18–20.

<sup>50</sup> John Cowper Powys, *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant* (Girard, KS: Haldeman-Julius [1928]), p. 24. This booklet has now been reissued as John Cowper Powys, *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant and Other Essays*, ed. David Goodway (Bath: The Powys Society, 2006) – see p. 30.

<sup>51</sup> John Cowper Powys, *The Meaning of Culture* (1929; New York: W.W. Norton, 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edn, 1939), p. 262. See also *ibid.*, p. 254, and John Cowper Powys, *A Philosophy of Solitude* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), pp. 115–16.

One knows that by the 1920s Powys had ceased to experience acute suffering. He seems to have been on the brink of mental breakdown or illness at times during the previous decade – and indeed it has been suggested that he underwent an actual breakdown in 1915.<sup>52</sup> The turning point came in 1921 when he met Playter, with whom from 1923 he lived for the rest of his life, achieving a profound intellectual companionship and emotional stability. It was then that he was enabled to proceed to the production of his mature fiction as well as to formulate the life-technique, acknowledging in 1930: ‘All my philosophy came into Being since I met her’.<sup>53</sup> One can only assume with his personal attainment of real happiness he had forgotten the extreme difficulties of coping with, for example, ill-health (despite his gastric ulcers and chronic constipation), anxiety, or bereavement.

His blithe instruction gives way by 1935 to descriptions in *The Art of Happiness* of elaborate strategies to acquire what he was to describe in *In Spite Of* as the ‘mixture of the two most essential tonics and drugs of the human soul, our fighting-power for embracing our satisfactions by mental force and our forgetting-power for obliterating our fears and horrors by the same mental force’.<sup>54</sup> He names and explains four techniques, the first being the ‘Ichthian act’ which is ‘a swift lumping together of all the evils of your life – as if you turned them into one element that completely surrounds you – followed by a fierce leap up of your inmost identity, a leap that takes you, if only for a second, into the freer air’, thereby momentarily escaping ‘the lumped-together evil of life, not in the strength of any outward change of conditions, or of any hope of such a change, but solely in a spasmodic revolt against them, a revolt wherein the indestructible spirit at the bottom of your soul re-

<sup>52</sup> Ernst Verbeek, ‘John Cowper Powys: Tempting the Gods’, *Powys Review*, no. 26 (1991), p. 45–6.

<sup>53</sup> Davies, *Diary*, p. 139.

<sup>54</sup> Powys, *In Spite Of*, p. 15.

Powys goes on to explain that because of this fastidiousness Pater ‘could get his sense-ecstasies only from things several times removed from the chaos of reality’ – unlike Dorothy Richardson and Powys himself who were able to respond to the trivia of everyday life, accepting ‘*the mystery of what is* in all the terrible-sweet flavour of its stabbing, raking, harsh, gritty chaos’. Yet Pater, within his rarefied confines, is of tremendous importance to Powys who wrote in 1916 of his

fastidious ‘hedonism’, seeking its elaborate satisfactions among the chance-offered occasions of hour, or person or of place...we seem to be aware of a secret attitude not only towards art but towards life also, to miss the key to which would be to fail in that architecture of the soul and senses which is the object of the discipline not merely of the aesthetic but of the religious cult.

Almost forty years later he remarked to a correspondent: ‘Walter Pater exactly suits me because he combines the most animal-like Wordsworthian mysticism with an aesthetic sense and sensibility to other aspects of art not given to Wordsworth.’<sup>93</sup>

One of Powys’s most admired authors was Goethe whose name appears constantly throughout the substantial non-fictional oeuvre. Powys responded to his ‘wise and massive’ egoism – he calls him ‘the greatest of all egoists’ – and, for example, links him with Rousseau for displaying ‘a certain

<sup>93</sup> Powys, *Dorothy M. Richardson*, pp. 32–3; John Cowper Powys, *One Hundred Best Books: With Commentary and an Essay on Books and Reading* (1916; London: Village Press, 1975 edn), p. 54; Head, *Letters to Hara*, p. 28. See also Powys, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 171–9, as well as the famous ‘Conclusion’ to Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 186–90.



was a lust, a madness, a frenzy, a fury, a rushing upon death, to him.' A *Life of Keats* was Powys's first full-length prose work, entirely unpublished for eighty years.<sup>91</sup>

*In Defence of Sensuality* is 'Dedicated / to the memory of / that great and much-abused man / JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU' and a journalist who visited Powys at Phudd Bottom, New York State, in the early 1930s remarked on an 'immense' bust of Rousseau in the study. So the third major source for Powys's sensationalism and the happiness to be derived from it is Rousseau, who has the 'incomparable trick of associating an amorous and intellectual life with a life of sensuous contemplation, something romantic, something with a vague, evasive horizon, full of those magical and half-realized feelings that float on the border-air between sense and spirit'. He quotes Rousseau recalling that he abandoned himself to 'aimless reveries which, although foolish, were none the less delightful', commenting that 'with Wordsworth's rugged, tough, taciturn north-country nature, these elemental sensations, so far from being felt as "foolishness", were regarded as the essential secret of life'.<sup>92</sup>

Walter Pater is the final principal contributor to the 'new philosophy of the senses'. When Powys linked his name with Stirner's because of their books missing their aim and failing to inaugurate this philosophy, in Pater's case 'on account of his masculine scrupulosity and his masculine fastidiousness',

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<sup>91</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Visions and Revisions: A Book of Literary Devotions* (1955; London: Village Press, 1974 edn), pp. 140–1; John Cowper Powys, *Powys on Keats: Volume One of 'John Keats: or Popular Paganism'*, ed. Cedric Hentschel (London: Cecil Woolf, 1993), esp. pp. 36–7, 55, 106–8, 112–14. For his Liverpool friend, Tom Jones, deriving his philosophy from Keats: Powys, *Autobiography*, pp. 367, 396; Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, p. 139; Powys, *Powys on Keats*, p. 23.

<sup>92</sup> Dante Thomas, p. 170; Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, pp. 35, 37, 41. The quotation from Rousseau is from a central passage of his *Confessions* (London: J.M. Dent, Everyman's Library, 2 vols., 1931), II, pp. 281–2. See also Powys, *Suspended Judgments*, pp. 83–103.

fuses to yield'.<sup>55</sup> The 'act of de-carnation' 'consists in thinking of your soul as something separate from your body, something that exists in the air...by the side of your oppressed and persecuted body', so that 'the main part of your consciousness' is able to survey your 'agitated physical organism and all its troubles'.<sup>56</sup> In the 'Panergic act' 'we draw our consciousness and our energy out of our thought-process and concentrate them on our sensation-process', for in defiance of its 'worries, apathies, miseries', 'Our spirit heaves itself up out of the depths of our being, armoured, as it were, in our most familiar sensations, and thus armoured confronts the pain-giving world'.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the "In-spite-of" act' is 'a desperate up-springing of your inmost soul, as if from the very pit of your stomach, by which you challenge the evils that surround you... and defy them, in the strength of a Being possessing an auto-creative power': "The In-spite-of" act asks nothing, desires nothing, hopes nothing. It just asserts your own solitary will-power, bent on resistance and resolved to be cheerful at all cost'.<sup>58</sup>

Powys has boundless confidence in human creativity and in the imagination. As an octogenarian he was still able to maintain in *In Spite Of* that 'the strongest creative force in the world ... is your own private, personal, individual imagination', every person possessing this creative power; that all human beings have the ability 'to create their own private, independent, and personal way of life in defiance of every obstacle'; that every creature is 'a living unit of a great wave of creative power; in fact is an integral unit of the energy that actually creates the

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<sup>55</sup> Powys, *Art of Happiness* (1935), pp. 28–9. See also *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31, 64.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87. See also *ibid.*, pp. 65–6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154–5. Powys recommends other techniques for happiness in *ibid.*, pp. 188–93.

future ... creating out of the world that already exists the world that is going to exist'.<sup>59</sup>

It is fundamental to Powys's way of thinking that *the self is a product of the individual's self-creation*. We have just seen him referring in *The Art of Happiness* to 'the strength of a Being possessing an auto-creative power' and in *A Philosophy of Solitude* he had explained:

The art of life consists in the creation of an original and unique self; and this is something that the simplest mind can achieve.

Thought creates a thought-body of its own – a new and spiritual body – which although it is linked in space and time with the material body feels itself to be different, feels itself to be inviolate....

What we steadily, consciously, habitually think we are, that we tend to become.

For the world is not a finished product; it is a creative flux; and what is known as evolution is the multifarious creation of myriads of self-creating wills.<sup>60</sup>

'This recreation of the mind by itself' – this '*power of my own mind to re-recreate itself on lines selected by itself*' – is the 'very essence' of what Powys understands by 'culture'.<sup>61</sup> What he advocates is diurnal familiarity with the classic writers, whether poets, novelists or philosophers (for that is how he recreated his own personality and, as will be explained, came also to synthesize the life-technique). By studying the 'great

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<sup>59</sup> Powys, *In Spite Of*, pp. 146, 213, 238, 247. See also T.J. Diffey, 'John Cowper Powys: Some Thoughts about His Imagination', *Powys Review*, no. 14 (1984), pp. 29–44.

<sup>60</sup> Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, pp. 55–6. See also *ibid.*, pp. 59–61.

<sup>61</sup> Powys, *Meaning of Culture*, pp. 1–2 (Powys's emphasis).

dignity of their isolation in the presence of the elements... When his poetry is most magical and most inspired he will be found to be writing of some solitary human figure outlined in a sublime isolation against these mysterious elements. Several of his greatest passages go even further than this and occur when his brooding imagination is occupied purely and solely with the non-human processes of dawn and moon and twilight, and the passing of clouds across the sky, of birds across mountain valleys, and of all the turbulences and taciturnities of winds and waters... There is not a touch or trace of sentimentality in Wordsworth's attitude; and over and over again with him we seem to catch glimpses of a stark 'animism' that is almost non-human in its bald, bleak and to many tastes forbidding loneliness.

Powys quotes Wordsworth's expression 'the pleasure which there is in life itself', by which Powys understands 'the conscious life of the senses', and even more 'an *active principle* in the soul, for it fortifies, inspires, sustains and comforts the solitary "ego" at the centre of every-man's life'.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, he repeatedly cites Keats as exclaiming, 'Oh for a life of sensations rather than of thought!'<sup>90</sup> Keats is commonly accepted as the most sensual of English poets, nobody agreeing with this more than Powys: 'The ground and soil, and sub-soil, of his nature, was Sensuality – a rich, quivering, tormented Sensuality!' He was therefore another progenitor of Powys's sensationalism: 'His cry day and night was for "new sensations"; and such sensationalism, a mere epicurean indulgence to others,

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<sup>89</sup> Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, p. 164; Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, pp. 11, 38–40; Powys, *Mortal Strife*, pp. 120, 128 (Powys's emphasis). See also Powys, *Pleasures of Literature*, pp. 346–57.

<sup>90</sup> For example, Powys, *Art of Happiness* (1923), p. 27.

Without hesitation we will now confess the truth. We have been influenced by all the early Greek sages, in so far as we could learn anything about them, who lived before Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. We have been influenced by the Chinese Taoist Kwang-Tze. We have been influenced by the Pluralism of William James. We have been influenced by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. And above all we have been influenced by Walt Whitman.<sup>88</sup>

In truth, the consolidated list of influences needs to be both less than this (if it is the life-philosophy alone that it is being examined) and extended. The key figures would appear to be Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Heraclitus, Epicurus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne, Rousseau, Goethe, Wordsworth, Keats, Lamb, probably Arnold and Emerson, possibly Dostoevsky, certainly Whitman and Nietzsche, very definitely Pater, and probably Homer, Rabelais and Shakespeare. Of these I consider the most important to be Wordsworth, Keats, Rousseau, Pater, Goethe and Chuang Tzu.

Wordsworth is central in Powys's thought, for both its egoism and its sensationalism. In 1947 Powys described himself as 'an old Wordsworthian': 'upon the manner in which this great original poet endows his sense-perceptions with intellectual and emotional overtones and undertones I have nourished my inner life for more than sixty years'. He calls Wordsworth an 'elementalist' in *A Philosophy of Solitude*:

It was indeed Wordsworth's master-idea ... to strip human life of all unessentials and to visualize individual men and women in the solemn

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<sup>88</sup> Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, pp. 243–4; Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, chap. 1 (esp. pp. 41–2); Powys, *Meaning of Culture*, p. 280 (cf. p. 267); Powys, *Mortal Strife*, p. 164; Powys, *In Spite Of*, pp. 5–6, 87, 272, 297, 309. See also Powys and Powys, pp. 84, 118–21.

authors', one can in a very real sense become a 'great author' oneself – by exercising an 'auto-creative power':

The desirable effect upon one's mind of imaginative literature is not to strengthen one's memory or enlarge one's learning, or to inspire one to gather together a collection of passages from 'great authors'; it is to encourage one to learn the art of becoming a 'great author' oneself; not in the sense of composing a single line, but in the sense of sufficiently detaching oneself from the chaotic spectacle of reality so as to catch on the wing that fleeting loveliness of which no genius has the monopoly and which only the stirred depths of one's deepest nature can prevail upon to pause in its eternal flight.

The 'cultured mind', in this sense, 'assimilates, spontaneously and freely, what best suits its own individual mental fatality, in both past and present' and 'nourishes its own original sensibility – of which every person has at least the rudiments – upon those various imaginative, humorous, spiritual, analytical moods, which tally best with its inherent bent'.<sup>62</sup>

The individual's creation of the self will lead, in turn, to the development of a 'life-illusion', a central concept in Powys's thinking, the term being derived from Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, Act Five, 'stealing the phrase, though giving it a wider significance'.<sup>63</sup> He explains: 'A person's life-illusion is that secret dramatic way of regarding himself which makes him feel to him-

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40. See also *ibid.*, p. 273, and John Cowper Powys, *The Secret of Self Development* (1926; London: Village Press edn, 1974), esp. pp. 13–14.

<sup>63</sup> Powys, *Art of Growing Old*, p. 55. It is only the first English translator, Frances E. Archer, who so renders *livslöggen* (*The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen: Copyright Edition*, vol. 8 (London: William Heinemann, 1907), p.

self a remarkable, singular, unusual, exciting individual'. And again: 'One's life-illusion is that view of one's self, taken by one's self, which includes both one's role in the world, as it applies to others, and the part played by one's self, in secret solitude, in regard to the universe.'<sup>64</sup> This is a matter entirely different from 'mere vanity or conceit', since everybody has a lifeillusion. Further:

A life-illusion is never wholly untrue. It is a vaporous eidolon of yourself that walks about with you wherever you go. It is a shadow. And because it is a shadow it has truth. But it is not a shadow of your objective self; – that dressed-up popinjay or scarecrow that your neighbours catch sight of before you even open your mouth – it is the shadow of your subjective self; the shadow of that etheric mask of the abysmal thing-in-itself, which has been created by your mind. The inmost 'I am I' is the thing-in-itself; and this creates the etheric self, whose shadow is the life-illusion.<sup>65</sup>

What will happen, though, if one's life-illusion is damaged or destroyed, if one comes to believe that one is a failure? The psychological damage will be immense: 'The person's ego feels torn to bits and as if each fragment of it were sinking down into [a] chasm with a wail of desolation.' Yet this is an impossible occurrence for any adept of Powys's life-philosophy for their life-illusion is 'independent of human valuation'.<sup>66</sup> By eschewing ambition and all the values of worldly success, includ-

370). Later translators have 'make-believe of life' (R. Farquharson Sharp) or 'saving lie' (Una Ellis-Fermor). See also J.M. Turner, 'Life-Illusion and Stupid Being', *Powys Review*, no. 4 (Winter-Spring 1978-9), p. 25.

<sup>64</sup> Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, p. 82; Powys, *Meaning of Culture*, p. 114.

<sup>65</sup> Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, pp. 82-3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

substantially unrelated to any other theoretical construct. How, then, did he come to develop it? When was it formed? Were there significant influences on him? And, if so, what or who were they?

Powys is the most generous of writers. He is always explicit in his acknowledgement of intellectual and literary indebtedness and lavish in his praise of his admired predecessors and, indeed, contemporaries. His specification of sources is essentially that all the great English, European and American writers and thinkers, ancient as well as modern, on whom he lectured in Britain and then in the USA were almost equally contributors to the elaboration of the life-technique. This process seems to have taken place during the first two decades of the century, so that the system was largely in place by the First World War and entirely by the early twenties. One problem is that when he does commit himself to short lists of influences they vary not only between but within books. In *In Defence of Sensuality* it seems to be 'all the old great poets, from Homer to Goethe', 'the sacramental doctrines of the traditional Christian Church', 'Dostoievsky, William Blake, Unamuno, the Druidic Triads of the Welsh, the *logoi* of Laotze [or Lao Tzu in a later transliteration]', and the pre-Socratics. In *A Philosophy of Solitude* it is Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu (or Kwang-Tze as Powys calls him), Heraclitus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Rousseau and Wordsworth. In the 1939 edition of *The Meaning of Culture* he says that 'it is to our great European sages, to Heraclitus, to Epictetus, to Homer, to Rabelais, to Cervantes, to Shakespeare, to Goethe, rather than to the metaphysical teachers of the East, that I have consistently turned'. It is 'Rabelais and Shakespeare and Cervantes and Montaigne' who are named as 'the greatest geniuses of our Western World' in *Mortal Strife*. *In Spite Of* begins by listing Homer, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Rabelais, Goethe and Dostoievsky, later adding Dickens, Spinoza, Kant, William James and Whitman, and concludes:

Never compare the present with the past. Never anticipate the future. Pull yourself up the second you begin pitying yourself for being *here* rather than *there*.

Too much has been made of hope. The better a philosopher you are the less you will hope. To hope is the most unphilosophical of all mental acts, for it implies that you are failing in the supreme achievement of turning the present into the eternal....

...instead of calling up imaginary changes in your life or hoping for this or that... make a resolute effort to convert what you see, be it the dreariest collection of objects, into what has *some* poetic significance. The great thing is to cultivate the power of obliterating what displeases you among these objects and of *making it invisible*...

Force those objects round you, however alien, to yield to your defiant resolve to assert yourself through them and against them. Get hold of the moment by the throat. Do not submit to the weakness of waiting for a change. *Create a change* by calling up the spiritual force from the depths of your being. This is an attitude of mind that you can turn into an automatic habit by doing it again and again...

Never wait for the future; never regret the past; make the present serve as past and future together.<sup>87</sup>

John Cowper Powys's life-philosophy is a most original body of practical thought, something entirely *sui generis* and

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<sup>87</sup> Powys, *Art of Happiness* (1935), pp. 187–8 (Powys's emphasis).

ing 'reputation in the eyes of others', one's life-illusion will be unassailable, inviolable:

... a real sceptical culture, by inspiring us with a philosophical contempt for all human grandeur and all human praise, may throw us back upon a deep, noble, simple, childish life-illusion according to which what we are exultantly and inviolably proud of is simply the fact of being alive, of being able to go walking about, touching things with our hands, blinking into the sun, feeling the wind on our face, the ground under our feet!

Powys comments that this is 'the great Homeric secret of happiness – the happiness of having for your life-illusion something which is inalienable from your basic bodily personality'.<sup>67</sup> It can be seen that his life-philosophy necessitates a *withdrawal from the world, quietism, non-action*.<sup>68</sup>

'I was born for sensations rather than actions. I was born to enjoy sensations...' (my italics). This is from *Confessions of Two Brothers* in which, as early as 1916, John Cowper can also declare:

In my writings and lectures I continually advocate a certain elaborate epicurean cult – a cult of sensations and ideas, deliberately undertaken with a view to deepening and intensifying one's vision of life. I speak tenderly and passionately of this premeditated art of making the utmost of every drop of Time. I speak of the epicurean pleasure to be derived from the least and most ordinary events of

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<sup>67</sup> Powys, *Meaning of Culture*, pp. 115–16.

<sup>68</sup> For the life-illusion see also Powys, *Art of Growing Old*, pp. 55–9; Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, p. 138.

every day – its food and fire, its sunrise and sunset, its felicitous groupings, its chance encounters, its fortunate omens, its gifts of comedy and tragedy, its sacramental and symbolic burden. I speak of a deliberate refinement of our powers of appreciation and understanding; of a deliberate cultivation of our consciousness, so that it should embrace more and more of the rich and astounding spectacle offered to our enjoyment.<sup>69</sup>

The advocacy of ‘enjoying life by a cult of sensations’ – these words are taken from *Mortal Strife* of 1942 – and the belief that it is by this means that both petty miseries and profound unhappinesses may be overcome underpin Powys’s *Weltanschauung*, from the beginning of his literary career through to *In Spite Of* in 1953, when he is continuing to assert that ‘the best of all cures for pride, vanity and conceit is *sensation*. Resolve to live entirely for sensation and you will soon find that you will be living the life of a human animal ... there’s the secret of life for you!’<sup>70</sup>

Sensations, sensationalism, sensuality, sensuousness... All these terms are conventionally used in very different ways from Powys’s intended meanings. From the outset he was anxious to dissociate himself from imputations of sybaritism:

My sensationalism is of an imaginative cast. It leads me constantly into absurd extremes of asceticism. I am naturally an ingrained ascetic, with lapses into luxuriousness. What is called ‘comfort’ has very little claim upon me. Many of my most exquisite sensations demand discomfort as their appropriate accompaniment.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Powys and Powys, pp. 83–4, 101.

<sup>70</sup> Powys, *Mortal Strife*, p. 168; Powys, *In Spite Of*, p. 65 (Powys’s emphasis).

<sup>71</sup> Powys and Powys, p. 105.

*Two Brothers* he admitted that although he was able to describe ecstasies ‘only too eloquently in words’ they ‘never come to me in life’, while in *The Complex Vision* he calls them not only ‘exalted’ and ‘heightened’ but also ‘exceptional’, ‘rare’ and ‘abnormal’.<sup>84</sup>

In total, Powys’s philosophy of life integrates personality, fosters maximum mental well-being and enables happiness to be attained. What is notably individualist anarchist about the imperatives of the life-technique is that no change to the economy, society or polity in which the individual lives is required. Individuals are able to achieve these ends without reference to other human beings and regardless of economic, social or political systems. This is also more generally anarchist, as in Wilde’s optimistic opinion that ‘even in prison, a man can be quite free. His soul can be free. His personality can be untroubled. He can be at peace.’ Or as Powys himself believes: ‘Shut this living skeleton of a man, of a woman, oh unrighteous, social order! into your crushing four walls, into your prisons of kindless labour; as long as he can hear the rain streaming upon the window he has a living ladder of escape.’<sup>85</sup> Essentially, though, Powys’s life-philosophy is revolutionary in expounding to ordinary people the technique – or techniques – by which they can effect self-liberation in the here-and-now: ‘Having once aroused in our mind enough faith in our own will-power to create a universe of contemplation and forget everything else, there are few limitations to the happiness we may enjoy.’<sup>86</sup> What could be more radical, more individualist or more anarchist than the following advice?

<sup>84</sup> Powys and Powys, p. 123; Powys, *Complex Vision*, pp. 340–1, 347.

<sup>85</sup> Oscar Wilde, ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’, in Richard Ellmann (ed.), *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 265; Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, p. 153 (see also pp. 91–2).

<sup>86</sup> Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, p. 215.

males and females (Powys appears to think men are more likely to experience them than women)?<sup>79</sup> Is it actually the case, as Powys asserts, that ‘everybody born into the world ... is visited by these indescribable and apparently causeless transports’?<sup>80</sup> One thing is, however, clear and that is that they are not social phenomena, relating to collectivities, but entirely located in the individual experience. It is therefore not surprising that it was Joyce and Powys, the two major twentieth-century writers most closely connected with individualist anarchism, who chose to analyse ‘ecstasies’ and ‘epiphanies’. It is also significant that it was one of Powys’s staunchest admirers, J.B. Priestley, who was to call them ‘the moments’ in a brief essay on the subject.<sup>81</sup>

There is some similarity between Proust’s notion of *temps retrouvé* and Powysian ecstasies. But whereas Proust is insistent that *temps perdu* can only be recovered involuntarily and advocates ‘an intense contemplation of a series of adventitious and accidental happenings, over the occasions of which he has no control’, Powys argues for ‘the power of arbitrarily summoning up these various temporal sensations’.<sup>82</sup> The best possible outcome of the cultivation of sensations is *to induce ecstasies, which can be ‘premeditated’*, and techniques for doing so are explained in *A Philosophy of Solitude*.<sup>83</sup> By then Powys’s own inner life had been transformed, since in *Confessions of*

<sup>79</sup> Melvon L. Ankeny, ‘Gladys Brown Ficke and *The Final Beauty*’, *Powys Journal*, XIII (2003), p. 105.

<sup>80</sup> Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 194.

<sup>81</sup> J.B. Priestley, *The Moments and Other Pieces* (London: William Heinemann, 1966), pp. 1–6. His celebration of Powys, ‘The Happy Introvert’, is reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 84–94. See also A.P. Seabright, *The Ecstasies of Crazy Jack* (Kidderminster: Joe’s Press, 1993); John Hodgson, ‘Chance Groupings – An Anatomy of Ecstasy’, *Powys Journal*, VII (1997), pp. 10–26.

<sup>82</sup> Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 108 (see also p. 133). Cf. Jacqueline Peltier, ‘Powys: The Pleasures of Proust?’, *Powys Review*, nos. 31–2 (n.d.), pp. 35–9.

<sup>83</sup> Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, pp. 88–93, 111–13, 122–4.

The British edition of *In Defence of Sensuality* went through six impressions in two months, but Victor Gollancz warned ‘the Reader who may be tempted to pick this superb book *pour le mauvais motif* [that] it may be said that...’ ‘In Defence of Joy’ or ‘In Defence of Saintliness’ would be titles more obviously descriptive of the contents’.<sup>72</sup> ‘In Defence of Sensationalism’ would be most exact, but equally open to misinterpretation! Those readers who anticipated erotic thrills must have been perplexed by such passages as the following:

Our Western civilization at the present requires nothing so much as a John the Baptist of sensuousness, a Prophet of simple, primeval, innocent sensuality. The brute pursuit of gross, active, gregarious pleasure which is the chief purpose of life of the machine-slaves of our time, has absolutely nothing in common with the lovely, magical, pure sensations that such a John the Baptist of the senses would advocate. He would baptise them into the pure contemplation of grass, water, sand, mud, trees, clouds, and pokeweeds! It is quite certain that simple indolent savages, all the world over, derive a thrilling satisfaction out of these things, such as we have completely lost the power of feeling.<sup>73</sup>

The most ready way for happiness to be attained, therefore, is by each individual practising a personal ‘cult of sensations’. Powys was a sprawling, long-winded, garrulous, repetitive writer, addicted to the itemizing of lists – from whom it is difficult to quote succinctly – and who was rarely obliged to confine himself *in parvo*; but the first of five paragraphs which

<sup>72</sup> Dante Thomas, p. 34. See Langridge, p. 115, for the publishing history.

<sup>73</sup> Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 117.

he produced for the dust wrapper of the American edition of *The Art of Happiness* of 1935 reads:

I am writing of all the little things connected with food, fire, warmth, cold, rain, sun and air, coffee, cigarettes, newspapers, mechanical work, walks, reveries, love-making, the after-thoughts from books, the casual glimpses of Nature, that in the most ordinary day of the most unassuming life can be given (by use of *the imaginative will*) a certain twist or a particular emphasis that *may make all the difference*.<sup>74</sup>

Sense-impressions such as these have the ability to trigger an 'ecstasy', a moment of heightened perception and intense joy. *Ecstasies* are a constant theme throughout both the 'philosophical' books and his fiction and stand for Powys at the apex of human experience. An ecstasy is 'a mood when you are ..."beside yourself"', a 'delirious self-abandoned rapture':<sup>75</sup>

... when under some sharp, sudden arrest of unexpected beauty, when under the swift piercing stab of a familiar thing caught in a new light – rain-dark violets under soaked leaves, crimson fungus-growths under dropping birch-twigs – we are flooded with mysterious happiness; mingled with what we feel comes a relaxing, a yielding, a furtive loosening of reason's taut nerve-cords.

And it is then that we are enabled to lie back upon clay and mud and birch-roots and earth-mould and last season's dead leaves ... in a complete reciprocity with Nature ... these fleeting and mysterious breaths ...make life itself, lived at the

<sup>74</sup> Dante Thomas, p. 46 (Powys's emphasis).

<sup>75</sup> Powys, *Philosophy of Solitude*, p. 122.

weakest, lowest, faintest ebb of vitality, something that is lovely and thrilling...<sup>76</sup>

Powys's ecstasies are similar to Joyce's 'epiphanies': physical, not mystic, experiences, precipitated by commonplace incidents – by, I can confirm, a piece of paper swirling in the gutter or the redness of the paint of a pillar-box – and revealing the meaningfulness and splendour of human existence:

When embraced in our special manner this dust, this smoke, this grime, these ashes, this dirt, this masonry, this gravel, this mud, this yellow and green mould growing on these piled-up stones, these garbage-tins, and these mysterious little pockets of undisturbed rubbish, have the power of giving us an enchanting ecstasy.<sup>77</sup>

It is astonishing that so little attention has been paid to so central and psychologically nourishing a feature of everyday life: '...why, in the Devil's name ... do we go on making a cult of everything else except these? Why must politics, religion, philosophy, ambition, revolution, reaction, business, pleasure – all be considered intensely important, and these rare magical feelings not to be considered at all?'<sup>78</sup> Historically ecstasies have probably been generally regarded as a form of religious illumination. Are they related to bodily health? Do they occur with the same frequency throughout the life span? Or are they more prevalent among the youthful, as Wordsworth (in 'Tintern Abbey' and 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality') and Powys both indicate? Is there a similar incidence between

<sup>76</sup> John Cowper Powys, *The Art of Happiness* (1923; London: Village Press edn, 1974), pp. 13–15.

<sup>77</sup> Powys, *In Spite Of*, p. 294. For 'epiphanies', see James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (London: Jonathan Cape, revised edn, 1956), pp. 22–3, 216–19; Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 87–9.

<sup>78</sup> Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 194.



stay in London.<sup>23</sup> Read donated small sums of money; reviewed Rocker's *Anarcho-Syndicalism* and *Nationalism and Culture* in one of the last issues of the *Criterion*; acted on behalf of anarchist authors with the two publishers, Heinemann and Routledge, for which he worked; spoke on anarchist platforms; and published articles and poems in *Spain and the World*, the paper launched in 1936 by Vernon Richards.

This set the pattern for the fifteen years of Read's association with the Freedom Press group. *Spain and the World* was renamed *Revolt!*, which was revived as *War Commentary*, in turn becoming in 1945 a resurrected *Freedom*; and he published in these titles the articles now collected in *A One-Man Manifesto and Other Writings for Freedom Press*.<sup>24</sup> In addition he wrote or edited for Freedom Press (which also reprinted *Poetry and Anarchism*) six books and pamphlets: *The Philosophy of Anarchism* (1940), *Kropotkin: Selections from His Writings* (1942), *The Education of Free Men* (1944), *Freedom: Is It a Crime?* (1945), *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*; *Chains of Freedom* (1949) and *Art and the Evolution of Man* (1951). His political writings were largely gathered as *Anarchy and Order* (1954); but publications linking politics, society and art included *To Hell with Culture* (1941), *The Politics of the Unpolitical* (1943) and *The Grass Roots of Art* (1947). Anarchists have always revered the written word but, traditionally, they have esteemed public speaking almost as much; and so Read was pressed to participate in this arena as well. But, as Richards remembered in his affectionate obituary of Read,

he not only reluctantly agreed to speak at meetings but ... having agreed to he wrote out his

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from Goldman to Read, 5 June 1939, quoted by Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman in Exile: From the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 214.

<sup>24</sup> Herbert Read, *A One-Man Manifesto and Other Writings for Freedom Press*, ed. David Goodway (London: Freedom Press, 1994) [hereafter OMM].

working-class Jack Common, now co-editor of the *Adelphi*, in 1936 that so many of the socialist bourgeoisie 'are the sort of eunuch type with a vegetarian smell who go about spreading sweetness and light and have at the back of their minds a vision of the working class all TT [teetotal], well washed behind the ears, readers of Edward Carpenter or some other pious sodomite and talking with BBC accents'.<sup>42</sup> Orwell's distaste for homosexuals was an abiding characteristic, with him castigating in private 'the pansy left', the 'fashionable pansies', Auden and Spender, being singled out for especial contempt. Yet he insisted, as usual unpredictable and unfailingly contradictory, that he had 'always been very pro-Wilde'.<sup>43</sup>

In 1936 Orwell was dispatched to the north of England to collect material on the condition of the unemployed for a book commissioned by Victor Gollancz. The outcome was *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which appeared as a Left Book Club volume in March 1937, while he was fighting in Spain. Direct contact with lives and attitudes of impoverished industrial workers proved revelatory, and it was now that he first espoused socialism, albeit a distinctively idiosyncratic version, never having any truck with either the Fabianism or the Marxism which so influenced most other middle-class intellectuals on the left. Indeed he was tell Spender that he had been 'very hostile to the CP since about 1935'.<sup>44</sup> Since he considers in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that 'for the moment the only possible course for any decent person, however much of a Tory or an anarchist by temperament, is to work for the establishment of Socialism', he almost certainly still regarded himself a Tory anarchist as late as 1936.<sup>45</sup> The fundamentals of Orwell's socialism were

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<sup>42</sup> CWGO, X, p. 471.

<sup>43</sup> Crick, p. 171; CWGO, XI, p. 67, and XIX, pp. 157.

<sup>44</sup> CWGO, XI, p. 132. See also CWGO, XIX, p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> CWGO, V (*The Road to Wigan Pier*), p. 204. Cf. Michael Sayers's testimony cited by Bowker, p. 174.

justice, liberty and decency. For him socialism meant ‘justice and common decency’, a decency inherent in the culture of the traditional working-class community. He believed that ‘the only thing *for* which we can combine is the underlying ideal of Socialism; justice and liberty’ [*sic*]; and concluded: ‘All that is needed is to hammer two facts home into the public consciousness. One, that the interests of all exploited people are the same; the other, that Socialism is compatible with common decency.’<sup>46</sup>

Bernard Crick argues persuasively that Orwell had attended the ILP summer school in July 1936, and so when at the end of December, having waited to deliver the typescript of *The Road to Wigan Pier* to Gollancz, he left for Spain, principally in search of a new subject, he asked the ILP to furnish him with documentation.<sup>47</sup> Although he appreciated that the revolution of July and August was probably now starting to recede, he was to write in *Homage to Catalonia*: ‘The Anarchists were still in virtual control of Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing’. The experience of Barcelona was

something startling and overwhelming. It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties; almost every church had been gutted and

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<sup>46</sup> *CWGO*, V (*The Road to Wigan Pier*), pp. 164, 201, 214 (Orwell’s emphasis). Richard Taylor, ‘George Orwell and the Politics of Decency’, in J.A. Jowitt and R.K.S. Taylor (eds.), *George Orwell* (Bradford Centre Occasional Papers No. 3, October 1981), is an able and very helpful guide to the slippery topic of Orwell’s socialism.

<sup>47</sup> Crick, pp. 194, 201; *CWGO*, XI, p. 136.

*Collected Poems* was published as early as 1926. Seven years later Wyndham Lewis’s acolyte, Hugh Gordon Porteus, in a warmly appreciative assessment, could complain that Read’s poetry was ‘unaccountably neglected ... and quite untapped as influence’, although ‘extremely fertile’. It is indeed a considerable achievement, yet continues to be underrated.<sup>21</sup> The lucid and admired *English Prose Style* came out in 1928. *The Innocent Eye*, the memoir of his childhood and a small masterpiece, followed in 1932 and was to be incorporated with the war prose writings in the similarly outstanding *Annals of Innocence and Experience* (1940), while *The Green Child*, Read’s only novel, appeared in 1934. A series of successful anthologies was launched in 1931 with *The London Book of English Prose*, co-edited with his great friend, Bonamy Dobree, shortly to become Professor of English at Leeds, followed by *The English Vision* (1933), *The Knapsack* (1939), *The London Book of English Verse* (1949), also with Dobree, and for children, *This Way Delight* (1956).

In total, therefore, when Read declared in 1937 for the unconventional doctrine of anarchism he was already a figure of considerable cultural authority, at the height of a dual career in literature and writing about the visual arts. As has been seen in chapter 6, Emma Goldman spent the years of the Spanish Civil War largely in London, acting as representative for the CNT-FAI and running a propaganda office for them. So after Read had announced his anarchism, he was contacted by her and recruited as a sponsor for the English Section of the SIA.<sup>22</sup> For several months they worked together fairly closely. Goldman later told Read that he and Ethel Mannin were the only ‘two real comrades and friends’ she had made during her entire

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<sup>21</sup> Hugh Gordon Porteus, ‘Herbert Read’, *Twentieth Century*, V, no. 25 (March 1933), p. 29. Kieron Winn, ‘The Poetry of Herbert Read’, in *HRR*, provides an excellent discussion.

<sup>22</sup> International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam: Goldman Archive, XXVII B, carbon of letter from Goldman to Read, 19 January 1938; letter from Read to Goldman, 20 January 1938.

plement from 1925 and the *Nation and Athenaeum* from 1927. Particularly noteworthy was 'Psycho-analysis and the Critic', a *Criterion* article of 1925, which introduced Read as the anglo-phone pioneer of the application of psychoanalytical theory to literary and art criticism.<sup>19</sup> There were also *Phases of English Poetry* (1928) and *Form in Modern Poetry* (1932); and gatherings of his literary essays appeared as *Reason and Romanticism* (1926), *The Sense of Glory* (1929), and a large *Collected Essays in Literary Criticism* (1938). In 1929 he delivered the Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, and these were published as *Wordsworth* (1930); and his deep engagement with the Romantic poets continued with 'In Defence of Shelley' (1936) and the later writings collected as *The True Voice of Feeling* (1953).

The booklets, *In Retreat* (1925) and *Ambush* (1930), were prose treatments of war experiences; *Naked Warriors* (1919) and *The End of a War* (1933) constituted his war poetry. D.J. Enright includes Read with Blunden, Graves and Sassoon as the authors of the 'first-class' prose works to deal with the war; yet Hugh Cecil goes further, believing *In Retreat* not only to be 'one of the best pieces of writing to come out of the war' but that to find Read's 'real equivalent in war literature' it is necessary to look outside Britain, *In Retreat* being as 'great a classic of war writings' as Ernst Junger's *Storm of Steel*.<sup>20</sup> Other volumes of poems were *Eclogues* (1919), *Mutations of the Phoenix* (1923) and, during the renewed European civil war, *Thirty-Five Poems* (1940) and *A World within a War* (1944). An initial volume of

<sup>19</sup> For the literary criticism, see John R. Doheny, 'Herbert Read as Literary Critic', in *HRR*, where too Read's use of psychoanalysis is discussed, as it is also in John R. Doheny, 'Herbert Read's Use of Sigmund Freud', in *HRR*, and David Cohen, 'Herbert Read and Psychoanalysis', in Malcolm Gee (ed.), *Art Criticism since 1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> D.J. Enright, 'The Literature of the First World War', in Boris Ford (ed.), *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 8 vols., 1983), VII, p. 211; Cecil, 'Herbert Read', pp. 35, 42. See also Hugh Cecil, *The Flower of Battle: British Fiction Writers of the First World War* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1995), chap. 10.

its images burnt...Every shop and café had an inscription saying that it had been collectivized; even the bootblacks had been collectivized and their boxes painted red and black. Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal.... There were no private motor cars, they had all been commandeered, and all the trams and taxis and much of the other transport had been painted red and black.... In all outward appearance it was a town in which the wealthy classes had practically ceased to exist.... Practically everyone wore rough working-class clothes, or blue overalls or some variant of the militia uniform.

Although Orwell confesses 'that there was much in it that I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it', he 'recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for' and within a few days had joined the militia of the POUM since that was the ILP's Spanish affiliate.<sup>48</sup>

He then spent four months on the Aragón front where he was among tens of thousands of people, mainly though not entirely of working-class origin, all living at the same level and mingling on terms of equality. In theory it was perfect equality, and even in practice it was not far from it. There is a sense in which it would be true to say that one was experiencing a foretaste of Socialism...

The positive consequences of his time in Spain were, then, 'to make my desire to see Socialism established much more actual than before' and ultimately to escape from the country with 'not less but more belief in the decency of human beings'.

<sup>48</sup> *CWGO*, VI (*Homage to Catalonia*), pp. 2–3. Cf. *CWGO*, XI, p. 51.

He praises the Spaniards for ‘their innate decency’, which, combined with ‘their ever-present Anarchist tinge’, he considered would enable them to ‘make even the opening stages of Socialism tolerable if they had the chance’.<sup>49</sup>

Not only the Spanish people but also the anarchists, therefore, emerge with great credit. Dissatisfied with the inaction and stalemate of the Aragon front Orwell, desperate to engage in the fierce battles around Madrid, was preparing to leave the POUM and transfer to the Communist-organized International Brigades, even though ‘as far as my purely personal preferences went I would have liked to join the Anarchists’. He was even to say that that had he had ‘a complete understanding of the situation’ when he arrived in Spain he would ‘probably have joined the CNT militia’.<sup>50</sup> *Homage to Catalonia* begins memorably with Orwell’s encounter with an Italian militiaman in the POUM’s Lenin Barracks:

Something in his face deeply moved me. It was the face of a man who would commit murder and throw away his life for a friend – the kind of face you would expect in an Anarchist, though as likely as not he was a Communist.... I have seldom seen anyone – any man, I mean – to whom I have taken such an immediate liking.

Some years later, in ‘Looking Back on the Spanish War’, he more convincingly identified him as ‘probably a Trotskyist or an Anarchist’ and published the moving poem beginning ‘The Italian soldier shook my hand / Beside the guard-room table...’ and ending

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<sup>49</sup> CWGO, VI (*Homage to Catalonia*), pp. 83–4, 186.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96; CWGO, XI, p. 136. Cf. CWGO, XI, p. 93; the interesting reminiscences of Bob Edwards, ‘Introduction’, to George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Folio Society, 1970), p. 8; and Stafford Cottman’s recollections, ‘In the Spanish Trenches’, in Coppard and Crick, pp. 151–2.

(1926) and *Staffordshire Pottery Figures* (1929). A long and prolific association began in 1929 with Read contributing art criticism to the *Listener*; and his widely read *The Meaning of Art* (1931), one of the very few of his books to have remained consistently in print, was adapted from some of these articles. He left the V&A in 1931 to become Watson Gordon Professor of Fine Art at the University of Edinburgh, but was obliged to resign the following year on account of personal scandal. He had married in 1919 a fellow student at Leeds, Evelyn Roff, the recipient of the letters to be eventually published in *The Contrary Experience* as ‘A War Diary’; but at Edinburgh he met Margaret Ludwig (‘Ludo’), a Lecturer in Music, who was to become his second wife. Back in London he established close friendships with the members of the most experimental group of artists working in England – Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Paul Nash, soon to be joined by Naum Gabo – and earned a living partly by becoming editor of the art-historical (and establishment) *Burlington Magazine* from 1933 until 1939.

Read was by now the foremost British advocate of modern art. He was the author of the widely read *Art Now* (1933), of the first book, in 1934, on his lifelong intimate, Henry Moore, and of a seminal work on industrial design, *Art and Industry* (1934). His avant-gardism led to a close association with the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1936 and he edited the collective statement, *Surrealism*, in the same year; but his fundamental, persistent advocacy was for abstraction. *Art and Society* (1937), originally delivered as the Sydney Jones Lectures at the University of Liverpool, was a pioneering contribution to the sociology of art. Parallel to these trendsetting activities in the world of art was an equally distinguished and productive literary output. Read became a regular contributor from its first issue in 1923 to the *Criterion*, the periodical edited by another lifelong friend, T.S. Eliot.<sup>18</sup> He wrote also for the *Times Literary Sup-*

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<sup>18</sup> See Harding, chap. 5: ‘Herbert Read: Anarchist Aide-de-Camp’.

he went to work at the new Ministry of Labour and then, also in 1919, to the Treasury.

An eager reader of the *New Age* during the war, he had soon become a contributor and one of Orage's youngest protégés. Orage proved a decisive influence on Read, shaping his style while training him in 1921 to take over the admired 'Readers and Writers' column for six months, and he hoped that Read would then succeed him as editor of the *New Age*. In the event he was only to co-edit a selection of Orage's non-political articles immediately after his death in 1934, although he did also prepare for publication, at the older man's instigation, the important collection of T.E. Hulme's *Speculations* (1924).<sup>16</sup> Another wartime enthusiasm, though, did not prove lasting. In his copy, signed in 1916, of Arthur Ransome's insightful *Oscar Wilde*, there is pasted on the title-page a photograph of Wilde cut out in silhouette – presumably by Read himself – but there was only to be a single significant reference to Wilde throughout his extensive oeuvre.<sup>17</sup>

He was able in 1922 to transfer, within the Civil Service, to the Department of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum. This provided the springboard for his highly influential involvement for the rest of his life with the visual arts. Books soon appeared on *English Pottery* (1924), *English Stained Glass*

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<sup>16</sup> Wallace Martin, *The New Age' under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), pp. 52–6, 279–82; King, pp. 69–72; Tom Steele, *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Arts Club, 1893–1923* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), pp. 218, 230–1; A.R. Orage, *Selected Essays and Critical Writings*, ed. Herbert Read and Denis Saurat (London: Stanley Nott, 1935). See also Herbert Read, 'Aspirations in Perspective', *Listener*, 7 May 1959, and Read, *Cult of Sincerity*, p. 104.

<sup>17</sup> Read Library, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds; Herbert Read, *The Philosophy of Modern Art: Collected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), pp. 73–4. There may be only two other mentions of Wilde: Herbert Read, *To Hell with Culture: Democratic Values Are New Values* (London: Kegan Paul, 1941), p. 12; Herbert Read, *A Coat of Many Colours: Occasional Essays* (London: George Routledge, 1945), p. 27.

But the thing that I saw in your face  
No power can disinherit:  
No bomb that ever burst  
Shatters the crystal spirit.<sup>51</sup>

He contrasts the anarchists and the Communists, entirely to the former's advantage: 'Philosophically, Communism and Anarchism are poles apart.. The Communist's emphasis is always on centralism and efficiency, the Anarchist's on liberty and equality.'<sup>52</sup>

His brother-in-law considered that 'what changed Eric completely was the Spanish war.... he came back a different man'.<sup>53</sup> Orwell left Spain with his belief in the decency of the common people reaffirmed, the knowledge that socialism was feasible and an empathy with the anarchists of the CNT-FAI. He wrote to Cyril Connolly: 'I have seen wonderful things & at last really believe in Socialism, which I never did before'.<sup>54</sup> But the negative experience of the machinations of international Communism was to prove even more decisive. On a fortnight's leave in Barcelona at the end of April he was astonished by the transformation since January. The revolution was going into reverse: 'Once again it was an ordinary city, a little pinched and chipped by war, but with no outward sign of working-class predominance.'<sup>55</sup> Then came the traumatic events of 3–7 May – the May Days. For Orwell the situation was clear: 'On one side the CNT, on the other side the police...when I see an actual flesh-and-blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask myself which side I am on.'<sup>56</sup> Back at the front Orwell was almost immediately badly wounded; and it

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<sup>51</sup> CWGO, VI (*Homage to Catalonia*), p. 1; CWGO, XIII, pp. 509–11.

<sup>52</sup> CWGO, VI (*Homage to Catalonia*), p. 204.

<sup>53</sup> 'The Brother-in-Law Strikes Back', in Coppard and Crick, pp. 129–30.

<sup>54</sup> CWGO, XI, p. 28.

<sup>55</sup> CWGO, VI (*Homage to Catalonia*), p. 88.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104. For Orwell's account and analysis of the May Days, see *ibid.*, chap. 9, and app. 2. For the anarchist perspective (with which he con-

was from hospital that he wrote so optimistically to Connolly. On his return to Barcelona in June he found that the POUM, scapegoated for the May Days, had been proscribed and consequently many of his comrades were imprisoned. Of the ILP contingent Bob Smillie, grandson of the former president of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, was to die in a Valencia jail.<sup>57</sup> Orwell, Eileen Blair, who had been working for the ILP's Barcelona office, and two ILPers were lucky to escape over the frontier to the safety of France.

In England, not only was there to be the difficulty of the publication and reception of *Homage to Catalonia*; also the *New Statesman* in July rejected a commissioned book review of two books on Spain in which he had stated: 'The most important fact that has emerged from the whole business is that the Communist Party is now an anti-revolutionary force.'<sup>58</sup> For Orwell the *New Statesman* had thereby exhibited 'the mentality of a whore', a charge to which he was to return in 1944: 'Don't imagine that for years on end you can make yourself the bootlicking propagandist of the Soviet regime, or any other regime, and then suddenly return to mental decency. Once a whore, always a whore.'<sup>59</sup> The origins of *Animal Farm* are to be found in counterrevolutionary Barcelona.<sup>60</sup>

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curred), see Richards, *Lessons*, chaps. 12–14, and [Vernon Richards (ed.)] *The May Days: Barcelona 1937* (London: Freedom Press, 1987).

<sup>57</sup> For Smillie, see *CWGO*, VI (*Homage to Catalonia*), pp. 39, 134–5, 170; Brockway, p. 303; Dan McArthur, *We Carry On: Our Tribute to Bob Smillie* (London: ILP Guild of Youth, n.d.); Buchanan; John Newsinger, 'The Death of Bob Smillie', *Historical Journal*, XLI (ii) (1998). John McGovern, *Terror in Spain* (London: Independent Labour Party, n.d), conveys the ILP's reaction to the events in Spain.

<sup>58</sup> *CWGO*, XI, p. 51.

<sup>59</sup> Crick, pp. 228, 305; *CWGO*, XVI, p. 365. See also *CWGO*, XI, p. 53.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation* (London: Constable, 1979), pp. 187, 225–6, summarize the importance of Spain in Orwell's career. Raymond Carr, 'Orwell and the Spanish Civil War', in Miriam Gross (ed.), *The World of George Orwell* (London: Weidenfeld &

the ages'.<sup>13</sup> In politics, however, for thirty years, Read went resolutely (and, with exception of his knighthood, consistently) against the tide by professing his anarchist convictions.

Herbert Read had been born in 1893 at Muscoates Grange, a farm equidistant to Kirkbymoorside and Helmsley in North Yorkshire. When his father died in 1903, the family, being tenants, had to leave the farm – and the arcadian life that Read was to describe in *The Innocent Eye* – and he was sent to an orphanage, Crossley's School, in a very different part of Yorkshire, Halifax. He left school in 1908, aged fifteen, went to Leeds and worked at the Leeds, Skyrac and Morley Savings Bank. After borrowing some money from an uncle, he enrolled in 1912 at the University of Leeds, where he studied a diversity of subjects, although economics was possibly the only one, he later recalled, in which he ever received 'what pedagogues would call a "thorough grounding"'.<sup>14</sup> He left university before finishing his degree to join the army, an eager volunteer, and in 1915 was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Yorkshire Regiment, the Green Howards. The same year saw the publication of his first book, *Songs of Chaos*, a volume of poetry. Read's military service in the Great War is second only to his upbringing at – and expulsion from – Muscoates as the determining force of his life. But he had 'a good war', receiving the Military Cross for conducting a raid and capturing an enemy officer and, for leading a retreat during the Germans' massive offensive of spring 1918, the Distinguished Service Order (during this war only awarded to subalterns for exceptional bravery not quite fulfilling the exacting requirements for a Victoria Cross), being promoted to Captain, and giving serious consideration to staying in the army and pursuing a military career.<sup>15</sup> In the event

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<sup>13</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Wyndham Lewis the Artist: From 'Blast' to Burlington House* (London: Laidlaw & Laidlaw, 1939), pp. 26–7; Wyndham Lewis, *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* (London: Methuen, <sup>1954</sup>), p. 53.

<sup>14</sup> Read, *Annals*, p. 127.

<sup>15</sup> Hugh Cecil, 'Herbert Read and the Great War', in *HRR*, pp. 33–7.

chism, the eloquent declaration whose origins were therefore strangely mongrel.

Read continued, in *Annals of Innocence and Experience*: 'In calling these principles Anarchism I have forfeited any claim to be taken seriously as a politician, and have cut myself off from the main current of socialist activity in England.'<sup>12</sup> There is considerable irony in the ultra-modern trendsetter in the visual arts electing for so permanently unfashionable a political creed as anarchism. Read has been accused, especially by bitter figurative painters, whose work he caused to be shunned, of jumping ceaselessly on to the bandwagon of the latest artistic novelty, of imposing upon practising artists a Procrustean schema of aesthetic evolution culminating in the abstract. As his thoroughgoing enemy, Wyndham Lewis, put it in 1939:

Mr Herbert Read has an unenviable knack of providing, at a week's notice, almost any movement, or sub-movement, in the visual arts, with a neatly-cut party-suit -with which it can appear, appropriately caparisoned, at the cocktail-party thrown by the capitalist who has made its birth possible, in celebration of the happy event ... prefaces and inaugural addresses follow each other in bewildering succession, and with a robust disregard for the slight inconsistencies attendant upon such invariable readiness to oblige.

In *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*, his extended assault of 1954, Lewis attacked Read 'for having been for years ready to plug to the hilt, to trumpet, to expound, any movement in painting or sculpture – sometimes of the most contradictory kind – which was obviously hurrying along a path as opposite as possible from what had appealed to civilized man through

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<sup>12</sup> Read, *Annals*, p. 134.

After his spell in the sanatorium in 1938 Orwell was sent to recuperate in French Morocco and it was there, brooding on the imminent European war, that he wrote to Herbert Read in January and March 1939, advocating preparations for 'illegal anti-war activities' by acquiring a printing press and stock of paper. His assumption was that some kind of authoritarian regime, a variety of Austro-Fascism, would come to power, explaining to a sceptical Read:

So long as the objective, real or pretended, is war against [G]ermany, the greater part of the Left will associate themselves with the fascising process, which will ultimately mean associating themselves with wage-reductions, suppression of free speech, brutalities in the colonies etc. Therefore the revolt against these things will have to be against the Left as well as Right. The revolt will form itself into two sections, that of the dissident lefts like ourselves, and that of the fascists, this time the idealistic Hitler-fascists...<sup>61</sup>

He had finally become a member of the ILP in June 1938 and at this time wrote what he called 'my anti-war pamphlet', 'Socialism and the War', which was never published and whose manuscript has not survived.<sup>62</sup> Fifteen months later, with the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the outbreak of war, although he had just been arguing that 'a Left-wing party which, within a capitalist society, becomes a war party, has already thrown up the sponge, because it is demanding a policy which can only be

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Nicolson, 1971), provides a critical, though generous, discussion of *Homage to Catalonia*.

<sup>61</sup> CWGO, XI, pp. 313–14, 340–1.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151, 169, 223; Crick, pp. 246–7. Crick's claim that Orwell joined the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) in December 1937 is disproved by Davison, who shows that it was merely a matter of Eileen Blair buying PPU pamphlets (CWGO, XI, p. 104).

carried out by its opponents', he resigned from the ILP in opposition to its anti-war stance.<sup>63</sup>

Orwell proceeded to advocate the radical, even revolutionary, patriotism of 'My Country Right or Left' and *The Lion and the Unicorn*. He contended that 'there is no real alternative between resisting Hitler and surrendering to him', but he believed additionally: 'Only revolution can save England ... but now the revolution has started, and it may proceed quite quickly if only we can keep Hitler out.'<sup>64</sup> His onslaughts on the pacifists – he maintained that 'to be effectively anti-war in England now one has to be pro-Hitler' and that 'there is no real answer to the charge that pacifism is objectively pro-Fascist' – led in summer 1942 to a bad-tempered brawl in the columns of *Partisan Review* with three young anarcho-pacifists, D.S. Savage, Alex Comfort and George Woodcock, each laying into him.<sup>65</sup>

Derek (Stanley) Savage, a Christian anarchist and poet, born in 1917, was one of the most highly regarded literary critics of the 1940s with *The Personal Principle: Studies in Modern Poetry* (1944) and *The Withered Branch: Six Studies in the Modern Novel* (1950), one of the novelists being Aldous Huxley. He attacked Orwell, asking:

What is the actual social system which he is fighting to defend? What hopes has he of diverting the stream of history the way *he* wants it to go? ... Mr Orwell, like all the other supporters of the war, shipping magnates, coal owners, proletarians, university professors, Sunday journalists, Trade Union leaders, Church dignitaries, scoundrels and honest men, is being swept along by history, not directing it. Like them, he will be deposited, along

<sup>63</sup> CWGO, XI, p. 406.

<sup>64</sup> CWGO, XII, pp. 271–2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473; CWGO, XIII, p. 110.

members of Read's milieu. It was his mentor, A.R. Orage, who in the *New Age* had 'discovered' and edited Major C.H. Douglas and led a section of Guild Socialism in support of Social Credit. Other followers, temporary or for life, of Douglas included Ezra Pound, Edwin Muir and Hugh MacDiarmid. In 1934 Aldous Huxley, canvassed by T.S. Eliot, signed a letter to *The Times* advocating 'a thorough and public examination of some scheme of national credit', together with Read, I.A. Richards and Bonamy Dobree.<sup>10</sup> The scale of Read's involvement with Social Credit remains to be documented; but it is readily apparent that his pamphlet of 1935, *Essential Communism*, which had first appeared as 'The Intellectual and Liberty', was a Douglasite tract and it was indeed reprinted the same year in *The Social Credit Pamphleteer*.<sup>11</sup> It was a 'drastic revision' of *Essential Communism*, which was incorporated in *Poetry and Anar-*

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been a friend for a quarter of a century, is an 'intellectual biography' and an excellent study of the published works. For Woodcock's reaction to *The Last Modern*, see George Woodcock, 'Herbert Read: Contradictions and Consistencies', *Drunken Boat* (New York), no. 2 (1994). Read has been better served by bibliographies: Robin Skelton (ed.), *Herbert Read: A Memorial Symposium* (London: Methuen, 1970), pp. 193–213; Benedict Read and David Thistlewood (eds.), *Herbert Read: A British Vision of World Art* (Leeds and London: Leeds City Art Galleries with Henry Moore Foundation and Lund Humphries, 1993), pp. 146–66 (ambitiously including many of the articles); and *HRR*, pp. 309–16 (compiled by the present writer).

<sup>10</sup> Grover Smith (ed.), *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), pp. 378–9. For Eliot and Social Credit, see David Bradshaw, 'T.S. Eliot and the Major: Sources of Literary Anti-Semitism in the 1930s', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 July 1996; but cf. Jason Harding, *The 'Criterion': Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 185–94.

<sup>11</sup> Both were published by Stanley Nott Ltd of London, *Essential Communism* in the 'Pamphlets on the New Economics' series. John L. Finlay, *Social Credit: The English Origins* (Montréal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), p. 253, states that it was not until *Essential Communism* that Read made public his acceptance of Social Credit – and also considers there is a natural affinity between it and anarchism.



sic principles of such political philosophy as I now accept.

And indeed in December 1934 he was telling the American literary critic, V.F. Calverton, that he was 'too good an anarchist' to become 'a complete Marxist'.<sup>6</sup> Yet Read was well advised not to claim a political consistency during these years, since in the early 1930s he had some distinctly authoritarian sympathies. In 'The Intellectual and Liberty', a *Listener* article of September 1934, he could say: 'From certain points of view. I can welcome the notion of the totalitarian state, whether in its Fascist or Communist form. I am not afraid of the totalitarian state as an economic fact, an economic machine to facilitate the complex business of living in a community.'<sup>7</sup>

Nor was *The Green Child* (1935), a mysterious utopian work, in any way libertarian, A.L. Morton long ago drawing a compelling comparison between Read's Utopia of the Green People and the final part, 'As Far as Thought Can Reach' of *Back to Methusaleh* (1921), for Read's inclinations are here identical to those of Bernard Shaw, the bloodless, cerebral, Fabian admirer of the interwar dictators, in contrast to those of the libertarian communist William Morris in *News from Nowhere*.<sup>8</sup>

What is also missing is any mention – by Read himself or either of his biographers – of his adherence to Social Credit.<sup>9</sup> This was a common enthusiasm in the 1920s and 1930s amongst

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<sup>6</sup> Read, *Annals*, pp. 129–30, 133–4; Homberger.

<sup>7</sup> Cited by Bob Barker, 'Herbert Read as Novelist: *The Green Child*, in David Goodway (ed.), *Herbert Read Reassessed* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998) [hereafter HRR], p. 108.

<sup>8</sup> A.L. Morton, *The English Utopia* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1952), pp. 208–9. Stanley Pierson, *British Socialists: The Journey from Fantasy to Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 241–8, provides an interesting discussion of Read's political development down to the 1930s.

<sup>9</sup> The unempathetic James King, *The Last Modern: A Life of Herbert Read* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), is the only full-scale biography; whereas George Woodcock, *Herbert Read: The Stream and the Source* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), written by the anarchist writer who had

with other detritus, where history decides, not where he thinks.<sup>66</sup>

Savage published the short *Hamlet and the Pirates: An Exercise in Literary Detection* in 1950, but *The Underground Man*, a study of *Hamlet*, concurrently announced as forthcoming never appeared and neither (other than an advance extract in *Colonnade* in 1952) did 'a study of the writer and politics', *Caesar's Laurel Crown*; and he then went almost entirely silent for a quarter of a century. He returned to literary criticism in the 1980s with two unforgiving essays on Orwell, contending that just before the outbreak of war 'he went into reverse, denied his pacificism and reverted to the Kiplingesque militarism of his early upbringing or conditioning':

... he [had] held to a notion of individual morality which he expressed vaguely as 'decency', and which was buttressed to some extent by allegiance to a political movement, the ILP, which was at least derivatively moral in its belief in human, or working-class brotherhood, and its rejection of militarism and war. By welcoming the resurgent militarism of World War II, Orwell cut his link with conscience and morality.

Although Savage's *Winter Offering: Selected Poems, 1934–1953* appeared from the Leavisite Brynmill Press in 1990, there were no further publications, and he died in 2007.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> CWGO, XIII, p. 394.

<sup>67</sup> D.S. Savage, 'The Fatalism of George Orwell', in Boris Ford (ed.), *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 8 vols., 1983), VIII, p. 137; D.S. Savage, 'The Case against George Orwell', *Tract*, no. 31 (Autumn 1980), p. 39. See also D.S. Savage, 'Testament of a Conscientious Objector', in Clifford Simmons (ed.), *The Objectors* (Isle of Man: Times Press and Anthony Gibbs & Phillips [1965]), pp. 103–5, 114–16. For Savage, see Stanley J. Kunitz (ed.), *Twentieth Century Authors: First Supplement* (New

Orwell had already reviewed at length for the *Adelphi* Alex Comfort's first, pre-anarchist novel, *No Such Liberty* (1941) and, while conceding that it was 'a good novel as novels go at this moment', had taken it apart as a pacifist 'tract'. Comfort retaliated fiercely in the *Partisan Review* controversy, beginning, 'I see that Mr Orwell is intellectual-hunting again...'; Orwell retorted that Comfort was 'hoping for a Nazi victory because of the stimulating effect it would have upon the Arts'. But this strange, lonely man – Anthony Burgess recalls him appearing in the Fitzrovia pubs 'to down a silent half', standing on the edge of the group<sup>68</sup> – this strange, lonely man who always exhibited great kindness and was the epitome of decency, had already – and entirely typically – initiated an emollient private correspondence. Comfort congratulated him on 'The Art of Donald MacGill', actually thanked him for the abrasive *Adelphi* review ('It made me revise several ideas'), and the next month invited him to contribute to the first issue of *New Road*, of which Comfort was co-editor, Orwell responding with 'Looking Back on the Spanish War'.<sup>69</sup> 1943, however, saw Orwell answering the Byronic stanzas Comfort had published as 'Obadiah Hornbooke' in *Tribune* with

I'm not a fan for 'fighting on the beaches',  
And still less for the 'breezy uplands' stuff,  
I seldom listen-in to Churchill's speeches,  
But I'd far sooner hear that sort of guff  
Than your remark, a year or so ago,

York: H.W. Wilson, 1955), pp. 872–3; George Woodcock, *Letter to the Past: An Autobiography* (Don Mills, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982), pp. 217, 230–1, 261; Michael Hamburger, *String of Beginnings: Intermittent Memoirs, 1924–1954* (London: Skoob Books, 1991), pp. 274–5, 370. Alex Comfort, 'The Out-Patients', *Public Opinion*, 31 March 1950, is an appreciative review of *The Withered Branch*. The *Guardian*, 21 November 2007, printed an obituary.

<sup>68</sup> Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God* (London: Heinemann, 1987), pp. 290–1.

<sup>69</sup> *CWGO*, XIII, pp. 39, 395, 397, 406, 496–7.

his pamphlets on *Anarchist Morality* and *Anarchist Communism* (published by the Freedom Press in 1912 and 1913). A pamphlet by Edward Carpenter on *Non-Governmental Society* (1911) was even more decisive...<sup>4</sup> To these writers must be added also Max Stirner and Georges Sorel.<sup>5</sup>

Another question that demands an answer is why Read's political convictions of the pre-1914 years, formed around the time when he was a student at Leeds University, were not manifested until a quarter of a century later. He accounts for this partly in the passage already quoted from *Poetry and Anarchism* (by confessing to the hold over him of the Bolshevik Revolution); makes clear his support of Guild Socialism during the First World War and his occasional advocacy of it in the *New Age* and the *Guildsman*; and in *Annals of Innocence and Experience* says also:

when, after the war, I entered the Civil Service, I found myself under a much stricter censorship, and though I never 'dropped' politics, I ceased to write about them. When in 1931 I left the Civil Service and was once more at liberty to take part in the public discussion of political issues, some people assumed that I had 'just discovered Marx', that the turn of political events had forced me from the seclusion of an ivory tower, that I had adopted anarchism as a logical counterpoint to my views on art. Actually there was an unflinching continuity in my political interests and political opinions. I would not like to claim that they show an unflinching consistency, but the general principles which I found congenial thirty years ago are still the ba-

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Read, *Annals of Innocence and Experience* (1940; London: Faber & Faber, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1946), pp. 127–8.

<sup>5</sup> 'Intervista con Herbert Read', *Volontà*, XII (1959), p. 13; Read, *Annals*, pp. 130–3.

an immediate policy, should not openly declare ourselves for the only political doctrine which is consistent with our love of justice and our need for freedom.<sup>2</sup>

Who and what, more exactly, were the ‘predilections’ of Read’s youth? In later writings he was very precise about these. In a review article of 1968, the year of his death, and reprinted as ‘My Anarchism’, he said that

my own anarchist convictions...have now lasted for more than fifty years. I date my conversion to the reading of a pamphlet by Edward Carpenter with the title *Non-Governmental Society*, which took place in 1911 or 1912, and immediately opened up to me a whole new range of thought – not only the works of professed anarchists such as Kropotkin, Bakunin and Proudhon, but also those of Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Tolstoy which directly or indirectly supported the anarchist philosophy, and those of Marx and Shaw which directly attacked it.<sup>3</sup>

In *Annals of Innocence and Experience* (1940) he had also named Marx and Bakunin, and went on: ‘I was much influenced by Kropotkin’s *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, and by

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<sup>2</sup> Herbert Read, *Poetry and Anarchism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938), pp. 13–15. Cf. Herbert Read, ‘Books of the Quarter’, *Criterion*, XVII, no. 69 (July 1938), p. 768. Quotations are usually, where possible, from first or early editions of Read’s works as he sometimes revised the texts of later editions, although not, as he himself emphasized, ‘to give an air of caution to the impetuous voice of youth’ (Herbert Read, *Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Pragmatic Anarchism’, *Encounter*, XXX, no. 1 (January 1968), p. 54, and reprinted in Herbert Read, *The Cult of Sincerity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 76.

That if the Nazis came you’d knuckle under  
And ‘peaceably accept the status quo’.  
Maybe you would! But I’ve a right to wonder  
Which will sound better in the years to come,  
‘Blood, toil and sweat’ or ‘Kiss the Nazi’s bum’.<sup>70</sup>

(The questions Comfort had actually asked in *Partisan Review* were: ‘What...does Mr Orwell imagine the role of the artist should be in occupied territory? He should protest with all his force, where and when he can, against such evils as he sees – but can he do this more usefully by temporarily accepting the status quo, or by skirmishing in Epping Forest with a pocket full of hand grenades?’)<sup>71</sup> In private Orwell complimented Comfort on his virtuosity: ‘You ought to write something longer in that genre, something like the “Vision of Judgement”...’<sup>72</sup> The following year Orwell, now literary editor of *Tribune*, printed further anti-war verses by Comfort, ‘The Little Apocalypse of Obadiah Hornbooke’, though not replying in kind. He explained to a truculent correspondent that ‘I do not agree with “Obadiah Hornbooke”, but that is not a sufficient reason for not publishing what he writes... Besides, if this war is about anything at all, it is a war in favour of freedom of thought’; but he did not admit that he had actually solicited ‘another satirical poem’.<sup>73</sup> Forty years later Comfort, like Savage, returned to the *Partisan Review* row unrepentantly but, in contrast to Savage, claiming Orwell as a friend, albeit ‘a friend by post’ since he only ever met him once (yet this was characteristic of the busy young doctor’s literary relationships).<sup>74</sup> For his part, Orwell was certainly a friend to Comfort, broadcasting and printing his poetry

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<sup>70</sup> CWGO, XV, p. 144.

<sup>71</sup> CWGO, XIII, p. 396.

<sup>72</sup> CWGO, XV, p. 165.

<sup>73</sup> CWGO, XVI, pp. 9, 306.

<sup>74</sup> Alex Comfort, ‘1939 and 1984: George Orwell and the Vision of Judgement’, in Peter Stansky (ed.), *On Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Stanford, CA: Stan-

and recommending him as one of the most talented young writers.<sup>75</sup>

It has been suggested that of the *Partisan Review* controversialists it was only George Woodcock who discomposd Orwell, since he accused ‘the former police official of British Imperialism’ of returning to ‘his old imperialist allegiances’ by working at the BBC and ‘conducting British propaganda to fox the Indian masses’. Orwell immediately arranged for Woodcock to participate in a broadcast discussion, which led the latter to concede ‘that, if I had heard a fair sample of the Indian broadcasts, I might in the past have been a little too angry about them’. Orwell rammed the point home by observing that ‘there is no question of getting to the Indian masses with any sort of b’cast, because they don’t possess radios, certainly not shortwave sets’. This exchange was towards the end of 1942 but, although Woodcock was invited to review for *Tribune* after Orwell became its literary editor twelve months later, a firm friendship between the two men only developed after the imprisonment in April 1945 of three of the editors of *War Commentary* for attempting to subvert members of the armed forces.<sup>76</sup> Orwell signed a letter of protest to *Tribune* with eight others, including Comfort, Dylan Thomas and Jankel Adler; and was then recruited by Woodcock to become

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ford Alumni Association, 1983), p. 17 [reprinted in David Goodway (ed.), *Against Power and Death: The Anarchist Articles and Pamphlets of Alex Comfort* (London: Freedom Press, 1994), p. 157].

<sup>75</sup> CWGO, XV, pp. 273–4; XVI, p. 9; XVII, p. 75. See also CWGO, XV, pp. 75, 135.

<sup>76</sup> CWGO, XIII, p. 395, and XIV, pp. 13, 213–14; Woodcock, *Crystal Spirit*, pp. 13–19; Woodcock, *Letter*, pp. 251–5; Newsinger, pp. 15, 97, 100. A photograph of Woodcock with the other participants in the broadcast is reproduced on the cover of Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds.), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 4 vols., 1970), II, and also in Douglas Fetherling, *The Gentle Anarchist: A Life of George Woodcock* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1998); and the transcript is printed in CWGO, XIV, pp. 14–25.

rightness, and a realization, moreover, of the necessity, or the probity, of an intellectual confining himself to essentials.

I am thus open to a charge of having wavered in my allegiance to the truth. In extenuation I can only plead that if from time to time I have temporized with other measures of political action – and I have never been an active politician, merely a sympathizing intellectual – it is because I have believed that such measures were part way to the final goal, and the only immediately practical measures. From 1917 onwards and for as long as I could preserve the illusion, communism as established in Russia seemed to promise the social liberty of my ideals. So long as Lenin and Stalin promised a definitive ‘withering away of the State’ I was prepared to stifle my doubts and prolong my faith. But when five, ten, fifteen, and then twenty years passed, with the liberty of the individual receding at every stage, a break became inevitable.

It was only delayed so long because no other country in the world offered a fairer prospect of social justice. It comes now because it is possible to transfer our hopes to Spain, where anarchism, so long oppressed and obscured, has at last emerged as a predominant force in constructive socialism.

‘The will to power’, he continued,

which has for so long warped the social structure of Europe, and which has even possessed the minds of socialists, is renounced by a party that can claim to represent the vital forces of a nation. For that reason I do not see why intellectuals like myself, who are not politicians pledged to

## 8. Herbert Read

John Cowper Powys was a prodigious original, as idiosyncratic in his politics -and his expression of them – as in everything else. Herbert Read was his opposite, admiring the works of Flaubert and James and the novella, certainly not the big, baggy monsters that Powys loved and produced, and reticent and unobtrusive other than in his roles as the most prominent British advocate for modern art as well as the best-known anarchist of his day.

It was the impact of the Spanish Revolution that caused Read to declare for anarchism in 1937 – at first extremely mutely in the *Left Review* survey, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*; and then forthrightly in ‘The Necessity of Anarchism’, a three-part article in the *Adelphi*.<sup>1</sup> This latter was included the following year in a substantial manifesto, *Poetry and Anarchism*:

To declare for a doctrine so remote as anarchism at this stage of history will be regarded by some critics as a sign of intellectual bankruptcy; by others as a sort of treason, a desertion of the democratic front at the most acute moment of its crisis; by still others as merely poetic nonsense. For myself it is not only a return to Proudhon, Tolstoy, and Kropotkin, who were the predilections of my youth, but a mature realization of their essential

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<sup>1</sup> *Adelphi*, September–November 1937. Cf. the letter from Read to V.F. Calverton, 20 February 1937, in Eric Homberger (ed.), ‘A Transatlantic Correspondence’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 May 1981.

vice-chairman of the Freedom Defence Committee, the only voluntary body in which he was ever active, as he continued to be down to its dissolution in 1949, by which time he was exceedingly ill (and Woodcock had emigrated to Canada). The Freedom Press Defence Committee had been set up in 1944 to fight the case of the *War Commentary* editors. It was then renamed and enlarged to uphold the civil liberties of libertarians, dissident leftists, pacifists, deserters and all hard cases at a time when the National Council for Civil Liberties was Communist-dominated and only inclined to aid the politically correct. Herbert Read was chairman and Woodcock secretary. Housman, Mannin, Pearson and Reynolds from the defunct SIA were sponsors, now joined by, among others, Aneurin Bevan, Gerald Brenan, Clifford Curzon, Michael Foot, E.M. Forster, Victor Gollancz, Basil Liddell Hart, Julian Huxley, Augustus John, Harold Laski, Henry Moore, J. Middleton Murry, George Padmore, J.B. Priestley, Bertrand Russell, D.S. Savage, Osbert Sitwell, Graham Sutherland, Julian Symons, Sybil Thorndike and Michael Tippett. (It is not known whether John Cowper Powys was invited to become a sponsor.)<sup>77</sup> Through the work of the Freedom Defence Committee Orwell and Woodcock were drawn close together. Orwell contributed one of his most remarkable essays, ‘How the Poor Die’, to Woodcock’s *NOW*, the nature of whose contributors to an issue of the first series he had brutally attacked in the *Partisan Review*, and also made a substantial donation to keep the magazine running. Woodcock went on to write for *politics* the pioneering ‘George Orwell, Nineteenth Century Liberal’, greatly appreciated by its subject, who judged it as ‘much the most serious criticism I have had’, as well as, long after

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<sup>77</sup> *CWGO*, XVII, pp. 135–6, 263–4, XVIII, pp. 48–9, and XIX, p. 34, 421–2; Woodcock, *Crystal Spirit*, pp. 19–23; Woodcock, *Letter*, pp. 266–7, 283–5; Crick, pp. 344, 388; Herbert Read, *Freedom: Is It a Crime? Two Speeches* (London: Freedom Press Defence Committee, 1945), pp. 13–14.

Orwell's death in 1950, the fine study, *The Crystal Spirit* (1967).<sup>78</sup>

Savage, Comfort and Woodcock were all pacifists in addition to being anarchists; but non-pacifist anarchists were equally opposed to the Second World War – with the exception of Rudolf Rocker and some of the Jewish anarchists around him who, perhaps understandably, supported the Allied governments. Orwell was also friendly with some of the non-pacifist anarchists in London, most notably Vernon Richards and Marie Louise Berneri. Richards was one of three *War Commentary* editors sentenced to nine months' imprisonment in 1945, the charge against the fourth editor, Berneri, being, to her disgust, dropped since under English law a wife could not be prosecuted for conspiring with her husband. Woodcock was responsible for the tale, to be adamantly denied by Richards, that at the time Orwell was having difficulty finding a publisher for *Animal Farm*, he offered it to Freedom Press but such was the antagonism to him for his attacks on opponents of the war as 'objectively pro-Fascist' – Berneri especially objected strongly – that the proposal was dropped. The truth may well be that Woodcock sounded out Berneri, his especial friend, and given the vehemence of her reaction went no further.<sup>79</sup> Relations between Berneri, Richards and Orwell

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<sup>78</sup> *CWGO*, XVIII, pp. 373, 455–67, and XIX, p. 29; Woodcock, *Crystal Spirit*, p. 29. 'George Orwell, Nineteenth Century Liberal' was collected in George Woodcock, *The Writer and Politics* (London: Porcupine Press, 1948), chap. 7. For the two men's friendship, see Woodcock, *Crystal Spirit*, pp. 23–45; Woodcock, *Letter*, pp. 285–93.

<sup>79</sup> George Woodcock, 'Recollections of George Orwell', *Northern Review* (Montréal), August–September 1953, p. 18 [reprinted in full in both Doug Fetherling (ed.), *A George Woodcock Reader* ([Ottawa]: Deneau & Greenberg, 1980), p. 147, and Coppard and Crick, pp. 200–1]; Crick, p. 317; Nicolas Walter, 'Orwell and Anarchism', in [Vernon Richards (ed.)] *George Orwell at Home (and among the Anarchists): Essays and Photographs* [hereafter *GOHA*] (London: Freedom Press, 1998), p. 70. Frederic Warburg accepted *Animal Farm* in August 1944 (*CWGO*, XVI, p. 358), a fact that causes severe problems for Crick's account.

he had recommended its contemporary restitution through the simplification of life – just as Edward Carpenter had done – and the enjoyment of 'every single physical sensation'. 'This solitary, stoical, detached attitude to the alien lives linked so closely to your own' he rightly regarded as 'a contemplative, spiritual anarchism'.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> John Cowper Powys, *A Philosophy of Solitude* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), pp. 184–5.

pathy for the Spanish Revolution, at root his anarchism was individualist and immediately realizable through each person's application of the life-philosophy. Discussing the end of *Wolf-Solent*, in which he believes that 'the doubtful future bliss of Saturnian gold' is replaced by 'the present humble satisfactions of a cup of tea', Charles Lock has very wisely written:

Those who can only see Saturnian gold – who see that as the novel's redeeming solution – are so steeped in their own mythologies that they have not learnt Wolf's lesson about the ambivalence of imagination, and that human relations are not fulfilled through fantasy. Saturnian gold is a Utopian, totalitarian solution to mankind's problems: a cup of tea is a more appropriate, human consolation.<sup>109</sup>

The opening lines of 'The Fall of Hyperion' are 'Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave / A paradise for a sect.' Powys agrees essentially with Keats's criticism of the dreamer, as well as with – it will be seen – Herzen and Colin Ward (not to mention the present writer) about the need not to subjugate the living to a dream of an impossible ideal future, but for human liberation to begin with the here-and-now – and immediately, indeed today. So Myrddin Wyllt is 'prepared to apply the "Golden Age" method of letting the unfortunate creatures of earth have their little pleasures' and Powys, entirely directly, writes: 'My claim is that the natural way, the intended way, the Utopian and Golden-Age way, of enjoying life is by a cult of the sensations.'<sup>110</sup> Back in 1933, in *A Philosophy of Solitude*, describing 'that Golden Age when peaceful, lonely, frugivorous families, wandered about over the face of the earth in paradisiac harmlessness',

<sup>109</sup> Charles Lock, 'WolfSolent: Myth and Narrative', in Humfrey, Powys's 'WolfSolent', pp. 128–9.

<sup>110</sup> Powys, *Porius*, p. 289; Powys, *Mortal Strife*, p. 168.

subsequently warmed considerably, and Orwell, notoriously averse to being photographed, allowed the couple, who were toying with the idea of becoming professional photographers to get round the problem of Richards's earning a living after release from prison, to take a remarkable series of shots at his flat and theirs and also in the street. Several of these photographs have been much reproduced, but in 1998 Richards for the first time published the entire sequence: portrait studies of Orwell, Orwell at the typewriter, dressing and playing with his small son, wheeling Richard in his pushchair, drinking tea, rolling a cigarette, at his workbench, holding a Burmese sword (as well as many pictures of Richard alone).<sup>80</sup>

Although Orwell displayed an empathy with Spanish anarchism, developed warm friendships with most of the prominent British anarchists of the 1940s (if only Derek Savage had lived in London, he too would probably been drawn into Orwell's circle) and participated fully in the work of the Freedom Defence Committee, he was never in his maturity any kind of anarchist – although he had in the early thirties (and possibly before) offered the self-description of 'Tory anarchist'. During the final ten years of his life he was a left-wing socialist and supporter of the Labour Party; yet at the same time he exhibited pronounced anarchist tendencies and sympathies, for he was a libertarian socialist. According to Julian Symons, whom he had accused in the *Partisan Review* row of writing in 'a vaguely Fascist strain', but who at the time was a Trotskyist, and with whom he became extremely friendly several years later, Orwell remained a libertarian socialist down to his death, although Symons believes that 'at the end' his faith in socialism was 'expressed...more sympathetically in the personalities

<sup>80</sup> GOHA. See also *CWGO*, XIX, pp. 486–7, and XX, pp. 36, 60, 81–2, 64, 140. Richards's *Freedom* obituary of Orwell is reprinted as 'Orwell the Humanist' in GOHA.

of unpractical Anarchists than in the slide rule Socialists who make up the bulk of the British Parliamentary Labour Party'.<sup>81</sup>

In 1946 Orwell wrote a series of articles for the *Manchester Evening News* on 'The Intellectual Revolt' in which he identified four major streams in contemporary socio-political thought, all demonstrating his preoccupation with the tension between economic equality and individual liberty: 'The Pessimists. – Those who deny that a planned society can lead either to happiness or to true progress'; 'The Christian Reformers. – Those who wish to combine revolutionary social change with adherence to Christian doctrine', but who also believe that 'any society which sacrifices the individual to the State will perish'; 'The Left-wing Socialists. – Those who accept the principle of planning, but are chiefly concerned to combine it with individual liberty'; and 'The Pacifists. – Those who wish to get away from the centralized State and from the whole principle of government by coercion' and who therefore encompassed most anarchists.<sup>82</sup>

Orwell belongs, like Arthur Koestler and Ignazio Silone, with 'The Left-wing Socialists'. These writers are 'all aware of the need for planned societies and for a high level of industrial development', but they also want 'the older conception of Socialism, which laid its stress on liberty and equality and drew its inspiration from the belief in human brotherhood, to be kept alive'. In the less advanced societies this tendency is, Orwell says, 'more likely to take the form of anarchism': 'Underneath it lies the belief that human nature is fairly decent to start with and is capable of indefinite development.' The genealogy of these ideas is to be traced back through 'Utopian dreamers like William Morris and mystical democrats like

<sup>81</sup> CWGO, XIII, p. 111; Julian Symons, 'Orwell, a Reminiscence', *London Magazine*, N.S., VI, no. 3 (September 1963), p. 49. See also Bowker, pp. 296, 346, as well as Rodney Barker, *Political Ideas in Modern Britain* (London: Methuen, 1978), pp. 147, 151.

<sup>82</sup> CWGO, XVIII, pp. 41, 57.

Bloody religion and bloody science are not forever. At the bottom of the world is pain; but below the pain is hope.'<sup>106</sup>

Although Powys's descriptions of the Golden Age are exceptionally spare, his vision is akin to that of the creators of social utopias in that he is implying that the Golden Age is within the reach of ordinary humankind. It is a state of innocence, a paradise, from which humans have fallen, but which can be reinstated in the material world, in the course of human history. At the burial of his grandfather Porius is given 'the feeling of an invisible confraternity of free souls binding together the living and the dead, and building the foundation, in the midst of all life's chaos of destruction and disaster, of an imperishable city of justice and security'.<sup>107</sup> The Age of Gold is not something which will only be attained in a life after death or with the coming of the Millennium. It is, therefore, a secular vision; and, I consider, it is the Golden Age which Powys envisages as the consummation of, as the ideal embedded within, his philosophical anarchism. So

the greatest effect of the [Second World War] is to shake us back into the primeval fellow-feeling of the Golden Age. This fellow-feeling is far-older than Christ or Buddha. It is that prehistoric humility of the ancient paradisiac anarchy, the lapse from which still lingers in our race's memory.<sup>108</sup>

Despite Powys's coming to view the Golden Age as an ultimately attainable social anarchism, despite his undeniable sym-

<sup>106</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Morwyn: or The Vengeance of God* (1937; London: Village Press, 1974), pp. 241, 320. See also *ibid.*, pp. 86, 183–4, 219–20, 317.

<sup>107</sup> Powys, *Porius*, p. 692. On the other hand, Porius also muses on 'all the desperate opposites in the world whose fanatic teeth are at each other's throats and must be at each other's throats until the end of time' (*ibid.*, pp. 782–3), yet this is an isolated statement.

<sup>108</sup> Powys, *Mortal Strife*, p. 221. In contrast Coates, p. 155, argues that the Age of Gold is 'concerned with personality rather than a particular, even prehistoric time'.



a revelation suffused with 'Saturnian gold'.<sup>104</sup> Yet it is from the mid-1930s, just before either renewed contact with Goldman or the actuality of the Spanish Revolution can realistically be identified as influences, that the Age of Gold as a recoverable society begins to break in insistently as one of the myths central to several of his greatest novels. In *Maiden Castle* (1936) Enoch Quirm anticipates *Owen Glendower* by explaining:

the Power of the Underworld that our old Bards worshipped, *though it was always defeated*, is the Power of the Golden Age! Yes, it's the Power our race adored when they built Avebury and Maiden Castle and Stonehenge and Caer Drwyn, when there were no wars, no vivisection, no money, no ten-thousand-times accursed *nations!*

He continues by insisting that the 'desire, that from the beginning of things has defied morality, custom, convention, usage, comfort, and all the wise and prudent of the world, can never be destroyed out of the human heart now it has once appeared' and predicting that it will reassert itself again, when 'these four thousand years wherein the world has been deceived and has left the way will be redeemed, and what was intended to happen will be allowed to happen'.<sup>105</sup> We are informed in *Morwyn* (1937), an embarrassingly weak novel but an important source for understanding what is to come, that 'we may be sure that the Justice of the Age of the Gold will return' and 'The sleeping-place of the Age of Gold is in the depths of every human heart; and to this all must revert.

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<sup>104</sup> Powys, *WolfSolent*, pp. 639, 642.

<sup>105</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Maiden Castle* (London: Cassell, 1937), pp. 455–6 (Powys's emphasis). Cf. John Cowper Powys, *Maiden Castle: The First Full Authoritative Edition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), pp. 460–1.

Walt Whitman, through Rousseau, through the English diggers and levellers, through the peasant revolts of the Middle Ages, and back to the early Christians and the slave rebellions of antiquity'.<sup>83</sup> In contrast the pacifists and anarchists – Orwell names Huxley, Read, Comfort and Savage among others – reject the necessity for a high standard of living:

... the real problem is whether pacifism is compatible with the struggle for material comfort. On the whole, the direction of pacifist thought is towards a kind of primi-tivism. If you want a high standard of living you must have a complex industrial society – that implies planning, organization, and coercion – in other words, it implies the State, with its prisons, its police forces, and its inevitable wars.<sup>84</sup>

In an earlier review of the writings of Winstanley the Digger, he had, however, considered that his thought 'links up with Anarchism rather than Socialism because he thinks in terms of a purely agricultural community living at a low level of comfort, lower than was then strictly necessary': 'Not foreseeing the machine, he states that a man cannot be rich except by exploiting others, but it is evident that, like Mr Gandhi, he values simplicity for its own sake.'<sup>85</sup> But at the time of the *Manchester Evening News* articles Orwell had also let slip: 'I have always suspected that if our economic and political problems are ever really solved, life will become simpler instead of more complex.'<sup>86</sup>

Elsewhere, in 'Politics vs Literature', he objects to the totalitarian tendency which is implicit in the

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>85</sup> *CWGO*, XVI, p. 377. See also *CWGO*, XIX, pp. 109–10.

<sup>86</sup> *CWGO*, XVIII, p. 240.

anarchist or pacifist vision of Society. In a society in which there is no law, and in theory no compulsion, the only arbiter of behaviour is public opinion. But public opinion is less tolerant than any system of law. When human beings are governed by 'thou shalt not', the individual can practise a certain amount of eccentricity: when they are supposedly governed by 'love' or 'reason', he is under continuous pressure to make him behave and think in exactly the same way as everyone else.<sup>87</sup>

He develops this assault on anarchism and pacifism in 'Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool' by accusing them, with some considerable justification, of authoritarianism:

The distinction that really matters is not between violence and non-violence, but between having and not having the appetite for power. There are people who are convinced of the wickedness both of armies and of police forces, but who are nevertheless much more intolerant and inquisitorial in outlook than the normal person who believes that it is necessary to use violence in certain circumstances. They will, if they can, get inside [somebody else's] brain and dictate his thoughts for him in the minutest particulars. Creeds like pacifism and anarchism, which seem on the surface to imply a complete renunciation of power, rather encourage this habit of mind.<sup>88</sup>

Yet even this devastating critique of anarchism as totalitarian, intolerant and power-seeking in tendency is extremely an-

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 424–5.

<sup>88</sup> *CWGO*, XIX, pp. 65–6. See also the comparison of Swift and Tolstoy, *CWGO*, XVIII, pp. 425–6.

The preoccupation with Saturn is almost certainly derived from Powys's youthful obsession with Keats. In his major poems, 'Hyperion: A Fragment' and 'The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream', Keats depicts the fallen Saturn with some attendant golden imagery. So we find Powys referring to 'old Saturn under his weight of grief' in the only item, a nine-page essay, he ever published on Keats as well as writing of 'these "realms of gold"' when introducing his one hundred best books (though, inexplicably, not selecting Keats); and in the fragment now available of the abortive book on Keats he brings in 'the Golden Age from which all religions start and towards which they all make their pilgrimage' and, decades later, recalls his visits to his Keatsian friend, Tom Jones, in Liverpool as 'an eternal recurrence of the Golden Age'.<sup>102</sup> Keats gives no description of the Golden Age. That first comes, albeit exceptionally briefly and without the Golden Age actually being named, in Hesiod, whose *Works and Days* Powys read while in hospital in 1917.<sup>103</sup>

In the concluding paragraphs of *Wolf Solent* (1929), Wolf, feeling as if 'guarding some fragment of Saturn's age', had had

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Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Powys Review*, no. 9 (1981–2); Ned Lukacher, 'Notre-Homme-des-Fleurs: *Wolf Solent*'s Metaphoric Legends', in Belinda Humfrey (ed.), *John Cowper Powys's 'Wolf Solent': Critical Studies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990).

<sup>102</sup> Powys, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 145; John Cowper Powys, *One Hundred Best Books: With Commentary and an Essay on Books and Reading* (1916; London: Village Press, 1975), p. 5; Powys, *Powys on Keats*, p. 36; Powys, *Autobiography*, pp. 364, 367. See also Powys, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 193; Powys, *Suspended Judgments*, p. 171; John Cowper Powys, *Mandragora: Poems* (1917; London: Village Press, 1975), pp. 63–4, 78–82. For the connection between Keats, Saturn and Myrddin Wyllt, see Timothy Hyman, 'Powys' Transition to Myth: An Experiment in Depth' (paper delivered to the Powys Society, July 1974: photocopied typescript), pp. 2–4; and Timothy Hyman, 'Porius: "Tired Thoughts Like Stones...Powys Notes (Fall and Winter 1995)", pp. 7–8.

<sup>103</sup> Head, *Letters to Philippa*, p. 191. Krissdottir, *Powys and Magical Quest*, pp. 38–9, distinguishes between two kinds of Golden Age: the heroic (or Promethean) and the 'primitive, childish, Taoist and Welsh'. See also Vincent Geoghegan, 'A Golden Age: From the Reign of Kronos to the Realm of Freedom', *History of Political Thought*, XII (1991), esp. pp. 190–4.

hundred and ninety-nine years of the tyranny of the Three-in-One'. Obedience is 'what cruel people do to children and animals', 'the Devil is every god who exacts obedience' and what turns a god into a devil is power. Myrddin Wyllt continues Neb's anarchist lesson by explaining:

Nobody in the world, nobody beyond the world, can be trusted with power, unless perhaps it be our mother the earth; but I doubt whether even she can. The Golden Age can never come again till governments and rulers and kings and emperors and priests and druids and gods and devils learn to un-make themselves as I did and leave men and women to themselves!

The 'hope of the world' is: 'The earth lasts and man lasts, and the animals and birds and fishes last, but gods and governments perish!'<sup>100</sup>

The person of Saturn and the return of the Age of Gold are themes running throughout Powys's oeuvre. Indeed Wilson Knight entitled his remarkable 'chart', which remains one of the indispensable studies, *The Saturnian Quest*, explaining that 'Powys searches in the mists of antiquity for the buried splendour of that golden age whose lord was Cronos, or Saturn' and that 'he is always likely to search *back* in racial history to a lost Golden Age, such was supposed in classical mythology to have existed under Saturn...before the present dispensation'.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 284, 286–8.

<sup>101</sup> G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest: A Study of the Prose Works of John Cowper Powys* (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 19, 21 (Knight's emphasis). Boulter, 7, argues unconvincingly that 'the Saturnian Quest is a quest to institute a pluralist society'. For important and illuminating explications of the Saturnian theme, see Timothy Hyman, 'The Modus Vivendi of John Cowper Powys', in Humfrey, *Essays*; Timothy Hyman, 'The Religion of a Sceptic', *Powys Review*, no. 2 (Winter 1977); Ned Lukacher, '“Between Philology and Psychology”': Cronos, Dostoevsky and the Language of Myth in John

archistic in its thrust. For, as Colin Ward maintained approvingly, Orwell's version of socialism is 'pretty anarchical', and the equally hostile assessment of Isaac Deutscher, who had known him as a fellow journalist for the *Observer*, was that Orwell was 'at heart a simple-minded anarchist'.<sup>89</sup> As an unsystematic thinker subject to the contortions of emotion, he can be plausibly claimed for a variety of incompatible ideologies – state socialism, conservatism, nationalism, liberalism, even Trotskyism – but libertarian socialism and especially anarchism have been neglected by the best-known commentators, other than Woodcock and Crick. The latter's incisive assessment is excellent: 'He did not accept anarchism in principle, but had, as a socialist who distrusted any kind of state power, a speculative and personal sympathy with anarchists.'<sup>90</sup> Orwell's concern above all others, given his first-hand experience of counter-revolutionary Spain, was that the implementation of socialism should not lead to totalitarianism and the extinction of liberty, an obsession that culminated in the dystopia of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: 'Today the whole world is moving towards a tightly planned society in which personal liberty is being abolished and social equality unrealized.'<sup>91</sup> Jennie Lee, wife of Aneurin Bevan and to become a Labour minister her-

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Colin Ward, 29 June 1997; Isaac Deutscher, *Heretics and Renegades: And Other Essays* (1955; London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 47–8. See the synopsis of Woodcock's response to 'Politics vs Literature': *CWGO*, XVIII, p. 431.

<sup>90</sup> Crick, p. 308 (see also pp. 247–8, 338, 343–4); Woodcock, *Crystal Spirit*, esp. pp. 28–31, 112–13, 185, 244; and cf. 'Stephen Spender Recalls', in Coppard and Crick, p. 262, and Symons, p. 45. There are also Colin Ward's five articles, based on impressively wide reading for the time, 'Orwell and Anarchism', first published in *Freedom* in 1955 and reprinted in *GOHA*, and several articles by Nicolas Walter, beginning with 'George Orwell: An Accident in Society', *Anarchy*, no. 8 (October 1961), all consolidated and revised as 'Orwell and Anarchism (1998)', in *GOHA*. Alex Zwerdling, *Orwell and the Left* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 29–30, offers a negative treatment.

<sup>91</sup> *CWGO*, XVIII, p. 71. Cf. *CWGO*, XVII, p. 403.

self, observed of Orwell that ‘he hated regimentation wherever he found it, even in the socialist ranks’, adding the gloss that ‘he was not only a socialist but profoundly liberal’.<sup>92</sup> Woodcock similarly considered that he was ‘very much nearer to the old-style Liberal than to the corporate-state Socialists who ... lead the Labour Party’. But Woodcock also points out that he was inconsistent and contradictory, recalling from conversations that his conception of a socialist state seemed more like ‘a syndicalist federation than a real State in the traditional Socialist model’ and that ‘his real inclinations’ appeared ‘to envisage a decentralized society and workers’ control of industry – something rather like the Guild Socialist vision, with a great deal of room for individual initiative’.<sup>93</sup> Answering the concern of some readers of *Animal Farm* that he now rejected revolutionary change, Orwell explained in anarchist fashion:

I meant *that kind* of revolution (violent conspiratorial revolution, led by unconsciously power-hungry people) can only lead to a change of masters. I meant the moral to be that revolutions only effect a radical improvement when the masses are alert and know how to chuck out their leaders as soon as the latter have done their job... What I was trying to say was, ‘You can’t have a revolution unless you make it for yourself...’<sup>94</sup>

Thirty years later Christopher Pallis (writing as Maurice Brinton) was to despair of ‘the danger that any new creation (in the realm of ideas, relationships or institutions) will immediately be pounced upon, penetrated, colonized, manipulated – and ultimately deformed – by hordes of power-hungry “profes-

<sup>92</sup> CWGO, XI, p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Woodcock, *Writer*, pp. 122, 123–4; Woodcock, *Crystal Spirit*, p. 31.

<sup>94</sup> CWGO, XVIII, p. 507 (Orwell’s emphasis).

Uranus was the father of Cronos (or Kronos as the name is spelt in *Atlantis*), otherwise known as Saturn. In *Porius* Cronos or Saturn is reincarnated as Powys’s great, astonishingly realized character Myrddin Wyllt, Merlin the Wild or Savage, the Emperor Arthur’s counsellor.<sup>98</sup> At the end of the book Myrddin Wyllt is ‘still plotting a second Age of Gold’, which can only transpire after at least two thousand years, that is, after the end of Christianity, for ‘as long as the Three-in-One rule in Heaven, cruelty and love and lies rule on earth’.<sup>99</sup> He warns his attendant Neb ap Digion not to be deceived by ‘this new religion’s talk of “love”’, for ‘wherever there is what they call “love” there is hatred too and a lust for obedience’, as well as prisons. It was

his Mother the Earth, *Gaia Peloria* ... who had invented and found within herself that ‘vast jagged sickle of the element of adamant’ with which he had dismembered the heavenly tyrant [Uranus], and caused the Cytherean [Aphrodite] to be born out of the crimsoned foam. The Earth it was whose innumerable progeny of gods and men and beasts and birds and fishes and reptiles he had made happy and had caused to enjoy their first Golden Age.

After the overthrow in turn of Cronos by *his* son Zeus came the ‘ten thousand years of tyranny of the Olympian, and four

lar groups in power. As for the forest-people, their society can be ‘seen as an inversion of Brythonic society, rather than as implying a dehierarchization’, but also this inversion can be viewed as ‘a figure for dehierarchization’ (*ibid.*, pp. 17–19). (Victor Golightly, ‘John Cowper Powys and Anarchism’, in H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight [eds.], *To Hell with Culture: Anarchism and Twentieth-Century English Literature* [Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005], also discusses Powys’s anarchism.)

<sup>98</sup> Powys, ‘Preface / or anything you like / to *Porius*’, pp. 8, 10; Powys, ‘The Characters of the Book’, p. 17.

<sup>99</sup> Powys, *Porius*, pp. 283, 827, 872.

We Cymry all over the land, whether we're Brythons or forest-people or Gwyddyl-Ffichti, if we had any spirit we'd get rid of all these lords and ladies ... and have the earth and its fruits for ourselves! God gave the earth to us all; not to *them* only!<sup>96</sup>

Whatever the inconsistencies of the depiction of the forest-people's social structure, there can be no doubt of their inherent insubordination and insurrectionary, indeed anarchic, nature:

The dirge-wail of the forest-people had already been a menace and a peril to three successive waves of formidable invaders. All these invaders had sought to suppress it. Every subsequent settled government had sought to suppress it. It was the lilt, the rhythm, the tune that set free the imprisoned devils of centuries and let the buried fires loose.... In vain had the House of Cunedda ... struggled to stamp out this life-in-death cry of the forest-people! Into it had been dropped, somewhere, sometime, somehow, far back in the darkness of pre-history, drops from the terrible semen of Uranus ... and none heard it that without being forced to feel that while the planet lasted the sound of this cry could never be altogether hushed.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Powys, *Porius*, p. 372 (Powys's emphasis).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 803–4. For a rare and most stimulating discussion of Powys's politics, see Joe Boulter, *Postmodern Powys: Essays on John Cowper Powys* (Kidderminster: Crescent Moon, 2000), chap. 1: "The Saturnian Quest" in *Porius*. Boulter argues that *Porius* 'inverts our preconceptions about social power', the various types of inversion in the novel implying 'dehierarchization', and that the newly emergent Cymry – all the common people of Wales regardless of ethnicity – are opposed to power itself, not simply to particu-

sional revolutionaries" ...<sup>95</sup> And in a letter, written a year before his death, discovered too late for inclusion in Peter Davison's superlative twenty-volume edition of *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, Orwell maintained, just like any good anarchist: 'The real division is not between conservatives and revolutionaries but between authoritarians and libertarians.'<sup>96</sup>

see her *Rebels' Ride: A Consideration of the Revolt of the Individual* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), pp. 124–6. For a debate between Reynolds and Goldman on Jewish emigration to Palestine and in which she confirmed that he had 'not a particle of anti-Semitism in him', see [Vernon Richards (ed.)] *British Imperialism and the Palestine Crisis: Selections from Freedom 1937–1949 with a Postscript 1989* (London: Freedom Press, 1989), pp. 24–5. Robert Huxter, *Reg and Ethel: Reginald Reynolds (1905–1958), His Life and Work and His Marriage to Ethel Mannin (1900–1984)* (York: Sessions Book Trust, 1992), is a biography of Reynolds.

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<sup>95</sup> Maurice Brinton, 'Introduction', to Phil Mailer, *Portugal: The Impossible Revolution?* (London: Solidarity, 1977), p. 14 (reprinted in David Goodway (ed.), *For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004), p. 190).

<sup>96</sup> Peter Davison and D.J. Taylor, 'Like Autumn in a Garden: New Light on the Friendship between George Orwell and Malcolm Muggeridge', *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 May 2003; Peter Davison (ed.), *The Lost Orwell: Being a Supplement to 'The Complete Works of George Orwell'* (London: Timewell Press, 2006), p. 116.

## 7. John Cowper Powys II: The impact of Emma Goldman and Spain

How well, it needs to be asked, did Emma Goldman and John Cowper Powys know one another before 1936? And how and when did they first meet? The evidence, printed and unprinted, is tantalizingly sparse. Goldman, in an early letter after contact was re-established, recalled finding his sister ‘once when I came to see you...at work on lace-making’.<sup>1</sup> This was Marian Powys, who had travelled from England to New York in December 1913, was shortly to share apartments with her brother on West 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Greenwich Village, went on to open a lace shop in Washington Square, and spent the remainder of her life in New York State.<sup>2</sup> It seems most likely that Goldman and Powys had become acquainted after he had cancelled a series of lectures at the Hebrew Institute, Chicago, because the premises had been denied in the summer of 1915 to Alexander Berkman, who had been announced to speak on the Caplan-Schmidt case. At that time, according to Goldman, ‘all [Powys] knew of Berkman was the misrepresentations he had read in the press’ – if Powys had already been acquainted with

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<sup>1</sup> International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam: Goldman Archive [hereafter GA], XIX 3, EG to JCP, 7 February 1936 (reprinted in David Goodway (ed.), *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2008) [hereafter *LJCEPG*], p. 46).

<sup>2</sup> For Marian Powys, see Richard Perceval Graves, *The Brothers Powys* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983). Unattributed details of Powys’s biography usually derive from this volume.

Africa far older than Christianity, were at once anarchical and peaceful, but had guided and inspired their imaginations and had supported their Druidic observances. Nor had the half-royal House of Ogof-y-Gawr found any difficulty in procuring husbands and lovers to keep their inheritance alive and provide them with descendants. Nor had they lacked means – so strong was the matriarchal and communistic tradition among these people – to forestall any attempt on behalf of their temporary husbands and fathers to interrupt their feminine jurisdiction.<sup>93</sup>

The parenthesis ‘we must not say “ruled”’ echoes what Powys had written in a letter to Goldman, that ‘in reality I am so ignorant of the whole matter than except for [Bakunin, Kropotkin and Proudhon] and Emma Goldman & Alexander Berkman, I do not know the name of *any writer* or *thinker* or *philosopher* who is an official exponent of the Anarchistic Idea of – I mustn’t say “Government” – but of organized human society!’<sup>94</sup>

There are, of course, contradictions within this delineation of the forest-people’s society. ‘The half-royal House of Ogof-y-Gawr’ is that of the Modrybedd, the three Princesses who are the great-aunts of Porius, Morfydd and Rhun. But how can the forest-people really be communist and anarchist if they have princesses exercising a ‘traditional authority...based upon a special kind of Matriarchy’?<sup>95</sup> The rebellious Gwythyr fulminates:

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 321–2. See also *ibid.*, p. 4. Cf. Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, pp. 13–15.

<sup>94</sup> GA, XXVIII C, JCP to EG, 18 August 1938 (*LJCEPG*, p. 121) (Powys’s emphasis).

<sup>95</sup> Powys, ‘The Characters of the Book’, p. 16.

destinies that the priests of the One God ... are always turning into One Necessity' and chance is described as 'that everlasting friend of the Many against the One'.<sup>92</sup>

Edeyrnion in 499 is an astonishingly multi-ethnic society. There are the forest-people, Ffichti (or Picts), Gwyddylaid (or Irish) – but these two groups have largely intermarried to form the Gwyddyl-Ffichti – Brythons, Romans, a family of Jews, and the invading Saxons. The aboriginal people were the Cewri or giants; but only two survive, the young giantess being fucked by Porius on his marriage-day. There is much miscegenation and the Brythonic Porius is also descended from Romans, forest-people and Cewri. With the extinction of the Cewri the forest-people are the oldest inhabitants of Edeyrnion and they are characterized in terms very similar to 'the first people' in *Owen Glendower*, only much more extensively and persistently. Powys obviously regards their social structure as of the greatest significance. They are said to be white Iberians originally from North Africa – from the region of Marrakesh – and non-Aryans. Socially they are communist, anarchist and matriarchal. The most systematic account runs as follows.

With the Brythons the rule of descent was through men and from father to son, with the forest-people it was always through women, and if by any chance a man became king, his successor was not *his* son but – if he had a sister – his sister's son.

Thus for generations upon generations the matriarchal mothers and grandmothers and sisters and aunts of the household of Ogof-y-Gawr had, we must not say 'ruled' the land, for the forest-people, on the strength of a tradition from

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<sup>92</sup> Powys, *Porius*, p. 865.

Goldman, he would necessarily have known more than that about Berkman.<sup>3</sup>

David Caplan and Matthew Schmidt, anarchist comrades of Goldman and Berkman, had been indicted with James and John McNamara for the dynamiting, during a strike in 1910, of the Los Angeles *Times* building, killing 21 persons. The McNamara brothers, conservative and Catholic trade unionists, had pleaded guilty, but Caplan and Schmidt had gone underground, only to be arrested in 1914 after Schmidt had visited Goldman's house and an informer, Donald Vose, who had been living there on the strength of his mother's friendship with her, had tipped off the police. Berkman toured the country, arguing that the extreme violence of the employers in American labour disputes legitimated the response in kind by the workers. The case was to be used by Eugene O'Neill, much influenced as a young man by Goldman, Berkman and their circle, as the background for *The Iceman Cometh*.<sup>4</sup>

Another potential point of contact between Goldman and Powys would have been their mutual friend, the novelist Theodore Dreiser (although his friendship with Powys only

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<sup>3</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (1931; New York: Dover edn, 2 vols., 1970), II, p. 570; Alexander Berkman, 'On the Road', *Mother Earth*, September 1915. But Goldman was wrong to write in her autobiography that the Hebrew Institute affair had occurred 'some years previously' to April 1916 – it was only some months before. For Powys's blurred memory of the episode, see John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (1934; London: Macdonald edn, 1967), p. 463.

<sup>4</sup> See Alexander Berkman, 'The Schmidt-Caplan Defense', *Mother Earth*, August 1915; Emma Goldman, 'Donald Vose: The Accursed', *Mother Earth*, January 1916; Goldman, *Living My Life*, I, pp. 478–80, 486–8, and II, pp. 545–6, 550–2; Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 175; Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 484 nn, 491 n142, 508 n368.

dates from late 1914).<sup>5</sup> Contact had definitely been attained by 19 April 1916, when, the evening before her trial for lecturing on birth control, a dinner was given for Goldman at the Brevoort Hotel, New York, attended by such luminaries of the American art world as Robert Henri, George Bellows and John Sloan, and at which Powys spoke, recalling

that one of the greatest libertarian thinkers of all time, John Milton, was an AngloSaxon, and that his essay, the *Areopagitica*, was a charter of free speech...he was appalled by the depth of his own ignorance in relation to the subject of birth control, but, in a general way, he wished to be counted as one in sympathy with the birth control movement and with its champion Emma Goldman.

It was commented in *Mother Earth* that, while it was ‘the first time that Mr. Powys had ever spoken in company with Anarchists’, he ‘seemed to enjoy the experience’.<sup>6</sup> Powys and Goldman marked the occasion by exchanging books, Goldman inscribing *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama* ‘with deep appreciation’ and Powys *Confessions of Two Brothers* ‘with admiration and respect’.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Malcolm Elwin (ed.), *Letters of John Cowper Powys to His Brother Llewelyn* (London: Village Press, 2 vols., 1975), I, pp. 161–2. See, for example, W.A. Swanberg, *Dreiser* (New York: Scribner’s, 1965), pp. 169–70, 196.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Morris, ‘The Free Speech and Birth Control Dinner’, *Mother Earth*, May 1916. See also Goldman, *Living My Life*, II, pp. 569–70. Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), esp. chap. 4, and Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), give fascinating accounts of the intersection between anarchism and the arts in New York at this time.

<sup>7</sup> The late Peter Powys Grey, Marian Powys’s son, informed me he had in his possession the copy of *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama* and transmitted the dedication posthumously; while I am obliged to W.J. Keith

but here, so dominated by his interior vision, he completely loses the sense of his words!<sup>89</sup> The Henog, an historian from South Wales, thinks to himself:

My gods ... have never demanded these final intensities and absolute devotions. They have been magical and magnanimous. They have been faithful to their friends; but they have never divided the world into opposed camps of the good and the evil.

He is confirmed in ‘his certainty that there was no such thing as a “One God”, or a “One Absolute Being”, but that life was an everlasting succession of many worlds and of innumerable creative and destructive gods and demigods’.<sup>90</sup> And in the concluding pages Porius expresses Powys’s own belief in a ‘vast fathomless congeries of souls and bodies, of worlds and creators of worlds, of dreams within dreams within dreams within dreams, of multiverses beyond multiverses’:

There’s nothing I can do ... but just accept this crazy loneliness in this unbounded chaos, and hope for the best among all the other crazy lonely selves! And why not? Such a chance-ruled chaos of souls, none of them without *some* fellow-feeling, *some* kindness, at least to their offspring, at least to their mates, at least to their friends, is a better thing than a world of blind authority, a world ruled by one Caesar, or one God, or one —

and at this point he also breaks off.<sup>91</sup> The first two libertarian themes are brought together when Porius is said to be enabled to ‘assert free-will against all those false fates and sham

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 734. See also p. 788.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 815, 817.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 852, 873 (Powys’s emphasis). Cf. Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, p. 88.



Several beliefs other than these two varieties of Christianity are represented in Edeyrnion: Druidism, Mithraism, Judaism, scepticism. Minnawc Gorsant, his successor as priest of the Gaer and the zealots who follow them are intent on the obliteration not just of the Pelagian heresy but all these other systems of thought. Porius's sceptical cousin, Morvran, has already been murdered by them. Minnawc Gorsant rants that 'when we've finished with the antichrist of magic we'll go on to the antichrist of reason, and we'll never stop till – till Christ and the Soldiers of Christ rule Yns Prydein from coast to coast!'<sup>88</sup>

The Christian church is extirpating heresy, denying freedom of thought and practice, and imposing thought control. Powys undoubtedly has partly in mind the contemporary and analogous political ideologies of Fascism and Stalinism and their state institutions. Minnawc Gorsant's (unnamed) successor informs Morfydd, Porius's wife, now that he is the new Prince of Edeyrnion:

what Christ commands me to tell your husband is this; that the reading of heathen books ... must, under his rule, be a punishable offence: that blasphemy ... must be punished so publicly and so penitentially that all those subject to him will be afraid to breathe a syllable against Christ or against Christ's sacrosanct state, which has absolute authority over the whole world! It is Christ Himself who enjoins your husband ... to rule in such a way that every man, woman and child shall confess with contrition every single thought that enters their heads that does not redound to the glory of – to the glory of –

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 502.

Goldman had opposed the First World War from its outbreak and after American entry in April 1917 campaigned against conscription, as a result of which she was arrested in the June and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.<sup>8</sup> Released at the height of the 'Red Scare' in September 1919, she was immediately deported to revolutionary Russia with Berkman and 247 other 'alien radicals' who had also been born in the former Tsarist Empire. Opportunities for face-to-face encounters between Powys and Goldman in the USA would therefore have been restricted to a period of only a couple of years, although they were both based in New York, in Greenwich Village and Harlem respectively.

Colonel Charles Erskine Scott Wood, poet, lawyer, and former Oregon state senator who later moved to the Bay Area of California, was also a friend of both Goldman and Powys, but his biographer believes he did not meet the latter until as late as April 1917.<sup>9</sup> A 'philosophic anarchist' who contributed to *Mother Earth* as well as *Liberty*, his politics were located squarely in the tradition of American individualism – one of his books has the title *Too Much Government*.<sup>10</sup> Although Wood's anarchism was very publicly professed and he was so close to

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for details of *Confessions of Two Brothers*, a volume now in the Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto Library.

<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Powys was from the beginning a staunch supporter of the War, attempting to enlist and lecturing for the British government in 1918 on the Allied war aims (see Powys, *Autobiography*, pp. 579–93, and John Cowper Powys, *The War and Culture: A Reply to Professor Munsterberg* (1914; London: Village Press, 1975).

<sup>9</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, I, pp. 430–1; Powys, *Autobiography*, pp. 363, 451, 489–90, 529, 584–6; Llewelyn Powys, *Skinfor Skin AND The Verdict of Bridle-goose* (London: Bodley Head, 1948), p. 134; Robert Hamburger, *Two Rooms: The Life of Charles Erskine Scott Wood* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), p. 244. For Wood's friendship with Powys, see also Hamburger, pp. 244–5, 254, 287, 292, 299.

<sup>10</sup> For Wood in general, see Hamburger (and for his anarchism, esp. pp. 122–9, 313–18); but also Van Wyck Brooks, *The Confident Years, 1885–1915* (London: J.M. Dent, 1952) p. 283; Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, p. 482 n62; Maurice

Powys that it was principally he who persuaded him to abandon, albeit temporarily, Arnold Shaw as his West Coast manager, Powys unaccountably asserted to Goldman in 1938 that ‘you yourself are the only anarchist I know or *have ever known* save a very gentle & quiet & most lovable printer in Boston who was a champion of those two who were killed’.<sup>11</sup> (This printer must have been Aldino Felicani, the founder and treasurer of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee and co-producer of the Sacco-Vanzetti periodical, the *Lantern*, to which Powys had contributed a short article and poem.)<sup>12</sup>

After her arrival in Spain Goldman had Powys’s name placed on the mailing-list of the English language edition of the CNT-AIT-FAI Boletín de Información (CNT-AIT-FAI Bulletin of Information). He told her: ‘I do read all these “Information Bulletins” from [Barcelona] with the most intense interest’.<sup>13</sup> Writing to his sister Katie (or Philippa), he referred to

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Browne, *Too Late to Lament: An Autobiography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1955), p. 268.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Roberts, *The Ideal Ringmaster: A Biographical Sketch of Geoffrey Arnold Shaw (1884–1937)* (Kilmersdon, near Bath: Powys Society, 1996), pp. 27–8; GA, letter from Powys to Goldman, 18 August 1938 (LJCPEG, p. 121) (Powys’s emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Sacco-Vanzetti and Epochs’ and ‘The Moon over Megalopolis’, *Lantern*, January/February 1929 and April-June 1929 (both reprinted in *Powys Review*, no. 9 (1981–2), pp. 37–8. But these contributions by no means imply current anarchist commitment on Powys’s part since, although Sacco and Vanzetti were undeniably anarchists, their trial, the legal arguments, their sentencing and ultimate execution (1920–7) united progressives of all shades, from liberals to Communists, in condemnation. For Felicani, see John Nicholas Beffel, ‘Felicani – A Fighter for Freedom’, *Freedom*, 24 June 1967; Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 54, 197, 211–12 (and with a portrait on p. 76); Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, esp. pp. 110–11, 124, 133, 140, 497 n212.

<sup>13</sup> GA, XXVIII D, JCP to EG, 2 May 1937 (LJCPEG, p. 77).

ally decided how this mad chaos heaved and sank’.<sup>83</sup> That Goddess is identified elsewhere as ‘the great goddess *Chance*’ or *Tyche Soteer*, ‘Chance, the great saviour of all things’, ‘that liberator of liberators’.<sup>84</sup> Chance, however, operates alongside fate or destiny: ‘how impossible it is to predict what the combined forces of fate and chance can conjure up.’ But chance is the more important determinant in human affairs, since although destiny is a ‘great god’, chance is a ‘still greater one’.<sup>85</sup> These ideas, like so much of Powys’s thought, were of long standing: in the narrative poem *Lucifer*, written in 1905, although not published until half a century later, chance is said to be ‘a stronger God than Fate’, indeed ‘Life’s lord, not fate’, and in *WolfSolent* described as ‘the greatest of all the gods’.<sup>86</sup>

Pelagianism is vigorously suppressed by the Church. The Christian priest, Minnawc Gorsant denounces ‘the special and peculiar sin of Ynys Prydein [Britain], the heresy of Pelagius’. He tells Brother John:

I fear ... that you believe in human progress, that you are labouring under the fatal and wicked error that man is naturally good; and that he even can, under favourable conditions, actually become better. It is clear to me ... that you think the human race was created for some other purpose altogether than the true one. The human race wasn’t created to be happy, or to be good, or to be wise, or to improve its lot. The human race was created, purely, solely, exclusively, arbitrarily, absolutely, for the glory of God, and for that alone.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Powys, *Porius*, p. 266.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179, 854, 865 (Powys’s emphasis). See also p. 222.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 459, 580.

<sup>86</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Lucifer: A Poem* (1956; London: Village Press, 1974), pp. 92, 137; John Cowper Powys, *WolfSolent* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), p. 635. But cf. Powys and Powys, pp. 27, 145–6, 148–50.

<sup>87</sup> Powys, *Porius*, p. 840.

floating on the water of life like weeds without stalks?<sup>80</sup>

The bard Taliessin concurs with Pelagius (in lines written by Powys) by proclaiming:

The ending forever of the Guilt-sense and God-sense,  
The ending forever of the Sin-sense and Shame-sense,  
The ending forever of the Love-sense and Loss-sense,  
The beginning forever of the Peace paradisiac ...<sup>81</sup>

Powys's own belief was that, notwithstanding the events of the Second World War, 'men and women, if not driven insane by hunger and terror, or by the shameful stupidity and devilish cunning of their rulers, are naturally good, naturally kind, naturally enduring, and finally naturally able to dispense with Christian Love'. He describes Pelagius, in unused glosses for *Porius*, as the 'philosophic originator of the humanistic trend of ideas that later we associate with Erasmus and Rabelais and even with Rousseau', considering that he combined 'the humanism of Erasmus' with 'a Rousseau-like belief in the *essential goodness* of ordinary men and women'.<sup>82</sup>

If events are not predetermined, what influences their outcome? One character is said to seem eager 'to ask Destiny, Fate, Providence, Necessity ... for the clue as to what would happen next', 'everything but the kind and wayward Goddess who re-

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42 (Powys's emphasis).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 427-8.

<sup>82</sup> Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, p. 181; John Cowper Powys, 'Preface / or anything you like / to Porius', *Powys Newsletter*, no. 4 (1974-5), p. 10; John Cowper Powys, 'The Characters of the Book', *Powys Newsletter*, no. 4 (1974-5), p. 16 (Powys's emphasis).

oh *such* an exciting mass of *Anarchist Literature* sent to me by old *Emma Goldman* who is my Prime Minister & chief Political Philosopher! and every week I get the anarchist paper from *Avenue A New York City* [*Challenge: A Libertarian Weekly*] and also the 'Bulletin of Information' from the Anarchists of Barcelona. This *latter* pamphlet I am carefully keeping; because it is not so much concerned with the war as with their *experiment in Catalonia* of organizing their life on *Anarchist lines* and getting rid of *all* Dictatorship & of the 'Sovereign State'.<sup>14</sup>

Powys, therefore, was in the exceptional position of receiving, in North Wales, details of events in Spain from both Goldman and *direct* from anarchist Spain (as well as from *Spain and the World* and other anarchist periodicals sent to him at Goldman's behest). This was a standpoint from which almost all outsiders were excluded. Readers who are at all conversant with what was going on in Catalonia and Aragon, and perhaps especially Barcelona, in 1936 and 1937, are most likely to be so through George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (or Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*, the impressive film of as late as 1995, derived from it). So, in 1942, Powys could object to Louis Wilkinson's pro-Soviet arguments:

And why did the Spanish Revolution fail? Because these Stalinites & their amiable No. i-ites deliberately sabotaged the Spanish popular cause and the Barcelona Anarchists... O why haven't I old Emma at my side to *put you wise* on Stalin & the Communist Party! I tell you, with Emma's

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Head (ed.), *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Philippa Powys* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1996), p. 106 [letter of 24 September 1938] (Powys's emphasis).

help for 2 years I got every week, in English, the Anarchist Bulletin from Catalonia, & what was it full of? The treacherous, pig-headed, *wicked* deeds of the Communistic Party! Every week it showed how the Party...hated the Anarchists & *preferred* that Franco should win.<sup>15</sup>

Renewed contact with Goldman was responsible for exerting a major influence on Powys's thought. In particular, it was through her that he was subjected to a flood of information concerning the Spanish Revolution. From at least 1905 he had been an advocate of state socialism, recalling that at only his second American lecture, on 'The Republic of the Future', delivered before the 'great, unique, proletarian audience, by far the most exciting ... in America', at the Cooper Union in New York, his 'conclusion that the republic of the future would be state socialism was criticized by the Anarchists present' – 'As I had just sworn on landing that I was neither an Anarchist nor a Polygamist I was surprised by the eloquence with I was now instructed in Anarchist doctrines' – but despite this 'some kind of state socialism was the stain or dye...of the perpetually unrolling scroll', in his figure, that continued to come out of his mouth as in a mediaeval illumination.<sup>16</sup> For two decades he was a fellow-traveller with the Russian Revolution of 1917 because, although he believed that his temperament was 'really that of a Jacobin, a Jacobin influenced by Jean Jacques Rousseau, and with not a few anarchistic leanings, rather than that of an orthodox Marxist' and 'in spite of my temperamental sympathy with anarchists' -he had written in 1916 of the 'anarchical rebelliousness in my spirit', but that his conscience compelled

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<sup>15</sup> *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, ig35–ig56* (London: Macdonald, 1958), pp. 103–6, 110–11 (Powys's emphasis). The final issue of the *Bulletin of Information* was that of 3 December 1938.

<sup>16</sup> Powys, *Autobiography*, pp. 462–3.

themes run throughout the book: the Pelagian heresy and its philosophical implications; the pluralist rejection of the monopolizing Christian church's drive to replace all other religious ideas and practices by its own; the social structure of the forest-people; and the Golden Age and its return. The last two are, as has been seen, important in *Owen Glendower*, yet in *Porius* their treatment is more extensive and central.

The action of *Porius*, subtitled 'A Romance of the Dark Ages', is confined to one week in 499. At the outset of the book Porius, heir to the principedom of Edeyrnion in North Wales, is poised to lead a mission to Constantinople at the request of the (Eastern) Emperor Anastasius and the Patriarch Macedonius 'to re-open the ancient Pelagian controversy with the intention of anathematizing the Pope of Rome for his confirmation of his predecessor's arbitrary and unjust condemnation' of Pelagius.<sup>79</sup> Porius is the student of the hermit Brother John who, in turn, was a disciple of Pelagius himself. Pelagius believed in the freedom of the will and rejected the doctrine of original sin. Porius extrapolates:

It was the idea that each solitary individual man had the power, from the very start of his conscious life, not so much by his *will*, for that was coerced by other wills, but by his free imagination, by the stories he told himself, to create his future. Chance was always interfering of course; but there was no hereditary curse descending upon him from Adam. He wasn't separated from God by any fatal Predestination. But if Pelagius were right about the natural goodness of man, didn't that cut away the very root of Christianity, leaving its sacraments

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*Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 154–5.

<sup>79</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages* (Hamilton, NY: Colgate University Press, "A pp. 32–3

continued because, although an attempt to restore the novel to its full length was made in 1994, there is a consensus that the edition was botched because of the false editorial principles as well as its failure to handle the substantial passages written to bridge the cuts and which must therefore represent Powys's final thoughts.<sup>77</sup> This Colgate University Press version was replaced by the reliable and accessible Overlook Duckworth edition in 2007.

John A. Brebner considers that in *Porius* Powys writes as

a convinced anarchist who believes that compassion – not love, for that leads to possession and domination – results from an imaginative grasp of each person's essential loneliness and that the kindest attitude to our fellow man is one of noninterference....Never before has Powys been as free with open discussions of sexuality, politics, militarism, and revolution.

For Jeremy Hooker the novel is 'an anarchistic and libertarian response to tyranny, which, in Blakean fashion, links political tyranny...with authoritarian religious ideas'. C.A. Coates writes of the 'sunny anarchism' of the Powys who wrote *Porius*, believing that its 'anarchic vision has an ample tolerance and imaginative freedom'.<sup>78</sup> Four libertarian, even anarchist,

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Val Baker (ed.), *Writers of To-day, Volume 2* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1948).

<sup>77</sup> Morine Krissdóttir, 'An "Artfully Artless Work": *Porius* by John Cowper Powys', *Powys Society Newsletter*, no. 22 (July 1994); 'A Symposium on the new Colgate *Porius*', *Powys Notes* (Fall and Winter 1995), esp. Charles Lock, 'On the New *Porius*'; Jerome McGann, 'Marvels and Wonders: Powys, *Porius* and the Attempt to Revive Romance in the Age of Modernism', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 December 1995; W.J. Keith, 'Editing for Whom? A Responsible Reader's Notes on the New *Porius*', *Powys Society Newsletter*, no. 28 (July 1996). See also a special *Porius* edition of *The Powys Newsletter*, no. 4 (1974–5), esp. Joseph Slater, 'Porius Restauratus'.

<sup>78</sup> Brebner, pp. 187–8; Jeremy Hooker, 'Romancing at the Cave-Fire: The Unabridged *Porius*', *Powys Journal*, IV (1994), p. 222; C.A. Coates, *John*

him to be a socialist – he 'stuck steadily to what was more like Bolshevism than anything else in my calmer moments'.<sup>17</sup>

After 1936 he was enabled to reformulate his political and social outlook in terms no longer markedly at odds with his basic personal philosophy. By 1939 he could assure the Rhondda poet, Huw Menai, that 'I've long been a convert to Anarchism as the only real liberty, & without question the system of the Future'; while in print he was calling himself an 'anarchistic individualist' and three years later committed himself to the 'social ideal' of 'Philosophical Anarchy'.<sup>18</sup> In *Dostoevsky*, completed in 1943 though not published until 1946, he described himself as a 'crotchety parlour-anarchist'.<sup>19</sup> He provided in a letter of 1945 to Iorwerth Peate an important and reasonably clear statement of his political views and of their relationship to his metaphysics:

my quarrel with the Catholic church and the Greek church and the Anglican church and with all the Nonconformists too is hopelessly temperamental instructive intuitive & both super- & sub-rational and is exactly the same quarrel I have with the rationalists and with the vivisection scientists. In plain words in spite of an almost morbidly Christian conscience ... my attitude to all these questions is essentially agnostic and heathen & indeed *pluralistic* as opposed to *monism* of every sort, the sort of pluralism W. James wrote of ... My pluralism is a temperamental intuitive preference for the

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 463, 525–6; John Cowper Powys and Llewelyn Powys, *Confessions of Two Brothers* (1916; London: Sinclair Browne, 1982), pp. 72, 155.

<sup>18</sup> 'Letters from JCP to Huw Menai', *Powys Society Newsletter*, no. 43 (July 2001), p. 23 [letter of 11 January 1939]; John Cowper Powys, *Obstinate Cymric: Essays 1935–47* (Carmarthen: Druid Press, 1947), p. 133; John Cowper Powys, *Mortal Strife* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1942), p. 167.

<sup>19</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Dostoevsky* (London: John Lane, Bodley Head, 1946), p. 156.

Many over the One – and for a certain Anarchy in things over One Cosmos and One God and One Christ. I like absolutely free speculation in these things and *I like to question* not only the *existence* of God – the *desirability* of following Christ – the *value* of the moral order (like my brother Llewelyn *the only thing* wh. I feel & *know* to be evil wicked and wrong is *dire mental & physical cruelty*) – the *value* of the Family etc. etc. etc. Like you I reluct at the tyranny of the Church as well as at the tyranny of the new totalitarian state – But its destined to come, I think and we libertarians were wise to try and humanize it ere *and as* it comes! But nobody will be able to stop it! And it'll be agreeable [*sic*] to see it sweep away *Class Privilege* etc etc etc I shall enjoy that part of it & I'm sure you will too. Yes, I fear we shall have to pay the price; but it'll be a malicious pleasure to see the *great ones* pay it as well as the rest of us!<sup>20</sup>

By describing himself as a 'libertarian' Powys is using the term as a synonym for 'anarchist' – in exactly the way that anarchists do (or at least used to, before the rise of right libertarianism). A year later the libertarian socialist George Orwell similarly wrote to a correspondent: 'Whether we like it or not, the trend is towards centralism and planning and it is more use-

<sup>20</sup> Iorwerth C. Peate, 'John Cowper Powys: Letter Writer', *Review of English Literature*, IV, no. i (January 1963), p. 39 (Powys's emphasis). It is this transcription from which I have mainly quoted rather than that in Iorwerth C. Peate (ed.), *John Cowper Powys: Letters 1937–54* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974), p. 54, since its punctuation makes better sense. For the need to humanize a coming State Communism, see also Powys, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 10, 139–40.

is called in *Atlantis*).<sup>73</sup> So not only had anarchy flourished in the prehistoric, megalithic Age of Gold, it will also (given the nature of the myth, which will be examined in greater detail in the context of *Porius*) be re-established in a distant future. As has been prophesied to Owen: 'Over your body ... our people will pass to their triumph; but it will be a triumph in the House of Saturn, not in the House of Mars.'<sup>74</sup>

Powys's most anarchist novel was his next, *Porius*, written between 1942 and 1949 and published in 1951, though in truncated form having been cut by one-third. *Porius* is his supreme fictional achievement, he himself along with Phyllis Playter regarding it as 'the Best Book of My Life' as early as 1944 and close to completion as 'the best piece of work I've ever done',<sup>75</sup> and the literary culture of mid-twentieth-century Britain is disgraced by allowing it to be mutilated for publication – even allowing for the problems of the time concerning paper-rationing – and then not to recognize that even the abridged version was an exceedingly great novel. It is very much to the credit of the literary biographer Malcolm Elwin, who had recently brought out *The Life of Llewelyn Powys*, that he reported to Macdonalds on the already reduced typescript: 'Without any doubt this is a work of great genius ... the crowning achievement of a veteran novelist who has already written at least one novel, *A Glastonbury Romance*, which ranks amongst the outstanding works of this century' – and that under his guidance Powys's final years were eased by the acceptance of all his books as well as by an ambitious programme of republication.<sup>76</sup> The scandal of *Porius* has

<sup>73</sup> Powys, *Glastonbury Romance*, p. 771; Powys, *Owen Glendower*, p. 925. For Annwn, see Morine Krissdottir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest* (London: Macdonald & Jane's, 1980), esp. pp. 34, 40, 95–6, 117.

<sup>74</sup> Powys, *Owen Glendower*, p. 823.

<sup>75</sup> *Letters to Wilkinson*, p. 143; R.L. Blackmore, 'The Matter of Porius', *Powys Newsletter*, no. 4 (1974), p. 5. See also *Letters to Roberts*, p. 92.

<sup>76</sup> Malcolm Elwin, 'John Cowper Powys and His Publishers', in Humfrey, *Essays*, p. 293. See also Malcolm Elwin, 'John Cowper Powys', in Denys

‘seemed, and perhaps *were*, the primeval woods of Wales, from which aboriginal herdsmen had had to flee for safety to the hills’, stories still being told of ‘ancient wrongs suffered by the mythical powers of this land, where there still lingered remnants of some great, long-lost, peaceful civilization that had been destroyed by force and enchantment’. This pacific, non-sacrificial, anarchist society was destroyed by the aggression of ‘the cruel “magicians” of the Age of Bronze’.<sup>70</sup> What Powys therefore considered was that ‘the first people’ lived in an Age of Gold; and this he did *believe* since he wrote elsewhere that the ‘ways and customs’ of mid-twentieth-century Wales ‘still retain memories of the Golden Age when Saturn, or some megalithic philosopher under that name, ruled in Crete, and the great Mother was worshipped without the shedding of blood’.<sup>71</sup> (Powys was familiar with the books of a friend of his brother Llewelyn, H.J. Massingham, who asserted that the megalithic (or Neolithic) culture of the southern downs was pacific, co-operative and federal, compounding with Stonehenge and Avebury the essentially Iron Age site of Maiden Castle. This amiable fantasy – though fantasy it surely is – has been revived recently by the anarchist writer, Peter Marshall, who actually calls the megalithic era a ‘Golden Age’, just as Massingham had done.)<sup>72</sup> Annwn is the Welsh underworld – ‘the land of twilight and death’, as it is described in *A Glastonbury Romance* – from which the dead emerge to renewed life; Owen Glendower is identified as ‘Prince of Annwn’; and Owen is also linked to Saturn (or Kronos as he

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 563 (Powys’s emphasis).

<sup>71</sup> Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, p. 83. See also *ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>72</sup> Morine Krissdottir and Roger Peers (eds.), *The Dorset Year: The Diary of John Cowper Powys, June 1934–July 1935* (Kilmersdon, near Bath: Powys Press, 1998), pp. 190, 228; Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, pp. 59–60, 73; Peter Marshall, *Europe’s Lost Civilization: Uncovering the Mysteries of the Megaliths* (London: Headline, 2004), esp. pp. 4, 22–3, 285–6, 292). Patrick Wright, *The Village That Died for England: The Strange Story of Tyneham* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), pp. 106–17, describes Massingham’s ideas.

ful to try to humanize the collectivist society that is certainly coming than to pretend...that we could revert to a past phase’.<sup>21</sup>

At the time of Powys’s graduation in 1894, the Assistant Secretary for Local Lectures, University of Cambridge, impressed by his talents, had considered him to be a socialist; but the first reference to the expression of any specific political view comes from the *Autobiography* and the period when he lived at Court House in Sussex (1896–1902). He then fought his brother Littleton, who had ‘sneered at the Irish Party in Parliament’. Thirty or more years later Powys declared: ‘You are an emotional Conservative. I am an emotional Radical. And as it was when we rolled in that ditch between Cooksbridge & Court House (over the question of Ireland) so in a sense I fear it will be to the end of the story.’<sup>22</sup> All the same, he was not to vote in any election until as late as 1945, when he supported the Labour Party.<sup>23</sup>

From 1917 he was a Communist fellow-traveller:

On this Armistice night [November 1918] ...  
I must confess to feeling a fiercer and more  
fermenting surge of malicious hatred for my  
well-to-do bourgeois compeers than I have ever  
felt before or since. The sight of such patriots ...  
was one of those sights ... that gave me a further

<sup>21</sup> Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell* [hereafter *CWGO*] (London: Secker & Warburg, 20 vols., 1998), XVIII, p. 104.

<sup>22</sup> Stuart Marriott and Janet Coles, ‘John Cowper Powys as University Extension Lecturer, 1898–1909’, *Powys Journal*, IV (1994), pp. 9, 37; letter to Littleton C. Powys, 15 April 1932, printed in Belinda Humfrey (ed.), *Essays on John Cowper Powys* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972), p. 333; Powys, *Autobiography*, pp. 249–50, 277.

<sup>23</sup> Boyne Grainger, *We Lived in Patchin Place: And Letters to Boyne Grainger from John Cowper Powys and Llewelyn Powys*, ed. Anthony Head (London: Cecil Woolf, 2002), p. 55. See also *Letters to Wilkinson*, pp. 180–3; *Letters from John Cowper Powys to C. Benson Roberts* (London: Village Press,

jerk along the hard and narrow road that leadeth to Communism.<sup>24</sup>

In the summer of 1919 Powys delivered a series of lectures in San Francisco:

To hear his lecture on Bolshevism the ballroom of the St Francis Hotel was crowded with the richest and most fashionable residents of the city.... Tossing 'common sense' to the winds, he talked of the things that were in his heart: of Russia, the war, the oppressed, of the man who had but recently become a convict in a federal penitentiary [i.e. Eugene Debs, the American Socialist leader].<sup>25</sup>

*The Complex Vision* of 1920 has tacked on a concluding, extremely unconvincing chapter, 'The Idea of Communism'. Powys's complex vision of pluralism, individualism, personal liberation and a multiverse is incompatible with Russian Communism's – with any form of Marxism's – monism, ideology of proletarianism, Hegelianism and 'block-universe' philosophy (Powys follows William James in opposing 'multiverse' with 'block-universe'). Powys, with a keen intelligence and deep personal insight, not unnaturally, appreciated some, at least, of the problems involved. Writing in 1934, he explained:

To a considerable extent, this book of mine, the 'Autobiography' of a tatterdemalion Taliessin from his third to his sixtieth year, is the history of the 'de-classing' of a bourgeois-born personality, and its fluctuating and wavering approach to the Communistic system of social justice: not

<sup>24</sup> Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 598.

<sup>25</sup> Ruth Le Prade (ed.), *Debs and the Poets* (Pasadena, CA: Upton Sinclair, 1920), p. 64.

double flight. It flees into a circuitous *Inward*. It retreats into a circuitous *Outward*.

You cannot force it to love you or to hate you. You can only watch it escaping from you. Alone among nations it builds no monuments to its princes, no tombs to its prophets. Its past is its future, for it lives by memories and in advance it recedes. The greatest of its heroes have no graves, for they will come again. Indeed they have not died; they have only disappeared. They have only ceased for a while from hunting and being hunted; ceased for a while from their 'longing' that the world which *is* should be transformed into Annwn – the world which *is not* – and yet was and shall be!<sup>66</sup>

Powys has been criticized for here imposing his life-philosophy of individualism and withdrawal upon the Welsh historical and political reality;<sup>67</sup> but the implications from a left-libertarian perspective are twofold. There is the invincibility of an oppressed people who reject the legitimacy of defeat. There is also the promise of 'the world which *is*' being transformed into both the world which *was* and the world which shall be. Owen muses of 'the first people' of Wales: 'there were no princes, no rulers then, but only the men of the land, living at peace together and worshipping peaceful gods without sacrifices and without blood'.<sup>68</sup> He is especially impressed that the altar inside a prehistoric mound had 'no hollow place for blood'.<sup>69</sup> The Forests of Tywyn, we are told,

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 889–90 (Powys's emphasis). See also pp. 914–15, 916–17.

<sup>67</sup> Roland Mathias, 'The Sacrificial Prince: A Study of Owen Glendower', in Humfrey, *Essays*, esp. pp. 257–61; Jeremy Hooker, *John Cowper Powys* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), pp. 74–8.

<sup>68</sup> Powys, *Owen Glendower*, p. 419.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91i, 917.



This heady and extremely anarchistic uprising of all against everything is undermined fictionally, intentionally or otherwise, in two fundamental ways. First, other than the explanation as to the eventual death of the gods, the reader is never given any indication of the outcome of the struggle between the Titans and Olympians. Secondly, Powys's personal values are exemplified by the farmer Zeuks, who also explicates a life-philosophy; but the essence of this is changed during the course of the novel from being *Prokleesis*, meaning 'challenge' or 'defiance', to *Lanthanomai* – 'I forget' – and *Terpomai* – 'I enjoy' – both of which lack the initial cosmic challenge.<sup>64</sup>

Powys's first great historical novel, *Owen Glendower* (1940), set in early-fifteenth-century Wales, ends with the defeat of the rebellion against English rule. Yet Owen remains defiant since the English 'can out-sail us, out-fight us, out-trade us, out-laugh us – but they can't *out-last* us! It'll be from our mountains and in our tongue, when the world ends, that the last defiance of man's fate will rise!'<sup>65</sup> Military defeat is in a very real sense a kind of victory for the Welsh, as is explained in a much-quoted passage:

The very geography of the land and its climatic peculiarities, the very nature of its mountains and rivers, the very falling and lifting of the mists that waver above them, all lend themselves, to a degree unknown in any other earthly region, to what might be called the *mythology of escape*. This is the secret of the land. This is the secret of the people of the land. Other races love and hate, conquer and are conquered. This race avoids and evades, pursues and is pursued. Its soul is forever making a

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 182–3, 284–5. See also pp. 209–10.

<sup>65</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Owen Glendower* (London: John Lane, Bodley Head, 1941), p. 781. See also pp. 885–6.

however to the Communistic philosophy: for I feel that the deepest thing in life is the soul's individual struggle to reach an exultant peace in relation to more cosmic forces than any social system, just or unjust, can cope with or compass.<sup>26</sup>

From the late 1930s this particular philosophical and socio-political tension is resolved. Favourable references to Soviet Communism largely cease. Communism and Fascism are viewed as *almost* equally abhorrent dictatorships. And anarchy takes over as the ideal.

While holidaying in Dorset in 1937, Powys spoke on 26 July in Dorchester Labour Hall at a meeting, to raise funds to supply the Spanish Republican militias with soap, of (it would seem) the fellow-travelling Left Book Club alongside the Communist Sylvia Townsend Warner.<sup>27</sup> Warner was the friend of his brother Theodore and sister Katie, but it is improbable that he would have agreed to this twelve months later. Earlier that month, indeed – in an outburst akin to that of Orwell's four weeks later when he declined to participate in *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*, telling Nancy Cunard to 'stop sending me this bloody rubbish' – Powys had rebelled in his journal against 'a very very very *tiresome letter* from a New Zealander about a concensus [sic] of damned Intellectuals and ArtistsL.for Propaganda against Dictators' (and with which Valentine Ackland, Warner's lover and also an ardent Communist, was involved), resolving: 'Well, I'll send them a

<sup>26</sup> Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 626.

<sup>27</sup> Elwin, *Letters*, II, pp. 235–6; Morine Krissdottir (ed.), *Petrushka and the Dancer: The Diaries of John Cowper Powys, 1929–1939* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), p. 252; Judith Stinton, *Chaldon Herring: The Powys Circle in a Dorset Village* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1988), p. 137; Wendy Mulford, *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters and Politics, 1930–1951* (London: Pandora Press, 1988), p. 92; Claire Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), pp. 170–1).

few Anarchist ideas borrowed from my Guide in Politics old *Emma Goldman!* I can't help it if they like not this.'<sup>28</sup>

From mid-1936 until January 1937 Powys was writing a novel, *Morwyn*. He then immediately turned to *The Pleasures of Literature*, which is spattered with approving references to 'anarchy' and anarchism – as are all his non-fiction works of the 1940s. In *Mortal Strife* (1942) he contended that 'the intention of Evolution will always be found on the side of the Community which is most libertarian; for in the heart of every "common or garden" man you will find, if you hunt long enough, the guileless integrity of an Ideal Anarchist'; and that 'the Libertarian Utopia ... is the heart's desire of all ordinary people'. And so Powys is able to equate 'the Catalan anarchists' and 'the old-fashioned British Liberals and Trades Unionists' – for making the clearest stand against the Fascist assault on 'the ordinary person and his independence'.<sup>29</sup>

'Anarchy', 'anarchist', 'anarchical', 'anarchistic' become for Powys terms of overwhelming approbation – in striking contrast to their conventional pejorative usages. For example: 'the divine anarchy of the soul'; 'the power of the lonely, equal, *anarchistic* individual'; 'the real, living, mysterious, anarchical Multiverse'; 'the unphilosophical, irreligious, anti-social, anarchistic *Embrace of Life*'; 'the chaotic, pluralistic, anarchistic Shakespeare'; 'beautiful Chance and beautiful Chaos and beautiful Anarchy'.<sup>30</sup> And in his unlibertarian belligerence during the Second World War: 'Let those old Pirate-Anarchists of Britain take to their Seven Seas'.

<sup>28</sup> CWGO, XI, p. 67; National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, John Cowper Powys's diary, 6 July 1937 (Powys's emphasis) (I am indebted to Morine Krissdottir for this quotation).

<sup>29</sup> Powys, *Mortal Strife*, pp. 18–19, 33, 83–4.

<sup>30</sup> John Cowper Powys, *The Pleasures of Literature* (London: Cassell, 1938), p. 3; Powys, *Mortal Strife*, pp. 156, 178, 194, 211; Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, p. 88. The emphases are Powys's.

a revolution in Nature herself! Nature herself has decided to assert herself at last. And *this* means, *can* mean, *does* mean, and *will* mean only one thing! And that one thing is this: Women from now on are no longer subject to men.

It is a battle to restore to us women the ruling position we held at the beginning of things! In the reign of Kronos we held it – and *that* age was the Age of Gold.<sup>60</sup>

All the same, on 'the shores of Ultima Thule ... exiled Kronos awaits the day of his awakening', apparently the only being unmoved by these extraordinary events.<sup>61</sup> A young woman explains that 'by the "Cosmic" Revolution ... we mean a rustic pastoral revolution against a cruel, despotic, wicked, undemocratic, hieratic, privileged tyrannical Order of the Citizens of great Cities which we – rustic shepherds and shepherdesses from the country – have joined together to break up forever!' 'But what will you put in its place?' her friend enquires; and the answer is 'Anarchy! Anarchy! Anarchy!'<sup>62</sup> In total, this is a 'multiversal revolt against the authority of the Olympians' and

as a result of a spontaneous and natural revolt all over the world against god-worship, all the gods that exist, from Zeus downwards, and all the goddesses that exist from Hera downwards ... are fated to perish. They are not fated to perish rapidly. But perish they will. And the fatal sickness that must ere long bring them to their end is caused by this growing refusal to worship them.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140–i, 224–5 (Powys's emphasis).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 383, 448.

a decade later. On the other hand, this political sub-plot is not only peripheral to the main concerns of *A Glastonbury Romance* but unconvincing in its handling.<sup>56</sup>

It is a late work, *Atlantis* (1954), glorious but ultimately disappointing, that had the potential for being Powys's most explicitly anarchist fiction. His failing powers as an octogenarian to realize a complex, lengthy, major novel must account for the way in which characters, themes and developments are left incomplete or as cul-de-sacs – there are no indications of revision or rewriting – and an important work has correspondingly failed to attract the attention it merits, even among Powys's admirers.<sup>57</sup> Odysseus, after many years back in Ithaca, embarks for a final voyage across the Atlantic Ocean and visits the continent of Atlantis, recently submerged during the cosmic revolt of which reports are woven throughout the narrative.

The Titans have broken free in Tartaros and are attempting to overthrow the Olympian gods who, it is said, are as much opposed by humans as by their predecessors.<sup>58</sup> If successful, this insurrection will change the world in very radical ways. It is 'a revolt against Fate Itself, as well as against the Will of the All-Father, a will that always bows to Fate'.<sup>59</sup> 'The world's new age of the real rule of women' will now begin – Persephone has escaped from Hades and is roaming the world looking for her mother Demeter – for there has also been

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. H.P. Collins, *John Cowper Powys: Old Earth-Man* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1966), p. 82; Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 62.

<sup>57</sup> But see the discussions by Kenneth Hopkins, *The Powys Brothers* (Southrepps, Norfolk: Warren House Press, 1972), pp. 244–7; Cavaliero, pp. 133–40; John A. Brebner, *The Demon Within: A Study of John Cowper Powys's Novels* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973), pp. 203–12; John Toft, 'John Cowper Powys's *Atlantis*', *Powys Review*, no. 3 (Summer 1978).

<sup>58</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Atlantis* (London: Macdonald, 1954), p. 177.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.

I think Churchill is far more of a sound, far more of a proper man – I won't say 'common or garden' or 'democratic' man, I'll say more of a *proper man*, of a 'honest cod' – far more of a live-&-let-live, well-meaning, un-fanatical, un-cruel, kindly & honest personality – in a word, far more of an *anarchist* than Cripps and all these popular-crazed, pin-headed Daily-Worker-Propagand Prof. Haldane austeriotypes!<sup>31</sup>

Powys received at least some issues of *War Commentary*, which 'old Emma used to make them send me before her death in Canada'; but he would no more have been able to stomach its principled opposition to the war than anarchists could have tolerated the jingoism of *Mortal Strife* (although he relished the 'sagacious articles' which Reginald Reynolds had written for *War Commentary*).<sup>32</sup>

This outpouring is anticipated by one still more fevered in the book on John Keats, written around 1908 to 1910 (yet unpublished for over eighty years), and in which a 'delicate and delicious anarchy' is longed for by 'all we anarchists of art and religion and pleasure' – the libertarianism of this work has Wilde's 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' as its principal source – as well as in *Visions and Revisions* and *Suspended Judgments* of 1915 and 1916 respectively.<sup>33</sup> Powys went on to refer, most significantly, to his revered Keats not only as 'a born "Pluralist"' but also as 'an anarchist at heart – as so many great artists are'; Remy de Gourmont, who happened to be associ-

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<sup>31</sup> Powys, *Mortal Strife*, p. 174; *Letters to Wilkinson*, p. iii (Powys's emphasis).

<sup>32</sup> Reginald Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes* (London: Jarrolds, 1956), p. 208; Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, letter from Powys to Reynolds, 29 October 1942 (I owe this reference to Charles Lock).

<sup>33</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Powys on Keats: Volume One of John Keats: or Popular Paganism*, ed. Cedric Hentschel (London: Cecil Woolf, 1993), pp. 37, 42, 44–5. For Wilde's influence, see *ibid.*, pp. 70–2.

ated with the French anarchist movement in the 1890s, is described as ‘a spiritual anarchist’ and as ‘proudly individualistic, an intellectual anarchist free from every scruple’; and, above all, he rhapsodized the ‘voluptuous anarchy’ of Rousseau, said to be ‘a true “philosophic anarchist”’. The earlier Rousseau was indeed a major precursor of anarchism; and his ‘anarchy’ is favourably contrasted to – being regarded as ‘far more dangerous’ than – that of ‘a genuine and logical anarchist, such as Max Stirner’.<sup>34</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that in the newspaper reports of Powys’s lectures of 1914–15 in Ontario there is significant favourable mention of anarchism. He very reasonably calls Tolstoy a ‘Christian anarchist’ as well as a ‘spiritual anarchist’, Nietzsche a ‘spiritual anarchist’ also and Ibsen – whose affinity to anarchism was remarked by Kropotkin and Goldman – an ‘intellectual anarchist’ and ‘consistent anarchist of the soul’. Of particular interest is a synopsis of ‘The Republic of the Future’, describing the coming ‘despotic’ and Wellsian socialist state, which in turn would wither away – as most socialists of the time believed – to be replaced (although a state and ‘rule’ are still referred to) by the ultimate form of social relations, anarchy: ‘Voluntary work, voluntary play, voluntary love – everything will be voluntary, and we will have all that time for leisure and what goes with it. We need and will find ourselves.’<sup>35</sup> And in Louis Wilkinson’s *The Buffoon*, the *roman à clef* of 1916 in which Jack Welsh is a portrayal of Powys, Welsh lectures to a socialist society on ‘Art and Democracy’, summarizing ‘rapidly and with great vigour’ ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ before concluding: ‘With Democracy comes Social-

<sup>34</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Visions and Revisions: A Book of Literary Devotions* (London: Village Press, 1974 reprint of 1955 edn), pp. 139–40; John Cowper Powys, *Suspended Judgments: Essays on Books and Sensations* (1916; n.p.: Folcroft Press, 1969 reprint), pp. 86–90, 93, 97, 233–4, 249, 253).

<sup>35</sup> Robin Patterson, ‘Powys in Canada: John Cowper Powys’s Canadian Lectures (1914–1915, 1930), *Powys Notes*, IX, no. 2 (Fall 1994–Winter 1995), pp. 21–3, 25, 41–2, 64, 79.

altogether. But part of its natural habit would be to pool its resources for the common benefit; voluntarily of course; not by compulsion; but it would pool them.’<sup>52</sup> ‘He dreams of ‘the great experiment’: ‘To feel free of all compulsion ... to feel the physical caress of air and water and earth upon his life, as he earned his living, a free man among free men, the stupidity of life broken up ... if he could only know it for one year!’<sup>53</sup> ‘Free life from every compulsion and people will be naturally kind and gentle and decent,’ he believes, since: ‘It’s the policeman in our minds ... that stops us all from being ourselves and letting other people be themselves.’<sup>54</sup>

Trent comes to be disabused not of the innate goodness of humanity in general, but certainly of Communists’. Spear

defeated him every time their ideas clashed... Dave had a clear-cut set of adamant principles, which he combined with a practical and even unscrupulous opportunism that was perpetual surprise to everyone ... it was always the Anarchist whose principles were vague and his practice unbending, who was forced to yield; while the Communist, whose principles were crystal-clear and his practice malleable and flexible, carried the point.

Trent complained that Spear ‘takes liberty away from the individual in the name of the community’, whereas he, Powys comments, was ‘far too ideal in his instincts for his instincts to prevail’.<sup>55</sup> Powys indeed seems already entirely aware of the problems of Communism as well as the attractions of anarchism before he was so thoroughly exposed to them half

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 748 (Powys’s emphasis).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 750. Ellipses in the original.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 750, 1042.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1041, 1043.

But 'tis all, alas! still a doctrinaire abstract philosophy, for the Fascists ended it in Catalonia as soon as it started – but I'd love to see it started (if only as an experiment) once again – in *one* country or province or county!<sup>49</sup>

It is Powys's earlier novels, written while he was resident in the USA and a Communist fellow traveller, that have more-or-less contemporary settings, principally in Wessex. In contrast, from 1937, after his move to Wales and when he was no longer just an individualist but a sympathizer with social anarchism, his fiction, while eschewing the modern world and consisting exclusively of historical novels and fantasies, is characterized by significant left-libertarian themes, not merely the exposition and practical application of his life-philosophy that is common to both periods.

In *A Glastonbury Romance*, however, published in the USA in 1932 and the following year in Britain, a tiny group of revolutionaries – two Communists and an anarchist – endeavour to set up in the small Somerset town a 'commune': a Glastonbury Commune along the lines of the Paris Commune of 1871 rather than in the modern sense of an experimental community. Paul Trent is, naturally, a 'philosophical anarchist' and a solicitor ironically but entirely plausibly, for anarchist lawyers have existed historically (and continue to do so). 'Have you never heard of a philosophical anarchist,' he asks, 'or of Kropotkin or Tolstoy or Thoreau or Walt Whitman?'<sup>50</sup> His vision is of 'the first real anarchist experiment that's ever been made', of 'a voluntary association of free spirits to enjoy the free life'.<sup>51</sup> He explains to the Communist, Dave Spear: 'My commune is just the opposite of yours! It's a voluntary association

<sup>49</sup> *Letters to Wilkinson*, p. 105 (Powys's emphasis).

<sup>50</sup> John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance* (London: John Lane, Bodley Head, 1933), p. 749.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 836, 1041–2.

ism: but beyond Socialism is Anarchy, and beyond Anarchy is Anarchy again, and yet again Anarchy! Anarchy, my brothers, this is my last word to you – Anarchy! Anarchy!<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, there is a real possibility that Powys continued to use this overheated approval of all things anarchist – other than as an immediate political programme – throughout the two decades between *Suspended Judgments* and *The Pleasures of Literature*. For in a rare account of a lecture of these years we have him commenting at Columbia University in 1930 that Shakespeare was 'anarchical' and 'naturally an anarchist', and continuing:

King Lear was a spoilt child: he later became an anarchist. The moral attitude of civilization and society is attacked in Lear. Jaques in *As You Like It* is an anarchist. Caliban was not only an anarchist against the ways of man: he represents the revolt of *the Cosmos against the Human Race*.<sup>37</sup>

One problem is the extent to which Powys really did, in 1914 or a quarter of a century later, understand the theoretical basis of anarchism – as is demonstrated by a letter he wrote to Goldman in June 1938:

Oh how I would like to see your friends in Catalonia emerge from this war victorious and really at last create an absolutely new experiment in social life and government free from politicians and dictators – a country *really free*, and one that would realize all those hopes that we all had at the *beginning* of the Revolution in Russia! I

<sup>36</sup> Louis U. Wilkinson, *The Buffoon* (1916; London: Village Press, 1975 reprint), pp. 123, 144, 148.

<sup>37</sup> Ann M. Reed, 'From the Front Row: Notes from the Lectures of John Cowper Powys', ed. Melvon L. Ankeny, *Powys Journal*, VII (1997), p. 51 (Reed's emphasis).

suppose your friends are in reality in the majority in Catalonia and if after the defeat of Fascism some sort of Federated Government in Spain was the issue, it would be *there* rather than anywhere else...that this great new experiment might be made.

I suppose they would *have* to have some sort of centralized authority elected directly by the syndicates to deal with exports & imports etc etc and for the settling of the division of the profits of the whole district's *production* and exchange with other districts in Spain & other countries. What problems will emerge so as to give the people at the same time livelihood *and* liberty!<sup>38</sup>

Goldman's reply was necessarily blunt:

You will forgive me, I know, for saying that there is a contradiction in this very first paragraph. It is wherein you speak of a 'country really free' and yet seem to think that government is necessary to maintain this ideal. Unfortunately freedom and government do not mix harmoniously. At least I know of no government, no matter how democratic or progressive, that has ever granted real freedom.

Another mistake you are making, dear friend, is in your belief in the need of 'centralized authority'. That is precisely what the Spanish Anarchists do *not* want. Their whole idea is based on federated

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<sup>38</sup> GA, XXXI, JCP to EG, 15 June 1938 (*LJCEP*, pp. 114–115) (Powys's emphasis).

4. I would like to see Big Business and Capitalistic Private Initiative threatened and taxed and harried and bludgeoned into good behaviour; but I would like to see sufficient individualism left to stop the government from becoming a Dictatorship.
5. I would like to see the nationalization of land, and above all of BANKS.
6. I would like the attainment by the manual workers of those values of freedom from worry, of personal leisure, of liberal education, of development of individual taste, of love of solitude, etc., etc., which we associate with the best aristocracies: in fact I would like to see a general *levelling up*.
7. I would like to see some scheme invented by which all men and women in all communities *were forced to share in the business of government*; and forced to learn how to take such a share!
8. I would like religion kept out of the schools, and out of education altogether; and left entirely to private *initiative*.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly he had told Wilkinson in 1942:

the only revolutionary party I have felt sympathetic to is that of the Catalonian Anarchists & Anarchist Syndicalists... I think the doctrines of anarchy...are the very best we have yet evolved.

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<sup>48</sup> Donald Brook, *Writers' Gallery: Biographical Sketches of Britain's Greatest Writers, and Their Views on Reconstruction* (London: Rockliff, 1944), pp. 110–11 (Powys's emphasis).

He adopts a position somewhere between philosophical and full-blooded anarchism in his statement on post-war reconstruction, extremely revealing as his only concise, detailed socio-political blueprint:

As to your excellent questions about the new order, I am too absorbed in reading over, and over for my own private culture, certain poetical and philosophical books; and in writing romances and lay-sermons and psychological-moralistic hand-books for individuals of my own rather anarchistic and rather solitude-loving type (with a mania for the inanimate and for the elements) to be anything but ignorant about world economics and politics.

But on two or three special and quite particular topics I do feel *very strongly* and in fact am both an ardent missionary and a fierce crusader. I will put these down in the order in which I feel their importance:

1. I would like to see the abolition of Vivisection and the discrediting and total debunking of the present fantastic tyranny of physical science.
2. I would like to see the complete destruction of the Franco Régime in Spain; and the establishment of Catalonia as an independent commonwealth with anarchistic tendencies.
3. I would like to see a very complete but entirely bloodless revolution all over the world by which distinctions of class and inequalities of property and money were brought to an end without the suppression of free thought, free speech, free press, free books, free discussion and free art.

relations in all walks and purposes of social life and activity.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, despite Goldman's lecture and a package or two of anarchist books and pamphlets, and very reasonably wishing, some years later, for the restoration of '*co-operative rule from below*' in Catalonia, he could still write:

Let [the individual] be as anarchistic as he pleases; as long as he obeys the laws and earns an honest living he has a perfect right to be as critical of his own government as of any other. He has a right to criticize the whole idea of government; as long as, while the laws are the laws, he obeys them.<sup>40</sup>

Had Powys, then, really become an anarchist? I think that it makes sense to consider that he had, since there are two anarchist positions to which it may plausibly be maintained that he adhered. First, as has been argued in chapter 5, he was an individualist anarchist – or 'anarchistic individualist', to use his own words – not just in the late 1930s and 1940s, but from the years before the First World War, throughout the period when he was a Communist sympathizer, and down to the 1950s and his death in 1963.

Secondly, there is philosophical anarchism: the 'social ideal' of 'Philosophical Anarchy'. 'Philosophical anarchy' and 'philosophical anarchist' are terms much favoured by Powys and by them he seems to mean a thoughtful or intellectual anarchism or anarchist – of all of which he always approved – as opposed to a mindless and violent activism or agitator (of which he did not). This is not a useful distinction and, if my interpretation

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<sup>39</sup> Bissell Collection, Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, EG to JCP, 16 August 1938 (*LJCPEG*, pp. 116–117).

<sup>40</sup> Powys, *Dostoevsky*, p. 193 (Powys's emphasis); John Cowper Powys, *The Art of Growing Old* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), pp. 176–7.

is correct, merely illustrates how little he knew of the rank-and-file movement and its militants: dynamitards or otherwise. Rather philosophic or philosophical anarchism is best understood as the standpoint that anarchism, that society without state or government, is the *ideal*, but that it is not really practicable, at least not at the present.<sup>41</sup> This is Powys's attitude in the early 1940s in *Mortal Strife*, *The Art of Growing Old* and even the much gloomier *Dostoevsky*:

... although it seems hopeless, as things are now, to accept the bold and spirited anarchist doctrine that if the State were abolished the people could, after one grand revolutionary rising, run the world for themselves, we can at least recognize that the whole trend of Evolutionary Democracy is towards this happy consummation.<sup>42</sup>

... the great spiral-historical ascent of humanity from unphilosophic State-Despotism to that ideal of 'philosophical anarchy' which is the hope, not only of all men of goodwill and philosophic mind, but of the common man all the world over...<sup>43</sup>

... the pearl-white *samite* of the sacred gonfalon of that Palace of Anarchy towards which, whether in the Past or the Future, the needle of our compass turns.<sup>44</sup>

To Louis Wilkinson he wrote in 1939: '...the Anarchist Ideal...is of course the perfect one...'; and: 'Of course really ...

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Nicolas Walter, *About Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2002), pp. 51–2.

<sup>42</sup> Powys, *Art of Growing Old*, p. 197. It is of some significance that Ethel Mannin treats *The Art of Growing Old* as a Utopian work in her *Bread and Roses: An Utopian Survey and Blue-Print* (London: Macdonald [1944]) – see, especially, p. 109.

<sup>43</sup> Powys, *Dostoevsky*, p. 107.

<sup>44</sup> Powys, *Mortal Strife*, p. 122 (Powys's emphasis).

the truth is that the Anarchists alone are right. But the worst of *that* is that they are too good to be true.'<sup>45</sup> The previous year, having agreed to become a sponsor of the SIA, he had explained in his journal that

these Catalonian Anarchists are, as politicians & builders of the desirable state of things, more idealistic & un-practical than any other group! & I confess that it seems that they alone (idealistic & unpractical as they are) represent a Society that is humane and free – the only set in the world that do!<sup>46</sup>

Anarchism for Powys is what he calls a 'Postponed Idea':

Pacifism today ... seems to have fallen into the category, along with the policing of the world by the League of Nations, of what one might call *Postponed Ideas*; ideas that the moment's pressure renders inopportune ... A sympathetic and cynical person might well be pardoned for thinking that not only no ideology... but no *idea* even, is worth the present sufferings of the civil population and of the refugees in Catalonia; but it does after all remain, even if the first really self-respecting and completely free life for the working people of the world were bombed into annihilation, that something more than an idea, a *living experience*, has come into being, to which, when humanity has disillusioned itself of these murderous and childish ideologies of efficiency, it can at last return.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Letters to Wilkinson*, pp. 54, 56 (Powys's emphasis).

<sup>46</sup> Krissdottir, p. 263 [entry for 17 January 1938].

<sup>47</sup> John Cowper Powys, 'The Real and the Ideal', *Spain and the World*, May 1938 (reprinted in *LJCEP*, p. 109) (Powys's emphasis).



The choice now is between militarism and pacifism. To me, the necessity of pacifism seems absolutely clear.<sup>60</sup>

Of the 149 writers who responded only Huxley, Ethel Mannin and, very elliptically, Herbert Read mentioned the anarchists positively. It is therefore not surprising that when Emma Goldman returned from Spain to form the English section of the SIA, Huxley was one of the people asked to become sponsors: 'I was delighted to see that you are so close to the ideas that I have fought for all my life. It is so rarely that one finds in England men or women dedicated to a truly libertarian ideal...'<sup>61</sup> But in April 1937 Aldous, Maria and Matthew Huxley, together with Gerald Heard and his lover Christopher Wood, had sailed for the USA, where Huxley and Heard were proposing to proselytize for pacifism. They had intended to return but did not, settling instead in California. Huxley thus replied:

The events of the last few years have made it clear, so far as I am concerned, that the libertarian ideal for which you have fought so long is the only satisfactory and even the only *realistic* political creed for anyone who is not a conservative reactionary.

With regard to the SIA, I am enclosing a small contribution to its funds. Being absent from England I think it best not to become a sponsor of the organization, inasmuch I shall be unable to do anything

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<sup>60</sup> *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (London: *Left Review* [1937]) [reprinted in *LAH*, p. 423]. This poll of British and Irish writers was instigated by one of its signatories, Nancy Cunard, with whom Huxley had been so infatuated in 1923 that his wife whisked him off to live in Italy and who then served as the model for Myra Viveash in *Antic Hay*.

<sup>61</sup> Goldman Archive, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam [hereafter GA], XXVII A, letter of 11 January 1938.

speech and delivered it with all the revolutionary fervour he could summon up for the occasion. Which meant that more often than not some of the public were so disappointed by his delivery that they failed to take into account the important things he had to say!<sup>25</sup>

All this came to a dramatic end with Read's acceptance of a knighthood in the New Year's Honours for 1953. It is significant for two reasons that this was awarded only 'for services to literature', and not to art. The State was unable to stomach his promotion of contemporary art; and Read, who always thought of himself as primarily a poet and that his literary achievement had been unfairly overshadowed by his other activities, felt it was at last properly recognized. Anarchists, not unnaturally, found his conduct insupportable – in any case they found themselves the laughingstock of their revolutionary rivals on the left for what was perceived as the opportunism or, at best, ingenuousness of their most prominent advocate – and he was ostracized by *Freedom*. Of the anarchists only Augustus John was to congratulate him and Alex Comfort and George Woodcock, while privately critical, to remain friends.<sup>26</sup> Yet as far as Read himself was concerned he remained an anarchist, even if an anarchist knight. His gravestone at St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale, bears the sometimes scarcely legible inscription: 'KNIGHT, POET, ANARCHIST'. Benedict Read, his youngest son and literary executor, commented in 1974: 'Read attempted to justify his decision to accept, but it is clear that there was more behind it than he cared to state publicly; perhaps the

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<sup>25</sup> VR, '“A Man Born Free”', *Freedom*, 22 June 1968 (reprinted in *Anarchy*, no. 91 [September 1968], pp. 284–6).

<sup>26</sup> University of Victoria, Victoria, BC: Read Archive, letter from John to Read, 18 January 1953; and see George Woodcock, *Beyond the Blue Mountains: An Autobiography* (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1987), p. 194, and 'Maturity', in Alex Comfort, *Haste to the Wedding* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962), p. 48.

heart had its reasons. In any case it did not in any way lessen the strength of his [political] views.<sup>27</sup>

Read's biographer, James King, has since disclosed how eager Ludo Read was to become Lady Read: 'Ludo had no doubt that Herbert had to accept the Palace's invitation.' T.S. Eliot had in 1948 been appointed to the Order of Merit, but Ludo asked, 'What's the use of being Mrs OM?' The couple were partially estranged because of a passionate friendship that Read had formed with Ruth Francken, a woman painter thirty years his junior, in Venice earlier in 1952. The relationship was platonic, but he had wanted it otherwise and been foolhardy enough to tell Ludo so. Thus King concludes: 'Finally, Read succumbed to Ludo's considerable powers of persuasion'.<sup>28</sup> All the same, it is very relevant that Read was a countryman, coming from a Conservative farming family – his first politics (from the age of fifteen) was a romantic, Disraelian Toryism.<sup>29</sup> In 1949 he had returned to Yorkshire: to live at Stonegrave House, only two or three miles from his birthplace and childhood home at Muscoates. He had explained in *Poetry and Anarchism*:

In spite of my intellectual pretensions, I am by birth and tradition a peasant. I remain essentially a peasant. I despise the whole industrial epoch – not only the plutocracy which it has raised to power, but also the industrial proletariat which it has drained from the land and proliferated in hovels of indifferent brick. The only class in the community for which I feel any real sympathy is the agricultural class, including the genuine remnants of a landed aristocracy. This perhaps ex-

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<sup>27</sup> 'Herbert Read – His Life and Work', in *A Tribute to Herbert Read, 1893–1968* (Bradford Art Galleries and Museums: catalogue of exhibition at the Manor House, Ilkley, 1975), p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> King, pp. 263–6.

<sup>29</sup> Read, *Annals*, pp. 124–6.

whole. If the word 'state' is too unpleasantly associated with ideas of domestic oppression and foreign war, with irresponsible domination and no less irresponsible submission, then by all means let us call the necessary social machinery by some other name. For the present there is no general agreement as to what that name should be; I shall therefore go on using the bad old word, until some better one is invented.<sup>59</sup>

Around the time that he was writing these passages Huxley was asked in June 1937 the celebrated questions:

Are you for, or against, the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain?

Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?

For it is impossible any longer to take no side.

His analysis had changed significantly since the autumn and he could reply: 'My sympathies are, of course, with the Government side, especially the Anarchists; for Anarchism seems to me much more likely to lead to desirable social change than highly centralized, dictatorial Communism.' This advocacy, though, he did moderate by continuing:

As for 'taking sides' – the choice, it seems to me, is no longer between two users of violence, two systems of dictatorship. Violence and dictatorship cannot produce peace and liberty; they can only produce the results of violence and dictatorship, results with which history has made us only too sickeningly familiar.

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

In *Ends and Means*, by contrast, Huxley concludes:

We have found agreement in regard to the ideal society and the ideal human being. Among the political reformers of the last century we even find a measure of agreement about the best means of organizing the state so as to achieve the ends which all desire. Philosophic Radicals, Fourierists, Proudhonian Mutualists, Anarchists, Syndicalists, Tolstoyans – all agree that authoritarian rule and an excessive concentration of power are among the main obstacles in the way of social and individual progress.<sup>58</sup>

Several pages later he writes, rather less promisingly for the anarchist:

The Anarchists propose that the state should be abolished; and in so far as it serves as the instrument by means of which the ruling class preserves its privileges, in so far as it is a device for enabling paranoiacs to satisfy their lust for power and carry out their crazy dreams of glory, the state is obviously worthy of abolition. But in complex societies like our own the state has certain other and more useful functions to perform. It is clear, for example, that in any such society there must be some organization responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the various constituent groups; clear, too, that there must be a body to which is delegated the power of acting in the name of the society as a

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Freedom Press, 1989), p. 30. For the authorship see Huxley, *Pacifism and Philosophy*, p. 56.

<sup>58</sup> Huxley, *Ends and Means*, p. 61.

plains my early attraction to Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Tolstoy, who were also of the land, aristocrats and peasants. A man cultivating the earth – that is the elementary economic fact; and as a poet I am only concerned with elementary facts.<sup>30</sup>

Aldous Huxley, in contrast, from his American exile, declined a knighthood in 1959.<sup>31</sup>

It needs to be said that Read's second marriage had some very negative consequences for him. Ludo undoubtedly provided psychological sustenance and emotional fulfilment – their partnership and his life with his second family were extremely happy. But the acceptance of the knighthood demolished whatever reputation Read had had on the left and, in addition, made many writers and painters (who do indeed often have much of the anarchist in them), especially avant-garde artists, down to the present day, scornful of someone so entirely compromised by absorption into the establishment. Further, Ludo was responsible for a lifestyle at odds with her husband's published principles and necessitating the lecture tours he hated and unnecessary books in order to finance it. Read the atheist assented to his daughter being sent to a convent (and a bad one at that) and his sons to Ampleforth, the nearby Catholic public school, when naturally he would have preferred them to go to a school like A.S. Neill's Summerhill.<sup>32</sup>

In 1939 Read had resigned his editorship of the traditionalist *Burlington Magazine* and become a director of George Rout-

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<sup>30</sup> Read, *Poetry and Anarchism*, p. 16. Ben Read (to whom I am indebted for much assistance and information over the years) confirms that my interpretation unpacks what he was implying when he wrote 'perhaps the heart has its reasons'.

<sup>31</sup> Tania Branigan, 'The Ultimate Honour – Impressive List of Those Who Refused to Bow to the System', *Guardian*, 22 December 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Fiona Malcolm, 'A Childhood: Piers Paul Read', *The Times Magazine*, 9 September 1995. See also the obituary of Lady Read (by Piers Paul Read), *The Times*, 15 March 1996.

ledge and Sons (Routledge & Kegan Paul from 1947) – a position he retained until obliged to retire on grounds of age in 1963. At Routledge (for whom he had acted as a reader since 1937) he introduced Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, Georges Simenon and such libertarian theorists as Simone Weil, Martin Buber and Leopold Kohr, as well as a poetry list that was to include Sidney Keyes, John Heath-Stubbs, Norman McCaig, Geoffrey Grigson and E.J. Scovell, as well as the anarchists Comfort, Savage and Woodcock. He edited the 'English Master Painters' series (1939–60); and was responsible for the initiation, jointly with the Bollingen Foundation, of the collected works of not only Carl Gustav Jung but also Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Paul Valéry.<sup>33</sup>

From around 1930 Read had been interested in both art education and children's art. Then, in 1940, he was invited by the newly established British Council to select drawings by British schoolchildren to form exhibitions for touring overseas in wartime. This experience was to prove overwhelming and enabled him to make the link between his writings on the visual arts and his anarchist politics; and the weighty *Education through Art* was published as early as 1943. In 1947 he became President of the Society for Education in Art (the Society for Education through Art from 1953), an office he held until his death; and following the sponsorship by Unesco of an International Society for Education through Art, he gave the opening address in 1954 to its first general assembly. *Education for Peace* (1949), a collection of papers on his educational theory, was reissued towards the end of his life as *The Redemption of the Robot* (New York, 1966; London, 1970).

Read's involvement with industrial design, which had been signalled by *Art and Industry* in 1934, was continued by the foundation of the Design Research Unit in 1943; and for the

<sup>33</sup> *150 Years of Great Publishing* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul [1986]), pp. 19–20.

ideas, together with the experience of other non-violent movements, to develop a theory of what he called 'moral jiu-jitsu', by the use of which trained groups of resisters could engage in non-violent resistance and direct action. 'Greggism', as it became known in the PPU, had enormous appeal for Huxley and Heard who responded enthusiastically to its self-discipline, asceticism and exclusivity. This would have been 'the training of an intellectual aristocracy' Huxley was thinking of and these 'the lines this training should take' when he was interviewed in November 1935.<sup>55</sup>

*Ends and Means* comes a poor third to *The Power of Non-Violence* and *The Conquest of Violence*, both compelling and deeply considered; all the same one can see why it impressed those in British pacifist circles in the 1930s and 1940s, Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman*, even going as far as to say in 1959 that it was 'the most logical statement of the pacifist case yet made by a Western author'.<sup>56</sup>

It was Huxley who in the autumn of 1936 drafted a leaflet, *Pacifism and Civil War*, notably unsympathetic to the popular revolution and harsh to the anarchists, as the PPU's response to the Spanish Civil War:

... it was, to say the least, unfortunate that the Popular Front should have allowed so much power to pass into the hands of the Communists and anarcho-syndicalists composing its left-wing. It was unfortunate that it permitted the ordinary machinery of administration to be supplemented by unofficial committees appointed by the parties of the extreme left.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> See n31 above. For Gregg and Greggism: Bradshaw, 'The Flight from Gaza', pp. 12–13, 18–23; Ceadel, pp. 250–7; Brock, pp. 124–5, 147–8.

<sup>56</sup> Brock, pp. 123, 151 n22; Roberts, p. 64. (But is it significant that Martin's assessment is not reprinted in Brock and Young, p. 146 n37?).

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in [Vernon Richards (ed.)], *The Left and World War II: Selections from the Anarchist Journal 'War Commentary', 1939–1943* (London:

guage, refreshingly different from the vague, well-meaning rhetoric of so much pacifist writing.

This is how Huxley in 1937 commends the translation of *Pour Vaincre sans Violence* – as *The Conquest of Violence* – and which his interest had been influential in getting published, and he proceeds to introduce English readers to de Ligt's famous dictum, 'the more violence, the less revolution', which complements his own contention that the ends cannot justify the means, since the ends attained are determined by the means employed.<sup>53</sup> ('The more violence, the less revolution', it should be noted, is Huxley's own translation from the French; and in the text of *The Conquest of Violence* Honor Tracy's renderings are the clumsy 'The greater the violence, the weaker the revolution...' and '...the more of violence, the less of revolution'.)<sup>54</sup>

It was another remarkable pacifist work, *The Power of Non-Violence*, published in 1935 (1934 in the United States), which had made an overwhelming impression on Huxley. The American author, Richard B. Gregg, a former trade-union lawyer and Quaker convert, had spent four years in India studying the Gandhian movement; and in his book he builds upon Gandhi's

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<sup>53</sup> Bart. de Ligt, *The Conquest of Violence: An Essay on War and Revolution* (London: George Routledge, 1937), pp. ix–x. For de Ligt, see Peter van den Dungen, 'Introduction to the 1989 Edition', Bart. de Ligt, *The Conquest of Violence: An Essay on War and Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 1989). Peter van den Dungen, 'Bart de Ligt, Aldous Huxley and "The Conquest of Violence": Notes on the Publication of a Peace Classic' (typescript in possession of writer), discusses the English-language publication and reception of *The Conquest of Violence*. De Ligt died in 1938 and as a result *La Paix Créatrice*, never translated into English, remained as the still very substantial *La Paix Créatrice: Histoire des principes et des tactiques de l'action directe contre la guerre* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 2 vols., 1934).

<sup>54</sup> De Ligt, *Conquest* (1937), pp. 75, 162. See also Aldous Huxley (ed.), *An Encyclopaedia of Pacifism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), p. 109; Huxley, *Ends and Means*, p. 25. For Huxley's other references to de Ligt: Huxley, *Encyclopaedia of Pacifism*, pp. 7, 18; Huxley, *Ends and Means*, pp. 138–9; LAH, p. 411.

two years down to 1945 he was, as Director, in sole charge of its running. Its most spectacular, although abortive, project was a design by Gabo for Jowett Cars. Although recognizing that *Art and Industry* became one of the gospels of design in Britain, Robin Kinross has been savagely dismissive of the book, from Read's content to Herbert Bayer's design. His persuasive critique also lambasts the Design Research Unit, what he calls 'the British design establishment' (the principal members of which were contributors to *The Practice of Design*, a volume edited by Read in 1946), as well as the conservatism that pervades English life. He complains that by the 1950s Read, obsessed with metropolitan design for industry was not receptive to dissenting, high-modernist innovators with country workshops, such as the furniture-maker Norman Potter and the typographer Anthony Froshaug. (Kinross also mentions Desmond Jeffery, the printer and 'designer' in 1970 of Christopher Pallis's *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*.) Potter, however, an anarchist from his teens who has been described as 'the English Rietveld' – the reference is to the great Dutch furniture-maker and architect, Gerrit Rietveld – vehemently rejected Kinross's views, pointing out how much Read's work and example had meant to him, especially as a young man. He himself was to publish two important books, the design classic, *What is a Designer* (1969; revised and extended in 1980) and *Models and Constructs: Margin Notes to a Design Culture* (1990), an unclassifiable work which Tanya Harrod rightly calls 'extraordinary', combining

as it does autobiography, poetry and design theory and practice.<sup>34</sup>

Potter's brother was Louis Adeane (born Donald Potter, there were to be two changes of name), with D.S. Savage and George Woodcock one of the brilliant young anarchist literary critics of the 1940s, and who for many years was working on 'To the Crystal City', a study of Read's writings. Adeane was, however, only to publish a booklet of poems, *The Night Loves Us* (1946); and it was Norman Potter who ironically was to become the successful author of books.<sup>35</sup>

To return to Read's career: towards the end of the war he began work on a series of monographs – lavishly produced by Lund Humphries, and which he either edited or contributed to – on the artists closest to him: Moore (1944), Nicholson (1948), Nash (1948), Hepworth (1952) and Gabo (1957). During these years he also became the champion of the next generation of British sculptors: Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick and others. *Contemporary British Art* (1951) was stimulated by the Festival of Britain; and *The Philosophy of Modern Art* (1952) was a major collection of art criticism written over more than fifteen years. He had played a leading role in the foundation in London of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1947 and was the automatic choice as its first president. In the

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<sup>34</sup> Robin Kinross, 'Herbert Read's *Art and Industry: A History*', *Journal of Design History*, I, no. 1 (1988); Robin Kinross, 'Herbert Read and Design', in *HRR*; Norman Potter, 'Herbert Read: Word and Object: In Response to Robin Kinross', in *HRR*; Tanya Harrod, obituary of Norman Potter, *Independent*, 2 December 1995. For Potter, see also Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (n.p.: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 228. For Potter's friend, Froshaug, there is the remarkable Robin Kinross, *Anthony Froshaug* (London: Hyphen Press, 2 vols., 2000).

<sup>35</sup> For Adeane, see George Woodcock, *Letter to the Past: An Autobiography* (Don Mills, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982), pp. 299–301; Michael Hamburger, *String of Beginnings: Intermittent Memoirs, 1924–1954* (London: Skoob Books, 1991), p. 269; Read Archive, letters from Adeane to Read, 1949–52. 'To the Crystal City' has now been deposited in the British Library as Add. MS. 71,198.

While Huxley's bourgeois upbringing and former elitist sympathies fully account for his distaste for the organized masses – and he was never to be a socialist, despite the conclusions of some unwary commentators<sup>52</sup> – his blind spot with respect to the radical potential of labour movements or sections at least of some is the more surprising given his admiration for the Dutch anarcho-pacifist Bart de Ligt, a former pastor and co-founder in 1921 of the syndicalist-related International Anti-Militarist Bureau, who had come to meld Gandhian non-violence with the total non-cooperation of the syndicalist General Strike in order to attain revolutionary social transformation. In September 1936 Huxley attended as a member of the PPU delegation Henri Barbusse's Universal Peace Congress in Brussels and there he met de Ligt, the two men continuing their discussions over several days some months later at de Ligt's home outside Geneva, where he had lived since 1925:

Bart. de Ligt is the author of two books which are among the most important contributions to the literature of pacifism. The first is a comprehensive history of pacifist thought and action from the earliest times to the present day .... Two volumes have already appeared under the title, *La Paix Créatrice*, and two more are to be issued in the near future. *La Paix Créatrice* is a work of wide and profound learning, indispensable to those who would study the history of peace and of 'the things that make for peace' .... M. de Ligt's other important work is *Pour Vaincre sans Violence ...* a text-book of applied pacifism, in which the techniques of non-violent activity are described with a sober precision of lan-

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<sup>52</sup> For example Larry Gambone, 'Aldous Huxley and Libertarian Socialism', *Freedom*, 6 February i<sup>3</sup>.

that were strenuously advocated).<sup>49</sup> The second change – and this is his greatest insight – is that society must be radically reconstructed through decentralization: in effect, through the abolition of power, though this is not a term he employs. The necessity for decentralization becomes a principal theme in all his subsequent writing on politics and society.<sup>50</sup> Whereas the realism of this second part of his programme is notable, in contrast to those middle-class pacifists who continued to adhere to economic liberalism, it is apparent that Huxley is not entirely at ease in the new territory into which he has stumbled. Although he is urging the most extreme change imaginable – complete decentralization, self-government, the abolition of power, call what you will – the word ‘revolution’ is eschewed in favour of the unbelievably modest ‘reform’. Also he fails to appreciate that his anarcho-pacifism – for that is what it is and *Ends and Means* is, despite its shortcomings, a left-libertarian work – could only have developed as a practical politics in his time within the context of the working-class movement.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Huxley explains his position persuasively, advocating making the best of both – or even all -the worlds, in the interview of 1961 by John Chandos, utilized by Bedford (see I, pp. xii, 29n) and released around the time of the publication of her biography as Aldous Huxley, *Speaking Personally...*, 2 LPs, Lansdowne Recording Studios, LRS 0003/4.

<sup>50</sup> He esteemed chapter 8 of *Ends and Means*, ‘Decentralization and Self-Government’, sufficiently to include it in his *Collected Essays* (1959). (It had previously been largely reprinted in Charles J. Rolo (ed.), *The World of Aldous Huxley: An Omnibus of His Fiction and Non-Fiction over Three Decades* (New York: Harper, 1947)).

<sup>51</sup> For other evaluations of *Ends and Means*: Peter Brock, *Twentieth-Century Pacifism* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970), pp. 123–4 (and reprinted in Peter Brock and Nigel Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century* (n.p.: distributed by Syracuse University Press, 1999), pp. 114–15); Woodcock, *Dawn and the Darkest Hour*, pp. 211–13; Adam Roberts, ‘The Limits of Pacifism: Aldous Huxley’s *Ends and Means*’, *Millennium*, II, no. 3 (Winter 1973–4); Watt, pp. 283–92, 301–3. For Julian Huxley it was a ‘great book’ (Julian Huxley, *Aldous Huxley*, p. 23), while Ceadel, p. 186, describes it as ‘perhaps the most rigorous justification for humanitarian pacifism ever attempted’.

1930s Read’s influence had been exerted primarily in Britain; after 1945 it spread worldwide and he travelled endlessly, lecturing throughout Europe and the United States (which he had not visited before 1946). Seminar lectures at Princeton in 1951 became Part One of *The True Voice of Feeling* (1953); the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1953–4 were published as *Icon and Idea* (1955); and the A.W. Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, in 1954, appeared as *The Art of Sculpture* (1956).

*Art and the Evolution of Man*, a lecture of 1951, announced a new direction for Read – the exploration of the origins of art and its function in evolutionary development – and this was continued in *Icon and Idea* and the work he considered his most assured, *The Forms of Things Unknown* (1960). Initially influenced by the American theorist, Susanne Langer, Read’s philosophy of art became increasingly indebted to Jung, whose annual conference, the Eranos Tagung, at Ascona, Switzerland, he had begun to attend from 1946; and the books in which he developed this new turn in his aesthetics are very heavy going for most readers.<sup>36</sup> In great contrast is the bestselling *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (1959), one of the earliest volumes in Thames & Hudson’s ‘World of Art’ series, which was followed by *A Concise History of Modern Sculpture* (1964), *Henry Moore: A Study of His Life and Work* (1965) and *Arp* (1968), all in the same very popular series. That *A Concise History of Modern Painting* should have sold so well over the years and been translated into at least sixteen other languages is astonishing given the limitations of such ‘an unsatisfactory primer’, as Paul Street terms it in a memorable dissection. Moulded by the perspective Read had acquired in the late 1920s and 1930s, it con-

<sup>36</sup> David Thistlewood, *Herbert Read: Formlessness and Form: An Introduction to His Aesthetics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), chaps. 5–7, and David Thistlewood, ‘Herbert Read’s Organic Aesthetic, II: 1950–1968’, in *HRR*, are very necessary guides to these works along with the influence of Jung.

tinues to exemplify his great strength in recognizing the importance of German art and not being bemused – like Roger Fry – by the continuing achievements of the School of Paris. Yet what hope is there for such a work when it is explained that Stanley Spencer, Balthus, Edward Hopper and the Mexican muralists are to be omitted because they do not fit into ‘the stylistic evolution which is my exclusive concern’? On the other hand, in the 1968 edition Read finally ceased to adopt the latest artistic innovation – op art and pop art had proved too much – predicted the ‘systematic destruction of the work of art’ and denounced the nihilism and ‘cultural decadence’ of the contemporary world.<sup>37</sup>

Over the decades an essential feature of Read’s production were the collections of articles and papers, frequently mingling writings on both art and literature. So far unmentioned are *In Defence of Shelley and Other Essays* (1936), *A Coat of Many Colours* (1945), *The Tenth Muse* (1957), *A Letter to a Young Painter* (1962), *To Hell with Culture and Other Essays on Art and Society* (1963) – a revision of *The Politics of the Unpolitical* (1943) – *The Origins of Form in Art* (1965), *Art and Alienation* (1967), *Poetry and Experience* (also 1967), and the posthumously published *The Cult of Sincerity* (1968). *Truth Is More Sacred* (1961) was a selection of the critical correspondence between him and the American writer, Edward Dahlberg.

Just at the time that his reputation was taking off on to a global level, Read had moved in 1949 from Buckinghamshire back to his origins in North Yorkshire. The locality nurtured the poetry of *Moon’s Farm* (1955) and final gathering of autobiographies, *The Contrary Experience* (1963), one of his finest

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Street, ‘Perception and Expression: Read’s *A Concise History of Modern Painting*, in *HRR*, p. 249; Herbert Read, *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1959), pp. 7–8; Herbert Read, *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1968), pp. 287–9.

royalties being paid to the PPU. And at the end of 1936 *The Olive Tree*, his first collection of essays since 1931 (whereas there had been five between 1923 and 1931), came out. This is an enjoyable, good-natured book; it is noticeable that the misanthropic articles of the early 1930s, collected by David Bradshaw in 1994 as *The Hidden Huxley*, are excluded. In July 1937 Chatto published, in 126 pages and ‘under the auspices of THE PEACE PLEDGE UNION’, *An Encyclopaedia of Pacifism*, edited by Huxley and whose unsigned entries, largely written by him, range from ‘Armaments, Private Manufacture of’ to ‘Women in Modern War, Position of’, from ‘Armaments Race’ to ‘War Resisters’ International’, and from ‘Biology and War’ to ‘Shelley’. Lastly, *Ends and Means*, his most ambitious (and final) pacifist work, begun in Europe and completed in the USA, was brought out in November.

In *Ends and Means* Huxley considers the elimination of war as dependent on a dual change. First, the fostering of a new ‘non-attached’ personality is necessary. Non-attachment means not being attached to ‘bodily sensations and lust.[the] craving for power and possessions.anger and hatred.exclusive loves.wealth, fame, social position.even to science, art, speculation, philanthropy’. On the other hand, ‘the practice of non-attachment entails the practice of all the virtues’: for example, charity, courage, intelligence, generosity and disinterestedness.<sup>48</sup> One would have thought that a professional writer could have come up with a more positive, a more appealing term than ‘non-attachment’ – familiar from English-language accounts of Buddhism – but the imperatives of a non-theological meditation and mysticism had already taken over (even though, it must be insisted, Huxley continued to be a sceptic with respect to the object of religions – there was to be no service of any kind at his eventual cremation – and it was the techniques alone of contemplation and detachment

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<sup>48</sup> Huxley, *Ends and Means*, pp. 3–4.



Pledge Union (PPU) in May 1936, he became one of the ‘Sponsors’ who constituted the collective leadership. The Sponsors, impressively distinguished and able, were, in addition to Gerald Heard, to include George Lansbury, John Middleton Murry, Bertrand Russell, Rose Macaulay, Laurence Housman and, a little later, Eric Gill; and Huxley continued as an Honorary Sponsor of the PPU throughout the years of his American residence. He forced himself, although he relucted from doing so, to address public meetings, becoming in the process an admirable lecturer and giving as early as 3 December 1935 a Lunch Hour Talk on ‘Pacifism and Philosophy’ to some 1,200 people at the Friends’ Meeting House, Euston Road.<sup>46</sup> While 1935 was a second bookless year, the writer’s block was now breached. *Eyeless in Gaza* was at last completed in March 1936 and published in June. This long, fine and very absorbing novel was received poorly and has never been given its due. The new Huxley was now on public display and admirers of the brittle and cynical fiction of the 1920s did not take to a committed work: of conversion to pacifism and meditation.<sup>47</sup> In April there appeared under the imprint of Chatto & Windus, Huxley’s London publisher from 1920 until his death, the pamphlet, *What Are You Going To Do About It? The Case for Constructive Peace*, an able advocacy of the pacifist case, with

<sup>46</sup> The talk was reprinted in Gerald Heard *et al.*, *The New Pacifism* (London: Allenson, 1936), pp. 25–40. For Huxley and the pacifist movement: Bradshaw, ‘The Flight from Gaza’; Ceadel, pp. 183–7, 219–21. For the PPU’s Sponsors: Bradshaw, ‘The Flight from Gaza’, p. 17; Ceadel, pp. 222–5, 281, 321–2. Aldous Huxley, *Pacifism and Philosophy* (London: Peace Pledge Union, 1994), is an interesting short anthology of his pacifist writings.

<sup>47</sup> For the contemporary disappointment and resentment experienced by Sybille Bedford and George Woodcock (although they both came to revise their assessments): Bedford, I, pp. 323–4; Woodcock, *Dawn and the Darkest Hour*, pp. 15–16, 19, 195–206; George Woodcock, *Beyond the Blue Mountains: An Autobiography* (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1987), pp. 214–15. See also Watt, pp. 19–20, 245–71, 283, 285, 313–15; and Cyril Connolly’s brilliant parody, ‘Told in Gath’ (in Connolly, pp. 127–35).

and most enduring books.<sup>38</sup> The definitive *Collected Poems* followed in 1966. He himself chose the *Selected Writings* (1963), the contents of which, extracts from *The Green Child* and the autobiographical works being intentionally omitted, are revealing: 36 per cent of space devoted to literary criticism, 23 per cent to art criticism, 16 per cent to poetry, 14 per cent to ‘social criticism’ (‘The Philosophy of Anarchism’, ‘The Politics of the Unpolitical’, ‘Towards a Duplex Civilization’), 11 per cent to education. He died in 1968 at Stonegrave and was buried nearby at St Gregory’s Minster, Kirkdale, close to his parents and other relatives.<sup>39</sup>

Read’s anarchist political theory was unremarkable. He was an anarcho-syndicalist – at the outset at least – with respect to means. ‘The ethical anarchism of Bakunin has been completed by the economic syndicalism of Sorel’, he said, and

wherever anarchism is a considerable political force, as in Spain, it is combined with syndicalism. Anarcho-syndicalism is a clumsy mouthful, but it describes the present-day type of anarchist doctrine.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of ends, Read seems always to have been an anarchist communist; and Kropotkin is the anarchist theorist most frequently (and approvingly) mentioned by him. In 1942 he concluded:

all the practical aspect of Kropotkin’s work is astonishingly apt for the present day. Though

<sup>38</sup> For an incisive discussion of the autobiographies, see Peter Abbs, ‘Herbert Read as Autobiographer’, in *HRR*; and for an earlier appreciation, Peter Abbs, ‘Autobiography: Quest for Identity’, in Ford, *New Pelican Guide*, VIII, pp. 515–17.

<sup>39</sup> The foregoing biographical summaries are heavily dependent on the authoritative ‘Herbert Read – His Life and Work’, written by Ben Read.

<sup>40</sup> *Poetry and Anarchism*, pp. 71, 82.

written more than fifty years ago, a work like *Fields, Factories and Workshops* only needs to have its statistics brought up-to-date; its deductions and proposals remain as valid as on the day when they were written.

And Colin Ward was to do just this for Kropotkin in his edition of *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* of 1974. On a visit to China in 1959 Read wrote:

All these communes are virtually self-supporting – the only things they need to get from outside are heavy machinery like tractors & perhaps coal & minerals like cobalt. It is the complete decentralization of industry advocated by Kropotkin in *Fields, Factories and Workshops*...

George Woodcock recalled:

On his return from his first visit to the United States after World War II...he came to see me and talked mostly about supermarkets, which he had seen for the first time, and which interested him because people took what they wanted from the shelves; it seemed to him that, if only the cash desks at the entrances could be removed, the supermarket would be the perfect model for free anarchist communist distribution as envisaged by Kropotkin in *The Conquest of Bread*.<sup>41</sup>

These three comments demonstrate one of Read's most attractive qualities: keeping abreast of modern developments and assessing the continuing relevance of anarchist analysis

<sup>41</sup> Herbert Read (ed.), *Kropotkin: Selections from His Writings* (London: Freedom Press, 1942), p. 15; Herbert Read, 'Letters from China, 1959', in *Tribute to Herbert Read*, p. 47; Woodcock, *Herbert Read*, p. 234.

milk; it'll only blow you up with wind. Take it in the form of cheese and butter; never liquid. And a minimum of eggs. And, of course, only one heavy meal a day. You don't need half the stuff you're eating.... Believe me ... your intestines are ripe for fascism and nationalism. They're making you long to be shaken out of that horrible negativity to which they've condemned you – to be shaken by violence into violence.'<sup>44</sup>

Back in England, Miller is active in the pacifist movement, meeting the repeated physical violence of an opponent at an outdoor meeting with total non-violence. Between them Heard, Alexander, McDonagh and pacifism made a new man of Huxley, mentally, physically and spiritually. As Maria told Huxley's American publisher, but almost certainly overestimating the influence of just one of the factors, as early as February 1936:

... the old enemy of insomnia is checked and by the man Alexander .... Aldous ... goes to him each day since the autumn.... He certainly has made a new and unrecognizable person of Aldous, not physically only but mentally and therefore morally. Or rather, he has brought out, actively, all we, Aldous's best friends, know never came out either in the novels or with strangers.<sup>45</sup>

Huxley flung himself into the hard work of pacifist activism; and it was entirely consistent that, when the Sheppard Peace Movement, as it was first known, evolved into the Peace

<sup>44</sup> Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza*, pp. 552–3, 557.

<sup>45</sup> LAH, p. 400. On the other hand, there is an unsympathetic portrayal from late that year in Isaiah Berlin, *Flourishing: Letters 1928–1946* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2004), pp. 215–17, 222 – although cf. Julian Huxley, *Aldous Huxley*, p. 146.

reach for a book, open a door, in a new, but only very subtly different way'.<sup>42</sup> Alexander, who had also treated Shaw and John Dewey, introduced him in turn to Dr J.E.R. McDonagh, FRCS, 'that odd fish' as Huxley was to describe him, who believed that many – or even most – disorders are caused by the poisoning of the intestines. McDonagh's treatment of colonic lavages, injections of vaccine and a rigorous diet were extended from Aldous to Maria and their son Matthew.<sup>43</sup> Heard, Alexander and McDonagh are rolled into one in *Eyeless in Gaza* in the character of the Scottish doctor, James Miller, whom Anthony Beavis meets by chance in Mexico:

'How can you expect to think in anything but a negative way, when you've got chronic intestinal poisoning? Had it from birth, I guess. Inherited it. And at the same time stooping, as you do. Slumped down on your mule like that – it's awful. Pressing down on the vertebrae like a ton of bricks. One can almost hear the poor things grinding together. And when the spine 's in that state, what happens to the rest of the machine? It's frightful to think of....You've got to change if you want to go on existing. And if it's a matter of changing – why, you need all the help you can get, from God's to the doctor's .... Speaking as a doctor, I'd suggest a course of colonic irrigation to start with. No, not fasting ... Only a proper diet. No butcher's meat; it's poison, so far as you are concerned. And no

<sup>42</sup> Bedford, I, pp. 312–13. See also *LAH*, pp. 400, 473–4, 525–7, 617–18; Huxley, *Ends and Means*, pp. 223–4, 326; Aldous Huxley, *Adonis and the Alphabet: And Other Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), pp. 20–5; Ceadel, p. 184; Dunaway, *Huxley in Hollywood*, p. 13; Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected*, pp. 28–9.

<sup>43</sup> Bedford, I, pp. 313, 316–17, 327. For the mysterious McDonagh, see also *LAH*, pp. 408, 435, 525. Huxley refers to his *The Nature of Disease* in *Ends and Means* (p. 258n).

– and, if necessary, pointing out how it needed to be updated. From the mid-1940s he often anticipated the 'new anarchism' of Alex Comfort and Paul Goodman, Colin Ward and Murray Bookchin – an anarchism informed by such disciplines as psychology, sociology, biology and ecology. His impressive lecture of 1947 to the London Anarchist Group, 'Anarchism: Past and Future', is noteworthy in this respect. Lamenting the fact that 'no fundamental thought has been devoted to the principles of anarchism for half a century', that is, since the publication of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, he called for 'a sevenfold system of study and creative activity' in history, philosophy, education, anthropology, sociology, psychology and social psychology, identifying the last as especially pertinent.<sup>42</sup>

It remains the case, though, that the broad outlines of Read's anarchism are unexceptional:

I have said little about the actual organization of an anarchist community, partly because I have nothing to add to what has been said by Kropotkin and by contemporary syndicalists like Dubreuil;<sup>43</sup> partly because it is always a mistake to build a priori constitutions. The main thing is to establish your principles – the principles of equity, of individual freedom, of workers' control. The community then aims at the establishment of these principles from the starting-point of local needs and

<sup>42</sup> *Freedom*, 17 May 1947 (reprinted in *OMM*, pp. 117, 124).

<sup>43</sup> The discussion of industrial self-government by the former die-maker and factory worker, Hyacinthe Dubreuil, also deeply impressed Aldous Huxley, who called his *A Chacun sa chance* (1935) 'remarkable' and wrote a foreword to the English translation, *A Chance for Everybody: A Liberal Basis for Work* (1939). See Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means: An Enquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods Employed for Their Realization* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), esp. p. 74 (also pp. 83–5, 172).

local conditions. That they must be established by revolutionary methods is perhaps inevitable.<sup>44</sup>

As Read himself observes:

I realize that there is nothing original in [my] outline of an anarchist community: it has all the elements of essential communism as imagined by Marx and Engels; it has much in common with Guild Socialism and Christian Socialism. It does not matter very much what we call our ultimate ideal. I call it anarchism because that word emphasizes, as no other, the central doctrine – the abolition of the State and the creation of a co-operative commonwealth.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, Murray Bookchin, the most original anarchist theorist since Kropotkin, has revealed that

Kropotkin had no influence on my turn from Marxism to anarchism – nor, for that matter, did Bakunin or Proudhon. It was Herbert Read's *The Philosophy of Anarchism* that I found most useful for rooting the views I slowly developed over the fifties and well into the sixties in a libertarian pedigree.<sup>46</sup>

Read breaks with the classic anarchist political thinkers in just one way, but it is of decisive importance. This is his rejection of force. By 1930 he had concluded of 1914–18: 'The whole

<sup>44</sup> *The Philosophy of Anarchism* (1940), reprinted in Read, *Anarchy and Order*, p. 51.

<sup>45</sup> Read, *Poetry and Anarchism*, p. 87. I illustrate the extremely conventional nature of Read's political anarchism in greater detail in the original version of this chapter: David Goodway, 'Introduction', to OMM, pp. 9–11.

<sup>46</sup> Murray Bookchin, 'Deep Ecology, Anarchosyndicalism, and the Future of Anarchist Thought', in Murray Bookchin *et al.*, *Deep Ecology and Anarchism: A Polemic* (London: Freedom Press, 1993), p. 53.

and mysticism and then pacifism; and Huxley appears to have followed in his wake.<sup>39</sup> Huxley's existing concern with issues of war, nationalism and the passions is indicated by a lengthy disquisition inserted into his impressions of Guatemala City in 1933;<sup>40</sup> but it was Heard's prior interest in the Rev. H.R.L. (Dick) Sheppard's Peace Movement, launched in July 1935, that enabled him to inform Sheppard on 31 October 1935 that 'Aldous Huxley has joined the move':

We have had a long talk this evening and it has been the culmination of a series ... [Huxley] is ready to write a small booklet of some fifty pages which would be a sort of pacifists' manual for debate and discussion... He is also convinced that the issue is as you say in your letter to me of 3<sup>rd</sup> 'directly spiritual' and he therefore also wants to talk over with you the issue from this point of view and whether this whole movement is not the point and nucleation of a spiritual movement which may revive religion. I am sure he is right. His new novel is to end with that outlook made clear and as a sort of forerunner of what your movement will we believe become.<sup>41</sup>

In October or November 1935 Huxley also began daily sessions with F. Matthias Alexander, the Australian teacher of 'the Alexander technique', for 'kinaesthetic' re-education, a complete relearning of posture, learning 'how to walk, sit down,

<sup>39</sup> Julian Huxley, *Aldous Huxley*, pp. 136–7; Gerald Heard, 'The Poignant Prophet', *Kenyon Review*, XXVII (1965), pp. 50–1; Dunaway, *Huxley in Hollywood*, pp. 9–10; Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected*, pp. 23–5; Ceadel, pp. 186–7; Clark, 231–2; Woodcock, *Dawn and the Darkest Hour*, p. 194.

<sup>40</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Beyond the Mexique Bay: A Traveller's Journal* (1934; London: Chatto & Windus, 1949 edn), pp. 72–113.

<sup>41</sup> Bradshaw, 'The Flight from Gaza', p. 12. For Sheppard's Movement, see Ceadel, pp. 173–92.

Juliette commented that ‘Aldous’s breakdowns were not that sort’, that is, the bouts of ‘black melancholy’ which afflicted Julian and his grandfather Thomas Henry: ‘I don’t know how you describe them. I know he had more than one; I think Maria had some very difficult times with him. You see, these Huxleys were fragile people.’<sup>38</sup>

Huxley was rescued from his crisis by three gurus: Gerald Heard, F.M. Alexander and J.E.R. McDonagh. He had been introduced in 1929 to the Anglo-Irish Gerald Heard, five years his senior, by the Bloomsbury critic Raymond Mortimer and was immediately entranced by his magical conversation: Mortimer similarly loved Heard for his ‘wit, his charm, his fantasy and his self-forgetting kindness’. He spoke with an Irish brogue and, in Christopher Isherwood’s opinion, ‘If you couldn’t get hold of Bernard Shaw, perhaps Gerald Heard was the next best thing....he was in many respects the most fascinating person I’ve ever met.’ Ironically, given their future mutual intellectual trajectory, Heard and Huxley were initially connected, in 1929–30, with the freethinking *Realist*, a shortlived ‘Journal of Scientific Humanism’, Heard as its literary editor and Huxley as not only a contributor, his essay on Pascal being spread over the first three issues, but also a member of the editorial board (which included Herbert Read, as well as Wells, Rebecca West, Julian Huxley, and J.B.S. Haldane and his sister Naomi Mitchison). Heard, a journalist and scientific popularizer with no scientific training – he had originally been expected to follow the males of his family by taking Anglican orders – became in the course of the 1930s increasingly interested in meditation

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 525; Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected*, p. 9. See also Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected*, pp. 27–8; Dunaway, *Huxley in Hollywood*, pp. 1–2. Bedford’s superb and commendably candid biography was published only ten years after Huxley’s death by a writer who had been a family friend since the early 1930s, but even Murray, pp. 282–9, is reticent. It is to be hoped that David Bradshaw’s long-awaited critical biography, which promises to be a major event, will deal fully with the matter of breakdowns.

war was fought for rhetoric – fought for historical phrases and actual misery, fought *by* politicians and generals and *with* human flesh and blood, fanned by false and artificially created mob passions...I can conceive of no values... for which human life indiscriminately and in the mass should be forcibly sacrificed.’<sup>47</sup> Writing in 1938, he explained:

There is no problem to which, during the last twenty years, I have given more thought than this problem of war and peace; it has been an obsession with my generation. There is no problem which leads so inevitably to anarchism. Peace is anarchy. Government is force; force is repression, and repression leads to reaction, or to a psychosis of power which in its turn involves the individual in destruction and the nations in war. War will exist as long as the State exists. Only a non-governmental society can offer those economic, ethical and psychological conditions under which the emergence of a peaceful mentality is possible.

‘Anarchism,’ he therefore believed, ‘naturally implies pacifism.’<sup>48</sup> He explicates further, in 1953, as a Gandhian:

Revolt, it will be said, implies violence; but this is an outmoded, an incompetent conception of revolt. The most effective form of revolt in this violent world we live in is non-violence.<sup>49</sup>

Read was to become a member of the Committee of 100, the militant direct action wing of the nuclear disarmament movement, but such was his commitment to only passive resistance

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<sup>47</sup> Cited by Harding, pp. 122–3 (Read’s emphasis).

<sup>48</sup> Read, *Poetry and Anarchism*, pp. 87, 119–20.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Introduction: Revolution and Reason’, to Read, *Anarchy and Order*, p. 26.

that he resigned, after a year, in 1961 in protest against the mass action at the Wethersfield air-base, regarding the intention as aggressive:

Such a policy is not passive. It is an organized threat to authority that provokes the threat of counter-forces to preserve public order or protect public property. In their immediate effect such demonstrations are directed against the police and military forces and not against the real enemy, which is the people in their massive ignorance and stupidity.<sup>50</sup>

Read's anarchism was not peripheral to his other, varied activities. Rather it was -knighthood and all – at the core of how he viewed the world in general. He remarked of William Morris: 'It is customary to consider Morris in his threefold aspect as poet, craftsman, and socialist. In this way we break down the fundamental unity of the man.'<sup>51</sup> Exactly the same applies to Read himself. To understand any one of his activities that activity needs to be considered in the context of the totality; to assess the stature of the man each of his individual achievements have to be added together (and the total is greater than the sum of the parts); and the anarchist politics needs to be seen, not as an embarrassing aberration, but as a central, integrating component. Similarly studies of Morris that seek to ignore, or to minimize, his revolutionary socialism are intellectually impoverished. When Read came to collect the essays he

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<sup>50</sup> Herbert Read, 'A Note on Policy Submitted to the Meeting of the Committee of 100 To Be Held on December 17 1961', in *Tribute to Herbert Read*, pp. 51–2. See also King, pp. 300–1; N[icolas] W[alter], 'Remembering Herbert Read', *Anarchy*, no. 91 (September 1968), pp. 287–8.

<sup>51</sup> Herbert Read, *Art and Industry: The Principles of Industrial Design* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p. 29, and repeated in Read, *Coat of Many Colours*, p. 77.

my besetting sin, the dread and avoidance of emotion, the escape from personal responsibility, the substitution of aesthetic and intellectual values for moral values – of art and thought for sanctity.<sup>35</sup>

To begin with, though, the writing went well, but by the end of the year, with the impulsive signing of a seven-year lease for a flat in Piccadilly's exclusive Albany adding to the financial pressure, insomnia was setting in:

It was after two o'clock. Anthony lay on his back staring up into the darkness. Sleep, it seemed, deliberately refused to come, was being withheld by someone else, some malignant alien inhabiting his own body....

At about seven, when behind the shutters the sun was already high above the horizon, he dropped off into a heavy sleep, and woke with a start three hours later.<sup>36</sup>

By January 1935 he was confessing, again to the same correspondent: 'I have been working a fair amount, but with not much results, as I am in chronic trouble with my book....'<sup>37</sup> In the course of 1934–5 Huxley clearly suffered a breakdown, a term not employed by his biographer Sybille Bedford, while the editor of his letters, Grover Smith, discreetly notes in his 'Chronology': 'Ca. November [1934]: H[uxley] suffers from insomnia and depression, by which he is increasingly disabled for the next year'. Ten years afterwards he described 1934–5 to his brother Julian as 'the time when I came nearest to having a breakdown – a long spell of insomnia'. His sister-in-law

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

<sup>36</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936; London: Chatto & Windus, 1949 edn), pp. 356, 361.

<sup>37</sup> *LAH*, p. 390.

Mere external political events are insufficient to account for Huxley's dramatic declaration for pacifism and the intensity of activism that ensued; he had been in the grip of a far-reaching personal crisis. In the autumn of 1932 he had been 'meditating a novel – feeling rather incapable of getting it under way, as is usual in these circumstances, but hoping that the thing will begin to flow one day'.<sup>32</sup> The novel did not flow and was shelved while Maria Huxley and he travelled in the Americas between January and May 1933. His account of their journey, *Beyond the Mexique Bay* (1934), was not completed until December, 1933 was the first year since 1920 that he had not published a book, and he had a contract to produce two novels in three years, with a further three books 'if possible', with Chatto & Windus.<sup>33</sup> He immediately returned to the novel which was ultimately to emerge as *Eyeless in Gaza*:

The theme, fundamentally, is liberty. What happens to someone who becomes really very free – materially first (for after all liberty must depend very largely on property) and then mentally and emotionally. The rather awful vacuum that such freedom turns out to be. But I haven't yet worked out the whole of the fable – only the first part.<sup>34</sup>

The 'someone' was Anthony Beavis, his alter ego in this highly autobiographical novel. As Huxley was to admit twelve months later:

I sometimes have the disquieting sense that I am being somehow punished by so much good fortune – that it is a scheme to lead me deeper into

<sup>32</sup> LAH, pp. 365–6.

<sup>33</sup> For the successive contracts see Bedford, I, pp. 130–1, 177–8, 209, 252, and, for the crucial revision of 1935, p. 297.

<sup>34</sup> LAH, p. 376.

had written 'specifically on the subject of Anarchism' he very properly insisted:

There is no categorical separation...between what I have written on this subject and what I have written on social problems generally (*The Politics of the Unpolitical*) or on the social aspects of art (*Art and Society* and *The Grass Roots of Art*) or on the social aspects of education (*Education through Art* and *Education for Peace*). The same philosophy reappears in my literary criticism and in my poetry.<sup>52</sup>

Read is an un-English writer, with much more in common with the radical intellectuals of continental Europe – for example, Camus, Sartre and Breton – than with such English contemporaries as Roger Fry, F.R. Leavis or Robert Graves. In Britain not only Read's revolutionary politics but also his competence in more than one specialist field were viewed with suspicion or derision or both.

In his aesthetics Read attempted to assimilate classicism (order, restraint, reason, etc.) to romanticism. As he explained in 1937: 'From 1918 I have been a close friend of T.S. Eliot, and to some extent his influence is responsible for my early attempt to reconcile reason and romanticism – not entirely, because the contradiction exists in my own personality.' Other major influences on Read in this respect were Orage and T.E. Hulme, whose *Speculations* he had edited.<sup>53</sup> He brings out the way in

<sup>52</sup> Read, *Anarchy and Order*, p. 9. In reality only the concluding paragraph of Herbert Read, *Art and Society* (London: William Heinemann 1937), pp. 274–5, is libertarian, the book's politics being indebted to Marx.

<sup>53</sup> Read Archive, carbon of letter from Read to Hans W. Häusermann, 6 August 1937. For Read's shifting approach to the romanticism–classicism dichotomy, see Thistlewood, *Herbert Read*, esp. pp. 7–9, 38–49, 168–73; H.W. Häusermann, 'The Development of Herbert Read', in Henry Treece (ed.), *Herbert Read: An Introduction to His Work by Various Hands* (London: Faber &

which he was caught between polarities when he says, 'Wisdom, as I have insisted ever since I became intellectually conscious, is the needle which comes to rest between reason and romanticism (a word which comprises instinct, intuition, imagination, and fantasy).'<sup>54</sup>

So it is when Read deliberately situates his politics within his overall philosophy that what he has to say is at its most unusual and, I think, impressive. Let me, in Read's own style, quote two more lengthy extracts in illustration:

When we follow reason .. in the medieval sense, we listen to the voice of God; we discover God's order, which is the Kingdom of Heaven. Otherwise there are only the subjective prejudices of individuals, and these prejudices inflated to the dimensions of nationalism, mysticism, megalomania, and fascism. A realistic rationalism rises above all these diseases of the spirit and establishes a universal order of thought, which is a necessary order of thought because it is the order of the real world; and because it is necessary and real, it is not man-imposed, but natural; and each man finding this order finds his freedom.

Modern anarchism is a reaffirmation of this natural freedom, of this direct communion with universal truth. Anarchism rejects the man-made systems of government, which are instruments of individual and class tyranny; it seeks to recover the system of nature, of man living in accordance with the universal truth of reality. It denies the rule of

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Faber, 1944), esp. pp. 53–5, 69–71, 79–80; also G. Wilson Knight, 'Herbert Read and Byron', in Skelton, p. 130.

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism; Chains of Freedom* (London: Freedom Press, <sup>1949</sup>), p. 30.

TION of the congenitally unfit';<sup>29</sup> but in July 1934 he was criticizing its *Manifesto* as an unashamed élitist:

Certain 'Samurai' used to play an important part in the earlier prophetic books of Mr H.G. Wells. They play no part in the FPSI *Manifesto*. The fact, it seems to me, is greatly to be regretted, as well on theoretical as on practical grounds. The Samurai idea is scientifically justified, in as much as it implies a recognition of the irreconcilable differences between human beings and a rejection of that wish-born theory of equality, which [Olaf] Stapledon has taken from the Encyclopaedists. It is also a programme, a plan of action.... The creation of a caste of Samurai is a piece of strictly practical politics.

There is even a great deal to be said for the creation of a caste of Brahmins above the Samurai ... ultimately, it seems to me, society can derive nothing but benefit from the existence of such a caste.<sup>30</sup>

As late as an interview of November 1935, when he had just become a pacifist, he was continuing to urge 'the training of an intellectual aristocracy', pointing to 'the lines this training should take' (but here he was almost certainly referring to the ideas of Richard B. Gregg).<sup>31</sup> By 1937 he was praising the anarchists' role in the Spanish Revolution. This political transition was not so much a sea change as a religious conversion, a conversion to pacifism in the autumn of 1935 in the aftermath of the brutal invasion of Abyssinia by the Italians.

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<sup>29</sup> For the statement of aims of the FPSI see the March 1932 issue of the *Twentieth Century* (its journal until the launch of *Plan* three years later).

<sup>30</sup> Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, pp. 38–41.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson, p. 163. For Gregg, see *ibid.*, pp. 154–5, and below.



This was the ambivalent intellectual background against which *Brave New World* was written and the enormous gulf between his convictions and interests in the early 1930s and the advocacy of societies of freely co-operating individuals and, in general, of left libertarianism by 1937 can now be still better appreciated. (Yet it should be stressed that during the second, libertarian half of his life he retained as a major concern the issue of population, with respect to not only – and entirely justifiably – escalating overpopulation, but also the quality of a population’s intelligence.)<sup>27</sup> In July 1933 Huxley was contending: ‘About 99.5% of the entire population of the planet are ... stupid and philistine ... The important thing ... is not to attack the 99–5% ... but to try to see that the 0.5% survives, keeps its quality up to the highest possible level and, if possible, dominates the rest.’ Three months later he informed an audience in Paris: ‘*Aux masses, il faut parler en termes d’autorité absolue, comme Jéhovah aux Israélites.*’ David Bradshaw argues that a sea change was taking place in Huxley’s political outlook after Hitler’s accession to power in January 1933 and particularly after his proclamation as *Führer* and *Reichskanzler* in August 1934, and Huxley, for example, certainly denounced Nazism as ‘a rebellion against Western Civilization’ in April 1934.<sup>28</sup> All the same he continued to express markedly authoritarian views. Towards the end of 1933 he had agreed to become a vice-president, along with Wells, Russell, Rebecca West, A.S. Neill and Julian Huxley, of the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals (FPSI), which was genuinely – indeed exceptionally – progressive save for its commitment to ‘STERILIZA-

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Aldous Huxley, *Themes and Variations* (1950; London: Chatto & Windus, 1954 edn), pp. 232–3; Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1959), pp. 27–9.

<sup>28</sup> Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, pp. xx–xxi.

kings and castes, of churches and parliaments, to affirm the rule of reason, which is the rule of God.

The rule of reason – to live according to natural laws – this is also the release of the imagination. We have two possibilities: to discover truth, and to create beauty. We make a profound mistake if we confuse these two activities, attempting to discover beauty and to create truth. If we attempt to create truth, we can only do so by imposing on our fellow men an arbitrary and idealistic system which has no relation to reality; and if we attempt to discover beauty we look for it where it cannot be found – in reason, in logic, in experience. Truth is in reality, in the visible and tangible world of sensation; but beauty is in unreality, in the subtle and unconscious world of the imagination.... We must surrender our minds to universal truth, but our imagination is free to dream; is as free as the dream; is the dream.

I balance anarchism with surrealism, reason with romanticism, the understanding with the imagination, function with freedom.<sup>55</sup>

A quarter of a century later he wrote:

This Heraclitean principle of flux, of chance, of fortuity issues out of the tragedy of war, and is basic to my anarchism and romanticism.... That I can combine anarchism with order ... a philosophy of strife with pacifism, an orderly life ... with romanticism and revolt in art and literature – all this is inevitably scandalous to the conventional philosopher. This principle of flux, the Keatsian notion

<sup>55</sup> Read, *Poetry and Anarchism*, pp. 96–7.

of 'negative capability', justifies everything I have done (or not done) in my life, everything I have written, every attack and defence. I hate all monolithic systems, all logical categories, all pretences to truth and inevitability. The sun is new every day.

A fatalistic philosophy should imply more resignation than I have shown. But fatalism does not imply inactivity: on the contrary, since we are counters in a child's game, we are condemned to action. It is in changing, as Heraclitus said, that things find repose. I have called my politics 'the politics of the unpolitical', but I have striven for change, even for revolution. My understanding of the history of culture has convinced me that the ideal society is a point on a receding horizon. We move steadily towards it but can never reach it. Nevertheless we must engage with passion in the immediate strife – such is the nature of things and if defeat is inevitable (as it is) we are not excused. The only excusable indifference is that of Zeus, the divine indifference.<sup>56</sup>

As this second passage in particular suggests, Read was 'a natural romantic' or 'fundamentally...a romantic', in the assessments, thirty-five years apart, of Hugh Gordon Porteous and Henry Moore. John Gould Fletcher, the American poet who was a member of the *Criterion* group, judged Read to have been a 'disguised romantic' in the 1920s.<sup>57</sup> So Read could write: 'It is true that we come into the world trailing clouds of glory; a

<sup>56</sup> 'What Is There Left to Say?', *Encounter*, no. 109 (October 1962), pp. 29–30, reprinted in Read, *Cult of Sincerity*, pp. 55–6.

<sup>57</sup> Porteous, p. 29; Henry Moore, 'Remembering Herbert Read', *Anarchy*, no. 91 (September 1968), p. 287; Harding, p. 118. See also Read, *Cult of Sincerity*, pp. 111–12.

feeble-minded' or 'half-wits' as late as 1934–5.<sup>24</sup> In terms anticipatory of *Brave New World* he had declared in 1927:

In the future we envisage, eugenics will be practised in order to improve the human breed and the instincts will not be ruthlessly repressed, but, as far as possible, sublimated so as to express themselves in socially harmless ways. Education will not be the same for all individuals. Children of different types will receive different training. Society will be organized as a hierarchy of mental quality and the form of government will be aristocratic in the literal sense of the word – that is to say, the best will rule... our children may look forward to a new caste system based on differences in natural ability, to a Machiavellian system of education designed to give the members of the lower castes only that which it is profitable for the members of the upper castes that they should know.<sup>25</sup>

As the economic turmoil and accompanying social catastrophe of the interwar depression mounted, with the inadequacies of liberal democracy blatantly apparent and amidst increasing signs of political instability, Huxley was also taking an attentive interest in state planning, getting involved in early 1931 with the group which was to become Political and Economic Planning (PEP) and praising the Soviet Union's First Five Year Plan in 1933.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Huxley, *Proper Studies*, pp. 272–82; David Bradshaw, 'Huxley's Slump: Planning, Eugenics, and the "Ultimate Need" of Stability', in John Batchelor (ed.), *The Art of Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 163–8; Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, pp. xii–xv, 147–58, 173–4.

<sup>25</sup> Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, pp. xiii–xiv. For earlier pointers to *Brave New World* see Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (1921; London: Chatto & Windus, 1949 edn), pp. 47, 241–7.

<sup>26</sup> Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, pp. xvii–xix; Bradshaw, 'Huxley's Slump', pp. 153–63.

was in 1931 to describe modern democracy,<sup>20</sup> Huxley advocates ‘the creation and maintenance of a ruling aristocracy of mind’, pointing out that ‘a state that is aristocratic in the etymological sense of the term’ is a state ‘ruled by the best of its citizens’. He advocates the right to vote being ‘made contingent on the ability to pass a fairly stiff intelligence test’ and nobody being allowed to stand for parliament ‘who had not shown himself [*sic*] at least capable of entering the higher grades of the civil service’. With examinations, or personality tests, all round ‘it would be possible to assign to every man and woman the place in the social hierarchy which he or she was best fitted to occupy’.<sup>21</sup> Huxley is therefore proposing a system that would enable his family and other members of Britain’s traditional ‘intellectual aristocracy’ to take command of the state, convinced that such a system ‘would not in any degree endanger the cause of humanitarianism’: ‘Indeed it would be necessary, in an aristocratically governed state, to carry humanitarianism much further than it has been carried in the democratic state.’<sup>22</sup>

One’s natural scepticism that ‘a ruling aristocracy of mind’ would manage affairs much better – or indeed any better – and be more humanitarian than the existing democratic order is entirely justified by Huxley’s concurrent belief in the necessity for a eugenic programme. In this respect he was not atypical, simply in agreement with much of intellectual advanced opinion and, as in other important matters, considerably under the influence of H.G. Wells.<sup>23</sup> In *Proper Studies* admittedly, in ‘A Note on Eugenics’, he is at pains to stress some of the potential disadvantages; but elsewhere he is an enthusiastic eugenicist, going so far as to advocate the compulsory sterilization of ‘the

<sup>20</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Music at Night: And Other Essays including ‘Vulgarity in Literature’* (1943; London: Triad Grafton, 1986 edn), p. 109.

<sup>21</sup> Huxley, *Proper Studies*, pp. 157–8, 162, 165–6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.157–8.

<sup>23</sup> Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, pp. xiv, 31–41.

Heaven which is universal and impersonal lies about us in our infancy, and though the shades of the social prison-house begin to close on the growing boy, he is still, in Wordsworth’s exact phrase, “Nature’s Priest””.<sup>58</sup> At root Read adhered to the values of romanticism: sincerity, simplicity, organicism, spontaneity, imagination, emotion, individualism. And it is when he is writing as a Yorkshire romantic (even if balancing this with classicism) rather than as an internationalist revolutionary that his political voice is most distinctive. I would contend further that the politics of romanticism is most naturally and properly anarchism.

The point at which Read’s anarchist thought is most grievously lacking is in his failure to extend his professional concern with the visual arts into a generalized theory of human emancipation. George Orwell, reviewing a collection of his essays, astutely chose ‘to concentrate mainly on one point – the clash between Read’s political beliefs and his aesthetic theory’.<sup>59</sup> In the title essay of *The Unpolitical* Read named the six modern ‘philosophers and prophets...whose message is still insistent, and directly applicable to our present condition – Ruskin and Kropotkin, Morris and Tolstoy, Gandhi and Eric Gill’. Although Read is sincere in

<sup>58</sup> Herbert Read, *The Education of Free Men* (London: Freedom Press, 1944), p. 18. For Read as a romantic, see Herbert Read, ‘Introduction’, to Herbert Read (ed.), *Surrealism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), pp. 21–8, 87–91 (reprinted as ‘Surrealism and the Romantic Principle’, in Read, *Philosophy of Modern Art*); Herbert Read, *The Tenth Muse: Essays in Criticism* (London, 1957), p.4; E.H. Ramsden ‘Herbert Read’s Philosophy of Art’, in Treece, p. 45; Woodcock, *Herbert Read*, pp. 139–56.

<sup>59</sup> George Orwell, review of *A Coat of Many Colours, Poetry Quarterly*, VII, no. 4 (Winter 1945), p. 147, reprinted in Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell* [hereafter *CWGO*] (London: Secker & Warburg, 20 vols., 1998), XVII, p. 402. In contrast Paul Gibbard, ‘Herbert Read and the Anarchist Aesthetic’, in H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight (eds.), *‘To Hell with Culture’: Anarchism and Twentieth-Century English Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 97–110, argues that Read developed a coherent anarchist theory of art.

his admiration of Morris as a 'great artist and great socialist', he is withering in his dismissal of Morris's rejection of the machine:

I am no yearning medievalist, and have always denounced the sentimental reaction of Morris and his disciples. I have embraced industrialism, tried to give it its true aesthetic principles, all because I want to be through with it, want to get to the other side of it, into a world of electric power and mechanical plenty when man can once more return to the land, not as a peasant but as a lord.<sup>60</sup>

Read is, of course, fully aware of the way in which the names and ideas of Ruskin, Morris and Gill are interlinked,<sup>61</sup> but neither Ruskin nor Gill receive the stick which he gives in his writings to Morris. Ruskin he reveres as a great and visionary writer and as a master of English prose. His high opinion of Gill, a valued friend and in the late thirties near neighbour, is indicated by his surprising inclusion among 'the Six' and influenced by Gill's having come to terms with mechanization and mass production (as actually Read considered Morris would also have done). When he reissued *The Politics of the Unpolitical* as *To Hell with Culture and Other Essays on Art and Society* (1963), Read dedicated it to Gill's memory. The title essay in 1963 had originally appeared as *To Hell with Culture: Democratic Values Are New Values*, a polemic of 1941, and it was Gill who had cursed: 'When will revolutionary leaders realize that "culture" is dope, a worse dope than religion ... To

<sup>60</sup> Herbert Read, *The Politics of the Unpolitical* (London: George Routledge, 1943), pp. 2, 44; Read, *Poetry and Anarchism*, pp. 16–17. For Read on Morris, see also Read, *Art and Industry*, pp. 27–33; Read, *Annals*, pp. 213–14; and 'William Morris', in Read, *Coat of Many Colours*, pp. 76–9.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Herbert Read, *The Grass Roots of Art: Lectures on the Social Aspects of Art in an Industrial Age* (London: Faber & Faber, new edn, 1955), pp. 37, 49.

been blamed because it leads to inefficiency and weakness of rule, because it permits the least desirable men to obtain power, because it encourages corruption....

The chronic, as opposed to the occasional, weakness of a democratic system of government seems to be proportionate to the degree of its democratization. The most powerful and stable democratic states are those in which the principles of democracy have been least logically and consistently applied. The weakest are the most democratic. Thus a parliament elected under a scheme of proportional representation is a truly democratic parliament. But is also, in most cases, an instrument not of rule but of anarchy....

Government of whatever kind is superior to anarchy. We must be thankful for a system which gives us stable government, even when, as happens only too frequently in democratic countries, the men who direct the government are charlatans and rogues....

.... Corruption under the democratic system is not worse, in the individual cases, than corruption under autocracy. There is merely more of it, for the simple reason that where government is popular, more people have an opportunity for acting corruptly at the expense of the state than in countries where government is autocratic. In autocratically organized states the loot of government is shared among a few....<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to 'the bedraggled and rather whorish old slut', which is how, in language almost worthy of Ezra Pound, he

<sup>19</sup> Huxley, *Proper Studies*, pp. 148–51, 154–5.

war will be an unofficial Sinn Feinism all over the world. Sinn Fein itself in Ireland and in the rest of Europe I.L.P. and syndicalism acting with organized anarchy apart from the existing parties.<sup>15</sup>

Both his socialism and tepid pacifism were sharply dropped after 1918 as he began to espouse an aristocratic authoritarianism, first under the spell of H.L. Mencken, the American journalist and iconoclastic critic of mass democracy, and then, from the mid-twenties, of Vilfredo Pareto, the great sociologist, one of the half-dozen progenitors of the discipline, but also a putative precursor of Italian fascism with his unsentimental dissection of parliamentary democracy and theory of the circulation of élites: in his famous summary, 'History is a graveyard of aristocracies.'<sup>16</sup> Huxley's admiration for Pareto's ideas is conveniently obvious in a short article published as late as 1934;<sup>17</sup> but the thoroughgoingness of his élitism had been revealed in a full-length book of 1927, *Proper Studies*, and his indebtedness to Pareto generously acknowledged (although he makes no mention of the other two major contributors, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels, to the impressive Italian tradition of élite theory):<sup>18</sup>

The defects of political democracy as a system of government are so obvious, and have so often been catalogued, that I need not do more than summarize them here. Political democracy has

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finally succumbs to that of an ultra-patriotic (and female) popular novelist (Huxley, *Limbo*, pp. i-5).

<sup>15</sup> *LAH*, p. 124 (see also p. 150).

<sup>16</sup> Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, pp. ix-xiii, and (for Mencken) 1-25. George Woodcock, for one, fails to appreciate the status and full stature of Pareto (*Dawn and the Darkest Hour*, p. 143).

<sup>17</sup> Reprinted as 'Pareto and Society', in Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, pp. 142-6.

<sup>18</sup> Huxley, *Proper Studies*, p. xviii. See also *LAH*, pp. 276, 376, 379-80, and Bedford, I, p. 187.

hell with culture, culture is added like a sauce to otherwise unpalatable stale fish!<sup>62</sup>

Read is predominantly concerned with the role of the designer in modern industry rather than, as Morris was, with the liberation of the worker. But in one important and provocative lecture, 'The Future of Art in an Industrial Civilization' (later retitled 'Towards a Duplex Civilization'), he speculates on the future not only of industrial design and the industrial designer but also of 'industrial man in general'.<sup>63</sup> He envisages a future in which the

defects in the existing economic system have been removed, and there are no further obstacles to the full and free application of design to the products of the industrial system. Production is for use rather than profit, everything is made fit for the purpose it is to serve, and everyone has the necessary means to acquire the essentials of a decent life at the highest level of prevailing taste... virtually the industrial designer's paradise will have come into being, and we shall have not only a machine age but also, what we have so far lacked, a machine art.

The standards for machine art are 'economy, precision, fitness for purpose - all qualities of classical beauty'. 'It is,' says Read, 'a very possible, and even a very probable Utopia.' Yet

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<sup>62</sup> For Read on Ruskin, see Read, *Annals*, pp. 209-13; 'The Message of Ruskin', in Read, *Coat of Many Colours*, pp. 231-7; and Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, pp. 56-7. For Read on Gill, see 'Eric Gill', in Read, *Coat of Many Colours*, pp. 5-16. Kinross, 'Herbert Read's *Art and Industry*', pp. 37-8, 44-5, provides a helpful discussion of the dialectical relationship between Gill and Read. The curse is to be found in 'Ownership and Industrialism', in Eric Gill, *Sacred and Secular Etc* (London: J.M. Dent, 1940), p. 173.

<sup>63</sup> Herbert Read, *The Grass Roots of Art* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1947), p. 58.

such a Utopia would be liable to suffer fundamental social and, especially, aesthetic problems:

We shall have factories full of clean automatic machines moulding and stamping, punching and polishing innumerable objects which are compact in form, harmonious in shape, delectable in colour. Gone are the jointed and fragile objects which to-day we ingeniously construct from wood and metal; almost everything will be made from one basic plastic material, and beds and bath-tubs, plates and dishes, radio cabinets and motor-cars, will spill out of the factories in an unending stream of glossy jujubes. I am perhaps exaggerating: if we get tired of glossiness, we can have our surfaces matt. Nothing will be impossible. The technologist and the designer between them will be able to satisfy every whim and fancy. From a technical point of view, it will all be fearfully easy, and we may well ask ourselves: where is the restraint to come from? What is to prevent this search for quality and variety degenerating into an avalanche of vulgarity?

Technological advances will have largely eliminated the human element from production and so, in addition to the problem of leisure, there will be the problem of 'the atrophy of sensation': so few people will be required 'to use their hands in creative contact with a material' that they will be 'quite unable to check a general atrophy of sensibility'.<sup>64</sup>

Read's solution to these interrelated problems, 'if we are to go forward to the logical conclusion of the machine age', is to 'create a movement in a parallel direction, and not in opposition'. It will be necessary to establish a 'double-decker' or

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63–5, 68.

anarchism.<sup>11</sup> There was also a University Co-op Shop at which, according to Naomi Mitchison, he helped to serve (improbable as it seems).<sup>12</sup>

In January 1916 Huxley was rejected by the Army as, hardly surprisingly, C3 (totally unfit). By this time he was already a visitor to Philip and Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington Manor, six miles outside Oxford, which has been well described as 'the headquarters of intellectual opposition' to the war, meeting such principled opponents as Lawrence, Bertrand Russell, Lytton Strachey and the painters Duncan Grant and Mark Gertler (as well as his first wife, the Belgian Maria Nys).<sup>13</sup> On graduation he joined, for a few months, Clive Bell and other conscientious objectors in agricultural work on Philip Morrell's farm and at Garsington he imbibed a pacifism, only lukewarmly, since he moved to a clerical job at the Air Board before his spell of teaching at Eton.<sup>14</sup> From May 1917 there is the interesting comment: '...I fancy that the best part of political life after the

<sup>11</sup> Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, pp. viii–ix (but for a later swingeing rejection of Wilde, see Aldous Huxley, *Proper Studies: The Proper Study of Mankind Is Man* (1927; London: Chatto & Windus, 1949 edn), p. 53). It is significant that in *Eyeless in Gaza*, chap. 10, Anthony Beavis, Brian Foxe and Mark Staithes are all members of 'the Fabians' while at Oxford, and see also Huxley, *Limbo*, pp. 29–30; but Huxley also belonged to an aesthetic Nineties Society (Julian Huxley (ed.), *Aldous Huxley, 1894–1963: A Memorial Volume* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), p. 30, and Peter Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot* (London: Abacus, 1985), p. 58).

<sup>12</sup> Julian Huxley, *Aldous Huxley*, p. 54; Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Delany, *D.H. Lawrence's Nightmare: The Writer and His Circle in the Years of the Great War* (Hassocks: Harvester, 1979), p. 68n.

<sup>14</sup> For Garsington see (in addition to Bedford): Julian Huxley, *Aldous Huxley*, pp. 39–43; Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected*, pp. 13–14; Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 45–6, 183. Garsington inspired the Crome of *Crome Yellow* (1921). For rare contemporary comments of Huxley's about the war (after the commonplace initial patriotic fervour): *LAH*, pp. 97, 124. In the strange novella, 'Farcical History of Richard Greenow', the personality of the Huxley-like protagonist and anti-war campaigner is invaded by and

It is towards a community of this type that Alfred Poole and Loola must be heading at the close of Huxley's second dystopia, *Ape and Essence* (1948), but for him to say in 1946 that this 'possibility [is] already actualized, to some extent, in a community of exiles and refugees from the Brave New World, living within the borders of the Reservation'<sup>9</sup> – referring to Bernard and Helmholtz being dispatched to the Falkland Islands – is unconvincing, for it is doubtful that the 'amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete' could have conceived of a 'society ... of freely co-operating individuals'. It is clear that Huxley had travelled an immense distance politically between 1931, when he was writing *Brave New World*, and 1946. On being asked in November 1935 'whether his ultimate sympathies were with the savage's aspirations or with the ideal of conditioned stability', he replied: 'With neither, but I believe some mean between the two is both desirable and possible and must be our objective.' And the transition had actually been completed as early as 1937.<sup>10</sup>

While an undergraduate Huxley had spoken at at least one meeting of the Balliol, Queen's and New College Group of the Oxford University Socialist Society; and he had been admitted to full membership of the Balliol Fabian Group by signing the Basis of the Fabian Society, 'affirming acceptance of the principles of socialism', although Rajani Palme Dutt, who enrolled him, remembered that he had added 'that he did not want to be "an economic type of Socialist", since he hated economics, and supported socialism for the same reasons as Oscar Wilde'. So here he was already admitting to an aesthetic approach to social affairs, but more importantly aligning himself with Wilde's

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mondsworth: Penguin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1986), p. 400; *The Anarchist Reader* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Campbell Johnson, *Peace Offering* (London: Methuen, 1936), pp. 162–3.

'duplex civilization', in which there will be a division between a public machine art, abstract and geometrical, and a private naturalistic or humanistic art.<sup>65</sup> He gives the example of ancient Egypt, where a religious art, mainly of public buildings and sculptured monuments, and which was geometric, rational, objective, abstract, co-existed for centuries with a domestic art, largely of paintings, small carvings and various kinds of decorated vessels, and which was naturalistic, lyrical, even sentimental. Obviously contemporary society already exemplifies to a significant extent a double-decker civilization. What, in addition Read prescribes is to

let every individual serve an apprenticeship in handicrafts ... creative arts of every kind should be made the basis of our educational system. If, between the ages of five and fifteen, we could give all our children a training of the senses through the constructive shaping of materials. ... then we need not fear the fate of those children in a wholly-mechanized world. They would carry within their minds, within their bodies, the natural antidote to objective rationality, a spontaneous overflow of creative energies into their hours of leisure.

The result would be a private art standing over against the public art of the factories. But that – in our painting and sculpture, our poetry and dancing, our artist-potters and artist-weavers – we already have. That is to say, we have a tiny minority of people calling themselves artists. I am recommending that everyone should be an artist.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68–9.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71–2.

Here, belatedly, in a lecture given in 1943 and first published in Britain in 1947, we have Read standing more-or-less foursquare alongside his great predecessors -Ruskin, Morris, Gill – and stressing the fundamental, liberatory importance of the arts and crafts in any free society. It must be noted, though, that the argument was not unchallenged, for, as Louis Adeane, who reviewed *The Grass Roots of Art for Freedom*, observed, it is

not one that would be acceptable to anarchists; indeed, the argument as it stands seems to be in sharp contradiction to the general thesis of the book..the anarchist would argue that the syndicate and the commune, operating a decentralized industry, would exert a direct influence upon design as well as distribution and exemplify the kind of communal creativity Read has in mind. This particular essay in speculation is a brilliant one, but the steps by which Read mounts to its launching would seem to the anarchist reader to be conspicuously shaky.<sup>67</sup>

Read's views continued to develop to such an extent that by 1961, as the designer Misha Black, who as a young man had been fired by *Art and Industry*, recalled, 'he had completely changed his attitude' and believed that 'one must accept that most things which are made by industry have no real aesthetic value at all and one must look for aesthetic satisfaction in other things.and he was getting very close in fact to.a kind of William Morris attitude'.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Freedom*, 1 May 1948.

<sup>68</sup> BBC Radio 3 programme, *Recollections of Herbert Read*, 4 December 1977. This oneness with Morris is also expressed in Herbert Read, *Design and Tradition: The Design Oration (1961) of the Society of Industrial Artists* (Hemlingford Grey, Huntingdon: Vine Press, 1962); and in an interview published

The Savage is offered only two alternatives, an insane life in Utopia, or the life of a primitive in an Indian village, a life more human in some respects, but in others hardly less queer and abnormal.... If I were now to rewrite the book, I would offer the Savage a third alternative. Between the utopian and the primitive horns of his dilemma would lie the possibility of sanity ... In this community economics would be decentralist and Henry-Georgian, politics Kropotkinesque and co-operative. Science and technology would be used as though, like the Sabbath, they had been made for man, not (as at present and still more so in the Brave New World) as though man were to be adapted and enslaved to them....Brought up among the primitives, the Savage (in this hypothetical new version of the book) would not be transported to Utopia until he had had an opportunity of learning something at first hand about the nature of a society composed of freely co-operating individuals devoted to the pursuit of sanity.<sup>8</sup>

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and the compromises and lack of principle of democratic politicians while, significantly, anarchism is another, both equally contemptuous of parliamentary democracy.

<sup>8</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), pp. 7–9. The important statement that 'In this community economics would be decentralist and Henry-Georgian, politics Kropotkinesque and co-operative' has been quoted, fully or in part, by almost all commentators with a serious interest in Huxley's turn to left libertarianism: David Bradshaw, 'The Flight from Gaza: Aldous Huxley's Involvement with the Peace Pledge Union in the Context of His Overall Intellectual Development', in Bernfried Nugel (ed.), *Now More Than Ever: Proceedings of the Aldous Huxley Centenary Symposium, Munster 1994* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 25; and no less than three times by George Woodcock: *Dawn and the Darkest Hour*, p. 14; *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Har-



– in A.F. (After Ford) 632 – in a totally controlled and conditioned society. Conception and birth have been removed from human bodies to laboratories, and the eggs and embryos are so treated and the resultant children subjected to hypnopaedic socialization as to produce a docile adult personnel, ranging from the elite Alphas to the proletarian Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons, including the Epsilon-Minus Semi-Morons; but promiscuous sexual intercourse is encouraged, along with frequent recourse to the drug *soma*, in order to effect total sedation. This change has taken place on a global scale, although throughout the world there remain reservations of unaltered aboriginal peoples. From the New Mexican Reservation Linda, an English woman who had been stranded there while pregnant, and her son, now in his early twenties, are brought back to London. John, ‘the Savage’, has managed to educate himself on the works of Shakespeare and is therefore the only fully human being (with the possible exception of Mustapha Mond, one of the twelve World Controllers) in the novel.

In *Brave New World*, faced with contemporary trends in the Soviet Union yet much more in the USA, Huxley’s concern is not for the dehumanized masses, but for the handful of dissatisfied intellectuals, such as Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson. It comes as even more of a jolt to realize that Huxley, who in the late 1920s had become an admiring friend of Lawrence and indeed published his edition of *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence* seven months after the appearance of *Brave New World*, considered existence in the Indian *pueblo* as little more acceptable than that in his New World Order. In his Foreword of 1946 he admits to having written the novel as an ‘amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete’<sup>7</sup> and comments:

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<sup>7</sup> For David Bradshaw’s reservations concerning the adequacy of this self-description see David Bradshaw (ed.), *The Hidden Huxley: Contempt and Compassion for the Masses, 1920–36* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. vii *et seq.*; yet Huxley’s aristocratic elitism in the 1920s and early 1930s, discussed below, is one possible aesthetic response to the banality of bourgeois politics

Read’s undeniably original, although not unproblematic, contribution to anarchism was as an educational theorist.<sup>69</sup> When the British Council was established in 1940, it was decided to ‘project’ British art overseas during wartime not by sending valuable works by professional artists but to substitute collections of drawings by British children. Read was given the task of selecting the works and visited schools throughout the country. In the year before his death he was to recall it as ‘an experience that may be said to have redirected the course of my life’.<sup>70</sup> He was appointed to a Leon Fellowship at London University for the two years, 1940–2, and the result was formidable *Education through Art*, published as early as 1943. Its disabling limitation is Read’s interpretation of psychological data and imposition of his curricular prescriptions in an arbitrary, pseudo-scientific way, reminiscent of Rudolf Steiner’s pedagogy, but this need not detract from the book’s general, anarchist implications. As he was to stress:

It is not often realized how deeply anarchist in its orientation ... *Education through Art* is and was intended to be. It is of course humiliating to have to confess that its success (and it is by far the most influential book I have written) has been in spite

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in 1959 he named Morris with Carpenter, Kropotkin and Stirner as his four major anarchist influences (‘Intervista con Herbert Read’, p. 13).

<sup>69</sup> The limitations of *Education through Art* and Read’s other writings on education are ably exposed by Malcolm Ross, ‘Herbert Read: Art, Education, and the Means of Redemption’, in *HRR*, although considerably more favourable were his fiftieth-anniversary reflections on *Education through Art*: Malcolm Ross, ‘In the Picture’, *Times Educational Supplement*, 2 April 1993, and extended as ‘Living There: Herbert Read’s *Education through Art* Fifty Years On’, *Journal of Art and Design Education*, XIV (1995). Cf. the cool and significantly brief comment of Stuart Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), pp. 372–3.

<sup>70</sup> ‘The Truth of a Few Simple Ideas’ (1967), in Read, *Cult of Sincerity*, pp. 43–5.

of this fact. I must conclude that I did not make my intention clear enough...<sup>71</sup>

He himself admitted: 'It is a general complaint that my book, *Education through Art*, is a difficult one – too difficult for the people it might most benefit'.<sup>72</sup> Freedom Press brought out *The Education of Free Men* in 1944, the year of the Butler Act, as 'a shorter statement of the theory of education' put forward in *Education through Art*, announcing: 'We are glad to publish this pamphlet by Herbert Read because ... it covers new ground by relating the problem of education to that of liberty. This is particularly important at a time when many people think that the question of education can be solved by State legislation.' On the cover was reproduced, very appropriately, one of Blake's illustrations to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

Back in 1940 what had so moved Read was the gestural and emotional content of the children's art. In particular, it was a working-class girl of five from a Cambridgeshire village who gave him 'something in the nature of an apocalyptic experience' with the drawing she described as 'a snake going round the world and a boat'. Not only had the child drawn a mandala, 'a magic circle divided into segments', 'one of the oldest symbols in the world', but she had found a verbal equivalent, for 'the snake surrounding the world is one of the most ancient of primordial images'. It has been seen that Read was a convinced Freudian and one of the first in Britain to apply psychoanalytical concepts to literary and art criticism. What he had previously known largely from reading Jung and regarded as merely an interesting hypothesis 'suddenly became an observed phenomenon, a proof', as he recognized the girl's draw-

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<sup>71</sup> 'Pragmatic Anarchism', p. 60, reprinted in Read, *Cult of Sincerity*, p. 90.

<sup>72</sup> Herbert Read, 'Education through Art', in Stefan Schimanski and Henry Treece (eds.), *Transformation Two* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1944), p. 63.

Madox Ford's assistant on the *English Review* before the First World War, which now seems most percipient:

Huxley's early novels ... amused, stimulated and charmed those who belonged to the circles from which his characters were drawn, shocked and disgusted pious old Ulster journalists ... and have since made the 'twenties glamorous for several generations of intelligent young people in London and the provinces. No such blend of talent, wit, refined smut and erudition had been seen before, except in Norman Douglas's *South Wind*, to which novel, as some observed, the touch of genius, the one thing missing in Huxley's books, was added. Of the latter 'indefinable something', discernible in the best of Firbank, as also in two books by his disciple Evelyn Waugh – *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies* – Huxley's brilliant novels showed no authentic sign. In place of it there was a trace of the minor prophet's melancholy, a deep-seated disgust, a vein of mysticism and a critical faculty so detached and so honest that he was able to recognize and admire in D.H. Lawrence the divine fire which he himself lacked.<sup>6</sup>

This phase of Huxley's output culminated with the publication in 1932 of *Brave New World*, the brilliant dystopian fable which must surely be his best book and which has certainly been – together with *The Doors of Perception* (1954), the account of his experiments with mescaline – the most influential. *Brave New World* is set, as is well known, many years in the future

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<sup>6</sup> Douglas Goldring, *The Nineteen Twenties: A General Survey and Some Personal Memories* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1945), pp. 98–9. See also William H. Pritchard, *Seeing Through Everything: English Writers, 1918–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 32–9.

Unlike poor Trev, Aldous left Oxford in 1916 with a First. During 1917–18 he spent eighteen months as a schoolmaster at Eton, where Eric Blair – the future George Orwell – was among his pupils. Teaching was not to his liking (see the first chapter of *Antic Hay* where Theodore Gumbriel quits his position) and he escaped to London and literary and other journalism, initially working as assistant editor to John Middleton Murry on the *Athenaeum*. He had already published three volumes of verse, but between 1920 and 1930 he established a commanding reputation as a writer of fiction with four novels – *Crome Yellow*, *Antic Hay*, *Those Barren Leaves* and *Point Counter Point* – and five collections of novellas and short stories – *Limbo*, *Mortal Coils*, *Little Mexican*, *Two or Three Graces* and *Brief Candles*. Influenced by Peacock, Norman Douglas and Anatole France, with a dash of Firbank, these first novels were brittle, cynical, nihilistic and very knowing.<sup>3</sup> As Cyril Connolly recalled: ‘I bought *Crome Yellow* out of some prize money. After that his novels and stories continued to dominate my horizon, so enormously competent, so clever, sympathetic, and on the spot. During the ’twenties it was almost impossible for the average clever young man not to imitate him...’<sup>4</sup> The formative nature of early exposure to Aldous Huxley is also affirmed by Evelyn Waugh and Angus Wilson of the many mesmerized among the next two or three generations of writers. George Woodcock seems an improbable devotee in the 1930s, but I can vouch for the intensity of my personal response as late as 1958–61.<sup>5</sup> All the same it is the negative judgment of Douglas Goldring, Ford

<sup>3</sup> For the impact of Anatole France see Derek P. Scales, *Aldous Huxley and French Literature* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1969), pp. 77–80.

<sup>4</sup> Cyril Connolly, *The Condemned Playground: Essays, 1927–1944* (London: Routledge, 1945), p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> See ‘A Critical Symposium on Aldous Huxley’, *London Magazine*, II, no. 8 (August 1955), pp. 51–6 (reprinted in the extremely useful Donald Watt (ed.), *Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 396–401); George Woodcock, *Dawn and the Darkest Hour: A Study of Aldous Huxley* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), chap. 1.

ing as ‘a symbol that was archetypal and universal’. (He now transferred his allegiance to Jung, becoming both publisher and editor-in-chief of the collected works in English). In total Read recognized in the children’s drawings a range of imagery that suggested that young children were naturally in harmony with deeply embedded cultural and social experiences. As he put it: ‘The more I considered my material the more convinced I became of the basic significance of the child’s creative activities for the development of consciousness and for the necessary fusion of sensibility and intellect.’<sup>73</sup>

What is the relevance for anarchism of all this? Read begins *Education through Art* by stating:

The purpose of education can ... only be to develop, at the same time as the uniqueness, the social consciousness or reciprocity of the individual. As a result of the infinite permutations of heredity, the individual will inevitably be unique, and this uniqueness, because it is something not possessed by anyone else, will be of value to the community....But uniqueness has no practical value in isolation. One of the most certain lessons of modern psychology and of recent historical experiences, is that education must be a process, not only of individuation, but also of *integration*, which is the reconciliation of individual uniqueness with social unity ... the

<sup>73</sup> Read, *Cult of Sincerity*, pp. 44–5; Herbert Read, *Education through Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1945), p. 187n (‘Snake round the World and a Boat’ is reproduced as Plate ib, facing p. 96). David Thistlewood, ‘Herbert Read: Education through Art’, *Resurgence*, no. 154 (September/October 1992), gives a useful summary of this and Read’s educational ideas in general. See also Thistlewood, *Herbert Read*, pp. 111–14; Michael P. Smith, *The Libertarians and Education* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 118–22. In addition to *The Education of Free Men*, Read provides a clear and compact account of his views in ‘The Aesthetic Method of Education’ in Read, *Grass Roots of Art* (1955 edn).

individual will be 'good' in the degree that his individuality is realized within the organic wholeness of the community.<sup>74</sup>

Here we have the egoism of Stirner assimilated in the anarchist communism of Kropotkin. Read mentions Stirner in *The Education of Free Men*; writes approvingly of him elsewhere, recounting how he bought his copy of the first British edition of Stirner's great book, *The Ego and His Own*, in 1915; and goes so far as to conclude that 'Jung sometimes seems to echo Stirner's very words.'<sup>75</sup>

We are already familiar with Read's advocacy, in his discussion of a duplex civilization, that 'creative arts of every kind should be made the basis of our educational system'. On the one hand, 'a child's drawings, produced as a result of spontaneous activity, are direct evidence of the child's physiological and psychological disposition' and 'once the psychological tendency or trend of a child is known, its own individuality can be developed by the discipline of art, till it has its own form and beauty'; on the other: 'We know that a child absorbed in drawing or any other creative activity is a happy child. We know just as a matter of everyday experience that self-expression is self-improvement.' As a result: 'We do not claim an hour or a day of the child's time: we claim the whole child.'<sup>76</sup>

For Read the choice between authoritarianism and a free, libertarian society therefore lies in the schoolroom:

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<sup>74</sup> Read, *Education through Art*, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> For Read on Stirner, see *OMM*, pp. 32, 38–9; Read, *Education of Free Men*, p. 17; Herbert Read, 'The Centenary of "The Ego and His Own"', *Freedom*, 27 July 1946 (reprinted in both *OMM*, pp. 106–11, and Read, *Tenth Muse*, pp. 74–82); Read, *Anarchy and Order*, pp. 51, 147, 164–5; Herbert Read, *The Forms of Things Unknown: Essays towards an Aesthetic Philosophy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), pp. 173–6, 205; 'Pragmatic Anarchism', pp. 57–60, reprinted in Read, *Cult of Sincerity*, pp. 84–92. Read's copy of the 1913 edition of *The Ego and His Own* is indeed dated 1915 (Read Library).

<sup>76</sup> Read, *Education of Free Men*, pp. 15–16, 32.

[1942]). He did not return to Eton, but was tutored at home. He had wanted to become a doctor, but this his defective eyesight now prohibited and it was to read English that he went up to Balliol College, Oxford, in 1913, remarkably only a year late.

Thirdly, his brother Trevenen ('Trev') committed suicide in 1914. Trevenen was the second eldest brother and the person to whom Aldous, five years his junior, was closest. Although his reputation was as the most brilliant of the three brothers, he had already shocked the family not only by getting a mere Second (and thereby debarring the assumed academic career) but by also failing the examination for entry into the Civil Service. Trev proceeded to fall in love with a parlourmaid in his father's house. This was regarded as socially impossible; the couple were parted (we do not even know the woman's name); and Trev, succumbing to the Huxley affliction of depressive illness, slipped out of his nursing home and was found a week later hanging from a tree. The eldest brother, the distinguished zoologist Julian Huxley, who was to run the London Zoo most successfully and be appointed the first Director-General of Unesco, suffered from nervous breakdowns throughout his career; and T.H. Huxley himself was subject to prolonged bouts of depression in his later years. Brian Foxe, in *Eyeless in Gaza*, is an exact depiction of Trev Huxley with the major difference that, whereas Brian tortures himself and his fiancée by declining even to kiss her, Trev's lover was pregnant. It is also relevant that at the end of *Brave New World* (1932) John, the Savage, hangs himself.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Julian Huxley, *Memories*, pp. 96–7; David King Dunaway, *Huxley in Hollywood* (London: Bloomsbury, 1989), pp. 11–13; David King Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected: An Oral History* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999), pp. 4–5, 9–11. For Aldous's response to Trev's death, see *LAH*, pp. 61–3. Except where otherwise attributed, biographical details throughout are drawn from Sybille Bedford's splendid biography, which Nicholas Murray, *Aldous Huxley: An English Intellectual* (London: Little, Brown, 2002), although proficient and up-to-date, does not replace.

He was then born into a family of immense intellectual achievement which, however, placed a burden of equally high expectation on its young males and this combined with the rigours of almost any late-Victorian and Edwardian bourgeois upbringing and education. In addition, Aldous Huxley was dealt three blows between 1908 and 1914 that scarred his personality and affected all his subsequent development. During his first term at Eton, when he was fourteen, his mother, Julia, died unexpectedly of cancer at the age of 45. The trauma of this early loss surfaces in both chapter 1 of *Antic Hay* (1923) and chapters 4 and 6 of *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936). Then, in 1911 he went down with keratitis, an inflammation of the cornea, which caused near-blindness. After eighteen months, during which he taught himself Braille, his sight began to return, yet it remained severely impaired for the remainder of his life (though he was able to dispense with spectacles from the late 1930s following his successful application of the Bates method, which he was to advocate triumphantly in *The Art of Seeing*

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Grover Smith (ed.), *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969) [hereafter *LAH*], p. 357; ‘T.H. Huxley as a Literary Man’, the Huxley Memorial Lecture, 1932, reprinted in *The Olive Tree* (New York: Harper, 1937), pp. 47–83; on T.H. Huxley as an educationalist, in *The Human Situation: Lectures at Santa Barbara, 1959*, ed. Piero Ferrucci (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), pp. 1–2; an interesting brief conjunction of T.H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold, in *Literature and Science* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), pp. 5–6; on Matthew Arnold, in *Texts and Pretexts: An Anthology with Commentaries* (1932; London: Chatto & Windus, 1959 edn), pp. 147–8, 294–5, and with a choice of his poetry on pp. 43, 49, 114, 145–6, 152–3, 260–2, 293–4, 297, 302–3; an oblique, but seemingly negative, remark about Ward in *Limbo: Six Stories and a Play* (1920; London: Chatto & Windus, 1946 edn), pp. 3–4; and comments on Thomas Arnold in *Ends and Means: An Enquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods Employed for Their Realization* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), p. 187, and *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), pp. 289–91. His father is acidly portrayed as John Beavis in *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) (cf. Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus and Collins, 2 vols., 1973–4), I, p. 14); but Aldous considered Leonard Huxley’s *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley* (1900) ‘a good book’ (*LAH*, p. 357).

The first charge on the educator ... is to bring the uniqueness of the individual into focus, to the end that a more vital interplay of forces takes place within each organic grouping of individuals – within the family, within the school, within society itself. The possibilities are at first evenly weighed between hatred, leading to crime, unhappiness and social antagonism, and love, which ensures mutual aid, individual happiness and social peace.<sup>77</sup>

Only a few years later Alex Comfort was to conclude that the task of modern revolutionaries is to abandon political intrigue and insurrectionary fantasy and instead become practitioners – or at least propagandists – of ‘child psychiatry, social psychology and political psychology’.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, and rather more practically, Read is in effect calling on anarchists to bring about the social revolution by becoming schoolteachers, trained in the pedagogy of his freedom in education:

... a choice must be made which inevitably dictates the form which our society will take. In one direction we can institute objective codes of conduct and morality to which our children are introduced before the age of understanding and to which they are compelled to conform by a system of rewards and punishments. That way conducts us to an authoritarian society, governed by laws and sanctioned by military power. It is the kind of society in which most of the world now lives, ridden by neuroses, full of envy and avarice, ravaged by war and disease.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>78</sup> Alex Comfort, *Delinquency* (London: Freedom Press, 1951), p. 13.

In the other direction we can avoid all coercive codes of morality, all formal conceptions of 'right' and 'wrong'. For a morality of obedience we can substitute a morality of attachment or reciprocity ... Believing that the spontaneous life developed by children among themselves gives rise to a discipline infinitely nearer to that inner accord or harmony which is the mark of the virtuous man, we can aim at making our teachers the friends rather than the masters of their pupils; as teachers they will not lay down ready-made rules, but will encourage their children to carry out their own co-operative activities, and thus spontaneously to elaborate their own rules. Discipline will not be imposed, but discovered – discovered as the right, economical and harmonious way of action. We can avoid the competitive evils of the examination system, which merely serves to re-enforce the egocentrism inherent in the child: we can eliminate all ideas of rewards and punishments, substituting a sense of the collective good of the community, to which reparation for shortcomings and selfishness will be obviously due and freely given.<sup>79</sup>

Education is a common preoccupation of anarchists, both theoretically and practically. Amongst the principal anarchist thinkers Godwin, Stirner and Tolstoy have all shared Read's concern, but only he went so far as to identify the school as the primary arena for anarchist action. What he originated was, in his words, 'a revolutionary policy', which would 'bring about a revolution in the structure of our society'; and George Woodcock was to be an eloquent expositor of this new anarchist

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<sup>79</sup> Read, *Education of Free Men*, p. 25.

## 10. Aldous Huxley

Aldous Huxley was born in 1894 into what Noel Annan has influentially analyzed as 'the intellectual aristocracy'. His grandfather, the biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, was 'Darwin's bulldog'; and his father Leonard, Charles Darwin's godson and T.H. Huxley's biographer, was to become in the early-twentieth century editor of Thackeray's *Cornhill Magazine*, albeit long after its Victorian prime. On his mother's side, one great-uncle was the poet and critic Matthew Arnold, another great-uncle W.E. Forster, the Liberal politician responsible for the Education Act of 1870, his great-grandfather Dr Thomas Arnold of Rugby, and his aunt Mrs Humphrey Ward, author of *Robert Elsmere* and other popular novels. By marrying the historian George Macaulay Trevelyan, his cousin Janet Ward linked the Arnolds and Huxleys to the even more impressive cousinage of Trevelyans and Macaulays; and when his halfbrother, the physiologist and Nobel Prize winner Andrew Huxley, married Jocelyn Pease, great-great-granddaughter of Darwin's brother-in-law, the Huxleys became connected with the Peases, Wedgwoods and Darwins (a direct link to the Darwins was to come in the next generation when the daughter of his other half-brother married a great-grandson of Charles Darwin).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N.G. Annan, 'The Intellectual Aristocracy', in J.H. Plumb (ed.), *Studies in Social History: A Tribute to G.M. Trevelyan* (London: Longmans, 1955), pp. 254–66; Ronald W. Clark, *The Huxleys* (London: Heinemann, 1968), pp. 338–9, 376–7; Julian Huxley, *Memories 1* (1970; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), chap. 1. For Aldous Huxley's assessments of various members of his family: an admiring overview of T.H. Huxley in a letter of 1932, in

Ostergaard's political formation belonged essentially to the pre-nuclear age. The significantly different conditions which obtained from the late 1950s – with the rise of a mass nuclear disarmament movement and an even greater convergence between pacifism and mainstream anarchism – will be discussed in chapter 12.

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phy (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1996), pp. 61–2, 104, 126, 249. Obituaries appeared in *Guardian*, 28 March 1990; *The Times*, 31 March 1990; *Freedom*, 7, 21 April 1990.

strategy, which he compared to anarcho-syndicalism.<sup>80</sup> Read's vision is an inspiring one and not, I consider, unrealistic – nor dependent on the ultimate validity of Jungian theory. There is, however, one major difficulty with it. All societies regard their educational systems as of vital importance to social well-being, none more so than contemporary societies. The kind of intervention and social change that Read advocates would be far from uncontested – as is witnessed by the educational reforms of Thatcherite and Blairite Britain, which to a significant degree have been directed at reversing the pedagogy and curriculum, especially in the primary school, which had been developed over the decades after 1944 and which the ideas of Read and the Society for Education through Art had done much to influence. So we are necessarily returned to the struggle for social power, which is required in order to implement such far-reaching educational innovation.

After reading Woodcock's study of George Orwell, *The Crystal Spirit*, in 1966 Read wrote to him as follows:

I haven't re-read any of Orwell's books recently, but they have always remained in my mind, and his personality, which remains so vivid after all these years, often rises like some ghost to admonish me. I suppose I have felt nearer to him than to any other English writer of our time, and though there were some aspects of his personality that irritated me – his proletarian pose in dress, his insensitivity to his physical environment, his comparatively narrow range of interests – yet who was,

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<sup>80</sup> Herbert Read, *Education through Art – A Revolutionary Policy* (London: Society for Education through Art, 1955), p. 1. For Woodcock's exposition, see especially Woodcock, *Herbert Read*, chap. 8; but also George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1986), p. 383, and George Woodcock (ed.), *The Anarchist Reader* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), pp. 48–9.

in general, nearer in ideals & even in eccentricities? You bring out his contradictions very well, & justify them. They didn't trouble me much, except when it came to the war – but by then he was a sick man & I saw little of him... If only he had lived a little longer he would have got rid of those 'monumental imperfections' & would have become as great as any of the authors of the past he admired so much.<sup>81</sup>

Read also had 'monumental imperfections' which, in my view, prevented his very great gifts from being manifested, ultimately, in work of the first order. What are the 'imperfections' that am I thinking of? He wrote too much and spread himself over too many fields (although this is one of the very things that makes him so stimulating!). He attempted to accommodate himself to classicism when he was inherently a romantic; and he subordinated himself to the influence of Eliot (an influence I consider to have been malign for Read in particular and for English culture in general). (His best work is concentrated in the 1930s and 1940s, as he struggled to forge his own romantic persona.). He accepted a knighthood, which was at odds with both his revolutionary politics and his championing of avant-garde art and artists. He lived the life of a member of the landed gentry, and this produced (along with the need to pay alimony to his first wife) the financial desperation of his final years, necessitating lecture series and tours – and because he did not enjoy lecturing he was a poor lecturer – as well as the 'hack work' of the 1960s: recycling already existing publications, retitling second editions, and generally serving his reputation ill.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Read Archive, letter from Read to Woodcock, 3 August 1966 (reprinted in part in Woodcock, *Herbert Read*, p. 239).

<sup>82</sup> King, pp. 174, 307, 310; Piers Paul Read, 'Herbert Read', in *Homage to Herbert Read* (Kent County Council Education Committee: catalogue of

and *Anarchists* (1992), a late gathering, but frequently of very much earlier work.<sup>26</sup>

Woodcock also continued to be a pacifist, contributing *Gandhi* (1972) to the Fontana Modern Masters series. Another anarcho-pacifist who was to be close to Freedom Press was the political scientist Geoffrey Ostergaard. Ostergaard converted to anarchism through reading Herbert Read's *Poetry and Anarchism* while serving in the RAF at the end of the Second World War and was to become a lifelong Gandhian as well. A doctoral student of G.D.H. Cole's at Oxford, he then spent his entire career at the University of Birmingham, writing on three areas: democracy and power in the British co-operative movement; syndicalism and workers' control (for *Freedom and Anarchy*); and above all the Sarvodaya movement of India, his principal works on this form of anarchism being *The Gentle Anarchists* (1971), with Melville Currell, and *Nonviolent Revolution in India* (1985).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Woodcock published his autobiography in three volumes: *Letter* [down to 1948]; *Beyond the Blue Mountains* (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1987) [1949–77]; *Walking through the Valley* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1994) [1977–92]. There is also a biography: Douglas Fetherling, *The Gentle Anarchist: A Life of George Woodcock* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1998). Avakumovic compiled an extensive bibliography, 1937–76, for Woodcock's *Festschrift*: William H. New (ed.), *A Political Art: Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978), pp. 211–49. Unfortunately the bibliography of the political writings appended to George Woodcock, *Anarchism and Anarchists: Essays* (Kingston, Ont.: Quarry Press, 1992), pp. 267–8, is incomplete.

<sup>27</sup> See also three other items by Ostergaard: 'Indian Anarchism', *Anarchy*, no. 42 (August 1964); 'Indian Anarchism: The Sarvodaya Movement', in David E. Apter and James Joll (eds.), *Anarchism Today* (London: Macmillan, 1971); 'Indian Anarchism: The Curious Case of Vinoba Bhave, Anarchist "Saint of the Government"', in David Goodway (ed.), *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1989). Some of his articles on workers' control and British syndicalism are collected in Geoffrey Ostergaard, *The Tradition of Workers' Control: Selected Writings*, ed. Brian Bamford (London: Freedom Press, 1997). For a warm appreciation by a former colleague and distinguished sociologist: A.H. Halsey, *No Discouragement: An Autobiogra-*



had appeared three years before his emigration and was followed in 1950 and 1956 by studies of Kropotkin and Proudhon, the former in collaboration with a young Serbian anarchist, Ivan Avakumovic'. Avakumovic', another writer for *Freedom* (sometimes as 'Our Balkan Correspondent'), joined Woodcock in British Columbia when he took up an academic post; and *The Doukhobors* (1968), a study of the Russian pacifist sect who had also eventually settled there, was a second collaboration between the two men. He was later to become the historian of Canadian socialism as well as of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, although he remained an anarchist.

Woodcock's most important contribution to anarchist historiography was undoubtedly *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, first published in Britain by Penguin Books in 1963. This was the first full-length history of anarchism in the English language and a considerable achievement.<sup>25</sup> An informal trilogy on the three most prominent libertarian writers of his time, Orwell, Huxley and Read, all of them discussed at length in this book, followed between 1966 and 1972. He had already written on a fourth of my subjects in a slighter work, *The Paradox of Oscar Wilde* (1950). Although he remained a committed anarchist until his death in 1995, he published only two books on specifically anarchist topics during his final two decades: *The Anarchist Reader* (1977), the useful anthology complementary to his *Anarchism*, and *Anarchism*

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<sup>25</sup> The strictures of Nicolas Walter in 'The Anarchist Past 1', *Anarchy*, no. 28 (June 1963), and 'Woodcock Reconsidered', *Raven*, no. 2 (August 1987), while factually valid are evaluatively ungenerous. Cf. his review of *The Anarchists*, by the well-regarded academic historian James Joll, which he compares adversely with Woodcock's history: 'Two Views on *The Anarchists*, 1: Flowers to the Rebels Failed?', *Anarchy*, no. 46 (December 1964). 'The Anarchist Past 1' is reprinted in Nicolas Walter, *The Anarchist Past and Other Essays*, ed. David Goodway (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2007), pp. 23–9.

And yet he was a marvellous writer. There are things I come back to time and again from throughout his career. His historical importance as the principal conduit for the reception of artistic modernism in conservative Britain cannot be gainsaid, yet his art criticism and history are now little read. On the other hand, I believe he will survive as the author of the marvellous autobiographies, the poetry, *The Green Child*, the political and social essays, and some of the literary criticism.<sup>83</sup> Although Eliot correctly considered that, ironically, Read's unrelenting opponent, Wyndham Lewis, was 'the greatest prose master of my generation – perhaps the only one to have invented a new style', he also thought that Read 'has written some of the finest prose of our time'. (Orwell and E.P. Thompson also need to be included in this latter category.) At least I assume that it was Eliot who was responsible for the publisher's blurb on the dust-jacket of *The Contrary Experience*:

Readers of the *Annals [of Innocence and Experience]* and of that strange romance *The Green Child* know that Sir Herbert Read has written some of the finest prose of our time; readers of *Moon's Farm* know that he has written some of the most moving poetry. And those who have read all these three books know that he is always inspired when he writes of his native Yorkshire.

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exhibition at Canterbury College of Art, 1984), p. 2. For Read as a member of the landed gentry, see the very interesting observations by Woodcock, *Beyond the Blue Mountains*, chap. 23, 'A Yorkshire Knight'.

<sup>83</sup> I find myself, unusually, in considerable agreement with Graham Greene. See his 'Herbert Read', *Horizon*, III, no. 15 (March 1941), and 'A Personal Foreword', to Herbert Read, *The Contrary Experience: Autobiographies* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973).

And Orwell similarly believed that ‘his best work comes from the Yorkshire strain in him’.<sup>84</sup>

As a prolific writer on anarchism and related matters, and as a large fish in the small pool that international anarchism had become by 1937 to 1968, Read’s reputation as a political and social thinker was considerable in libertarian circles. But he deserves to be continued to be read and studied by anarchists – particularly for his strategy of socio-political change through education, but also for the many perceptive and sometimes profound things to be found scattered throughout his writings.

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<sup>84</sup> King, p. 279, quotes Eliot’s assessment of Lewis; and for Orwell’s judgment, see his review of *A Coat of Many Colours*, p. 150, reprinted in *CWGO*, XVII, p. 405.

the war society they could lay the foundations of a peaceable order.<sup>23</sup>

This was potentially a most promising form of socio-political pacifism (even if advocated by moral and – to use Ceadel’s terminology – ‘sectarian’ pacifists); yet Woodcock only lasted the three months of the winter of 1940–1 at Langham, given the very flawed arrangements of the community (it was to be terminated in 1942) combined with the lack of the privacy he required in order to write. He therefore withdrew to Cambridge from where he produced the number of *NOW* that was to arouse Orwell to fury in the *Partisan Review*.<sup>24</sup>

From late 1941 Woodcock began to contribute extensively to *War Commentary*, becoming one of its editors on the imprisonment of Vernon Richards, John Hewetson and Philip Sansom, and writing for Freedom Press six pamphlets, mainly on practical libertarian applications, as well as his first prose book, *Anarchy or Chaos* (1944). Freedom Press also published the first two issues of a second series of *NOW*, one of the very best little magazines of the 1940s, whose contributors included Orwell (‘How the Poor Die’), Lawrence Durrell (the superb ‘Elegy on the Closing of the French Brothels’), George Barker, W.S. Graham, Julian Symons, the undervalued painter Jankel Adler (an anarchist exile from Poland), Henry Miller, e.e. cummings, Paul Goodman, Kenneth Rexroth, Dwight Macdonald, André Breton and Victor Serge, as well as Read, Comfort, Savage, Hewetson and M.L. Berneri. In 1949 he returned permanently with his German wife to Canada, where he was to establish the journal *Canadian Literature* and become one of the country’s leading men of letters. His first anarchist biography, of Godwin,

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<sup>23</sup> Woodcock, *Letter*, pp. 224–5 (emphasis in original). See also Lea, pp. 273–4, 283–4, 289–91; Ceadel, *Pacifism*, pp. 291–2, 295–6, 307–8; Ceadel, *Thinking*, pp. 164–5; *CWGO*, XVI, pp. 432–4.

<sup>24</sup> Woodcock, *Letter*, pp. 225–30. See also Ceadel, *Pacifism*, p. 308; Lea, pp. 292–301; Carswell, pp. 254–6.

he was pacifist and consequently the *Adelphi* became pacifist also and Langham a pacifist community run by the PPU. Max Plowman, a pacifist since he had resigned his commission during the First World War, a Blake scholar, one of Orwell's editors at the *Adelphi* in the early thirties and his very good friend, was general secretary of the PPU from 1937 to 1938, and then became sole editor of the *Adelphi* and warden of Langham until his premature death in 1941. Murry, for his part, edited the organ of the PPU, *Peace News*, between 1940 and 1946. (He renounced his pacifism in 1948 and, also a former Communist, urged a preventive war against the Soviet Union, ending his life as a Conservative voter!)<sup>22</sup> Woodcock recalled his own interest in 'the communitarian movement emerging among the pacifists':

John Middleton Murry had been preaching in the *Adelphi* and elsewhere the need to create, 'in the *interstices* of the totalitarian order', communities of like-minded people who would form the nuclei of a future libertarian society based on voluntary sharing rather than imposed equality. Pacifists, Murry and many others argued, need not be merely negative refusers; in withdrawing from

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<sup>22</sup> CWGO, X, pp. 181–2, 493, 507, and XVI, pp. 492–4; Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation* (London: Constable, 1979), pp. 169–73; John Carswell, *Lives and Letters: A.R. O'Grady, Beatrice Hastings, Katherine Mansfield, John Middleton Murry, S.S. Kotliansky, 1906–1957* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), pp. 234, 237, 246–56; Ceadel, *Pacifism*, pp. 201–3, 230, 272. Rayner Heppenstall's memoir, *Four Absentees* (London: Barrie & Rockcliff, 1960), pp. 65–6, 106–7, 118–37, is not only informative but very entertaining. F.A. Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry* (London: Methuen, 1959), is hagiographic but the only biography. Katherine Middleton Murry, *Beloved Quixote: The Unknown Life of John Middleton Murry* (London: Souvenir Press, 1986), chaps. 8–19, and Colin Middleton Murry, *One Hand Clapping: A Memoir of Childhood* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), esp. chaps. 17–18, 21–4, 28, are also of interest.

## 9. War and pacifism

Herbert Read was a military hero who had seriously considered in 1918 staying in the army and making his career there, but his opinions changed dramatically in the course of the succeeding decade and he was eventually to become an advocate of Gandhian non-violence. In this he was not exceptional; a significant minority, some of them also former soldiers, reached similar conclusions during the interwar years.

Almost 700,000 Britons had been killed during the First World War, and to this figure needs to be added 200,000 (almost a third of them Indian) from various parts of the empire. Another one and a half million suffered permanent disability from either wounds or gas. A surprising class differential was that casualties were proportionately three times heavier among junior officers than in the ranks. Other countries experienced even greater losses: for instance, twice the number of the United Kingdom's deaths in the case of France.<sup>1</sup> The natural revulsion at this slaughter and the other horrors of the trench warfare on the Western Front was reinforced at the end of the 1920s by the publication of a series of outstanding novels and autobiographies – including Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*, Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* and *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* and Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That* – and the production of R.C. Sherriff's play, *Journey's End*. Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* appeared in

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<sup>1</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 120–1; Hugh Cecil, *The Flower of Battle: British Fiction Writers of the First World War* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1995), p. 1.

German in 1929, in English translation the same year, and as Lewis Milestone's major film as early as 1930. Sassoon had edited Wilfred Owen's poems in 1920; Blunden was to bring out a much fuller collection in 1933.<sup>2</sup>

It is therefore entirely explicable that when there were renewed menaces of war after 1933, with the National Socialists having come to power in Germany and the mounting aggressions of two other authoritarian powers, Japan and Italy, considerable pacifist sentiment manifested itself in Britain. Ten days after Hitler had been appointed chancellor, the Oxford Union voted by 275 to 153 votes that 'this House will in no circumstances vote for its King and country'. In the Peace Ballot conducted by the League of Nations Union from door to door in 1934–5, only 2,351,981 householders supported the use of military action to counter aggression whereas 6,784,368 voted for economic and non-military measures. In 1935 the Rev. Dick Sheppard launched his Peace Movement, which became the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) the following year and in which Aldous Huxley temporarily played a prominent role in the collective leadership. The PPU's pledge was 'I renounce War and never again will I support or sanction another, and I will do all in my power to persuade others to do the same.' Within two or three months the new organization had 100,000 members, peaking at 136,000 in April 1940 (although there was no membership fee).<sup>3</sup>

A.J.P. Taylor was responsible in 1957 for the semantically clumsy yet conceptually essential distinction between 'pacifism' and 'pacifism', a distinction that has become common-

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<sup>2</sup> For Read's desolate review of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, see James King, *The Last Modern: A Life of Herbert Read* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1990), p. 92, and Cecil, p. 264.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain between the Wars, 1918–1940* (London: Methuen, 1956 edn), pp. 422, 538, 541–2; Taylor, *English History*, p. 379; Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 31, 222–3, 301, 318.

dom Press Group, was to become one of the most prolific and well-known anarchist writers of the second half of the twentieth century. George Woodcock had been born in Canada in 1912, but his parents brought him back to England as a baby and he grew up in Shropshire and Buckinghamshire. In the early 1920s he was taken to hear Edward Carpenter lecture in Marlow, recalling it as 'one of the epiphanic evenings of my life'.<sup>21</sup> He had to leave school at sixteen, since his father had died two years earlier, and to work as a clerk at the Great Western Railway's Paddington headquarters. He established himself as a poet in the literary London of the late 1930s and in 1940 launched his own, initially cyclostyled, periodical *NOW*. Later that year he gave notice to the Great Western Railway and – his status as a conscientious objector being conditional on doing agricultural work – went to live at the Langham community in Essex.

A little needs to be said parenthetically about Langham given its twofold significance in the career of George Orwell and the history of British pacifism. The *Adelphi*, as has been shown in chapter 6, was of especial importance in nurturing Orwell's literary talent. The Adelphi Centre was set up at Langham in 1936, in association with the magazine, to serve as a self-supporting community with accommodation for socialist summer schools and conferences. That August Orwell lectured at the first Adelphi summer school to be held there on 'An Outsider Sees the Distressed Areas' (a fellow speaker was Herbert Read) and this experience, together with the ILP summer school the previous month, would have afforded him with rich observation of 'fruit-juice drinkers, nudists, sandal-wearers, sex-maniacs, Quakers, "Nature Cure" quacks, pacifists and feminists'. John Middleton Murry, the founder of the *Adelphi* back in 1923 and a man notorious for a succession of astonishing *volte-faces*, had decided in September 1936 that

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<sup>21</sup> Woodcock, *Letter*, pp. 55–6.

Hewetson, a doctor who became an editor of *War Commentary* and afterwards *Freedom*. Later a member of a South London practice of GPs in which a fellow partner was Wilhelm Reich's brother-in-law, he produced a mass of journalism but only two pamphlets and one short book. The pamphlets were *Mutual Aid and Social Revolution* (1946), reprinted in 1987 as the introduction to the Freedom Press edition of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, and the pioneering *Sexual Freedom for the Young: Society and the Sexual Life of Children and Adolescents* (1951), which links child abuse to sexually repressed upbringings; the book is the impressively documented and argued *Ill-Health, Poverty and the State* (1946), Alex Comfort remarking in his review for *Freedom*: 'Against the reformist heresy, Hewetson hits hard and effectively. He stands in the tradition of the biology of health, the biology of Kropotkin, of which freedom from power is an integral and essential part.'<sup>19</sup> Gibson was to write for Freedom Press three pamphlets, all in 1952, including the memorable *Who Will Do the Dirty Work?*, and a book, *Love, Sex and Power in Later Life* (1992). After taking a degree at the London School of Economics in his thirties, he became a long-term associate and admirer of H.J. Eysenck and a professional psychologist, in which capacity he published as 'H.B. Gibson'.<sup>20</sup>

Another pacifist, shortly to follow the members of the Forward Movement in their migration from the PPU to the Free-

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*Beauty Is More than 'in the Eye of the Beholder': Photographs of Women and Children* (London: Freedom Press, 1999), p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Reprinted in *APD*, p. 96. See also obituary appreciations by Colin Ward and Philip Sansom, *Freedom*, 12 January 1991; and Colin Ward and David Goodway, *Talking Anarchy* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2003), pp. 35, 38–40. *Sexual Freedom for the Young* was reprinted in the *Raven*, no. 4 (March 1988), pp. 365–79, with an illuminating preface by Ward (pp. 361–4).

<sup>20</sup> *Who Will Do the Dirty Work?* is reprinted in Vernon Richards (ed.), *Why Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society* (London: Freedom Press, 1983), pp. 108–14. Obituaries of Tony Gibson appeared in *Freedom*, 7 April 2001; *The Times*, 9 April 2001; *Guardian*, 30 April 2001. Frederick Lohr was to self-publish *Anarchism: A Philosophy of Freedom* (n.d.).

place since Martin Ceadel employed it in his outstanding study, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (1980). 'Pacifism' is 'the assumption that war, though *sometimes necessary*, is always an irrational and inhumane way to solve disputes, and that its prevention should always be an over-riding political priority', whereas 'pacifism' is 'the belief that all war is *always wrong* and should never be resorted to, whatever the consequences of abstaining from fighting'.<sup>4</sup> Although there were 62,000 conscientious objectors during the Second World War as opposed to 16,500 for 1914–18, the significant difference was not the fourfold increase in numbers but that the latter contained many pacifists, opponents of the Great War in particular, whereas the former were overwhelmingly absolute pacifists, rejecters in principle of all wars.<sup>5</sup>

Another key differentiation is between those pacifists (or indeed pacifists) whose opposition to war is at root *moral*, usually on account of religious belief, and those whose outlook is *socio-political*, believing that war is merely a symptom of a fundamentally unjust, repressive, sick society, while engendering its cohesion and continuance, and that its elimination can only be achieved as a result of revolutionary change. In the words of the impressive American social critic, Randolph Bourne, in his essay 'The State' (1919):

War is the health of the State ... the nation in wartime attains a uniformity of feeling, a hierarchy of values culminating at the undisputed apex

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<sup>4</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy 1792–1939* (London: Panther, 1969 edn), p. 47n; Ceadel, *Pacifism*, p. 3 *et seq.*; Martin Ceadel, *Thinking about Peace and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 4, 10, 101–2 (Ceadel's emphasis).

<sup>5</sup> Ceadel, *Pacifism*, pp. 31, 301; Nigel Young, 'War Resistance and the British Peace Movement since 1914', in Richard Taylor and Nigel Young (eds.), *Campaigns for Peace: British Peace Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 31, 37, 45–7 nn49 and 76–7.

of the State ideal, which could not possibly be produced through any other agency than war... At war, the individual becomes almost identical with his society... The State is intimately connected with war, for it is the organization of the collective community when it acts in a political manner, and to act in a political manner towards a rival group has meant, throughout all history – war.<sup>6</sup>

Socio-political pacifism has therefore been a major recruiting ground for anarchism, a pure pacifism being perceived as inadequate and war inextricably linked to the State, government, authority and hierarchy. So Aldous Huxley and Alex Comfort both converted first to pacifism before moving on immediately to advocacy of, respectively, radical decentralization and a thoroughgoing anarchism, Comfort coming to believe that ‘pacifism rests solely upon the historical theory of anarchism’.<sup>7</sup> By the time he announced his anarchism Read had also become a pacifist, agreeing with Comfort that ‘anarchism naturally implies pacifism’: ‘War will exist as long as the State exists. Only a non-governmental society can offer those economic, ethical and psychological conditions under which the emergence of a peaceful mentality is possible.’<sup>8</sup>

When Orwell wrote in 1946 for the *Manchester Evening News* on four major currents in contemporary social and political thought, his article on the pacifists, whom he described as ‘those who wish to get away from the centralized State

<sup>6</sup> Randolph S. Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals: Essays, 1915–1919* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), pp. 71–2.

<sup>7</sup> Alex Comfort, *Peace and Disobedience* (London: Peace News [1946]), p. 3 [reprinted in David Goodway (ed.), *Against Power and Death: The Anarchist Articles and Pamphlets of Alex Comfort* [hereafter APD] (London: Freedom Press, 1994), p. 80].

<sup>8</sup> Herbert Read, *Poetry and Anarchism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938), pp. 87, 120.

His most intense political involvement was to come at the very end of his life with his activism in the PPU, its pacifist affirmation of ‘the supreme value of the human person’ according with his most deeply held belief.<sup>17</sup>

The early months of the Second World War saw conflict between the quietest leadership of the PPU, largely moral in outlook, and socio-political pacifists believing that it should ‘be more active in stopping the war’ and employ direct action, and who formed the Forward Movement as a ginger group, advocating ‘a revolutionary movement on a non-violent basis’. Many of these radical dissidents of the Forward Movement moved straight on into anarchism and included John Hewetson and his companion Peta Edsall, Tony Gibson, Frederick Lohr and Laurie Hislam.<sup>18</sup> The most important member of the group was

<sup>17</sup> Eric Gill, *The Human Person and Society* (London: Peace Pledge Union, 1940), pp. 3, 22. MacCarthy, *Gill*, is the major biography, but Malcolm Yorke, *Eric Gill: Man of Flesh and Spirit* (London: Constable, 1981), is also useful, although both are inadequate on the politics (but see MacCarthy, *Gill*, esp. pp. 272–5, and Yorke, esp. pp. 95–8). Gill’s *Autobiography* peters out after the 1920s. Stanley Pierson, *British Socialists: The Journey from Fantasy to Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 226–32, is a rare treatment of Gill’s political evolution. See also Ceadel, *Pacifism*, pp. 281, 289–91, 295, 321; Peter Faulkner, *William Morris and Eric Gill* (London: William Morris Society, 1975). Eric Gill, *A Holy Tradition of Working* (Ipswich: Golgoonooza Press, 1983), is a useful sampling of Gill’s voluminous writings. For a negative assessment, there is Orwell’s review in 1944 of a posthumous book, *CWGO*, XVI, pp. 278–9.

<sup>18</sup> Ceadel, *Pacifism*, pp. 295–6, 299; Ceadel, *Thinking*, p. 162; N[icolas] W[alter], ‘Fifty Years: PPU and *Peace News*’, *Freedom*, June 1986; J[ohn] H[ewetson] in *War Commentary*, October 1940 (reprinted in [Vernon Richards (ed.)] *The Left and World War II: Selections from the Anarchist Journal ‘War Commentary’, 1939–1943* (London: Freedom Press, 1989), pp. 30–3); George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1986), p. 382; George Woodcock, *Letter to the Past: An Autobiography* (Don Mills, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982), pp. 239–40, 261; Albert Meltzer, *I Couldn’t Paint Golden Angels: Sixty Years of Commonplace Life and Anarchist Agitation* (Edinburgh and San Francisco: AK Press, 1996), p. 85; Vernon Richards, *A Weekend Photographer’s Portrait Gallery* (London: Freedom Press, 1999), p. 70; Vernon Richards,

never be abolished by those who profited by them and that “the mother of parliaments” was not an institution for righting wrongs ... but one for the promotion and preservation of whatever seemed most profitable to the owners of capital’.

He therefore concluded:

I must keep clear of *politics* – politics as the word is understood in our time and in what are called democratic countries. And I must keep clear of politicians – the gang of professional parliamentarians and town and county councillors.... It is all a confused business of ramps and rackets – pretended quarrels and dishonest commercial schemings, having no relation to the real interests of peoples, neither to their spiritual nor their material welfare, and conducted upon no principles other than momentary self-interest.<sup>15</sup>

In the course of the thirties Gill moved hard to the left and by the middle of the decade his advocacy of collective ownership of each industrial enterprise by its workers had caused him to revise his distributism in a compromise deserving emulation:

I believe in workers’ ownership of the means of production and distribution. I believe in the village blacksmith ... owning his own workshop and tools. I believe in the farmer [presumably a peasant proprietor] owning his own farm and implements.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Gill, *Autobiography*, pp. 144, 148–9, 259 (Gill’s emphasis).

<sup>16</sup> Walter Shewring (ed.), *Letters of Eric Gill* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), pp. 391–2. See also *ibid.*, pp. 357–60, 389–90, 401–3, 467–70.

and from the whole principle of government by coercion’, discussed only John Middleton Murry, Max Plowman and Wilfred Wellock in addition to the libertarians Tolstoy, Gandhi, Read, Huxley, Comfort and D.S. Savage. ‘The waging of war, and the preparation for war’, he concurred, anticipating *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, ‘make necessary the centralized modern state, which destroys liberty and perpetuates inequalities’. He concluded that the pacifists (and anarchists) have ‘rightly insisted that present-day society, even when the guns do not happen to be firing, is not peaceful, and they have kept alive the idea – somewhat neglected since the Russian Revolution – that the aim of progress is to abolish the authority of the State’.<sup>9</sup>

The distinguished letter-cutter, typographer and illustrator, Eric Gill, who was also a remarkable sculptor, was co-opted on to the National Council of the PPU in 1939 and later became a Sponsor, his pacifism deriving from his Christian anarchism. Two weeks before his death he informed Read: ‘I find it difficult to discover anything I don’t agree with [in *The Philosophy of Anarchism*] and in spite of the appearance to the contrary I am really in complete agreement with you about the necessity of anarchism, the ultimate truth of it, and its immediate practicability as syndicalism’ – and pointed out that his recent essay, ‘Ownership and Industry’, in which he had stressed that ‘work is the affair of the workers’ and asked ‘who shall decide, who have the right to decide, how work shall be organized but those who do it?’, was ‘simply on the same line of thought – i.e. syndicalism’.<sup>10</sup> Read, in the obituary appreciation published in *War Commentary* as ‘Eric Gill: Anarchist’, commented in turn

<sup>9</sup> Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell* [hereafter *CWGO*] (London: Secker & Warburg, 20 vols., 1998), XVIII, pp. 57, 66–9. See also *ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> University of Victoria, Victoria, BC: Read Archive, letter from Gill to Read, 31 October 1940; Eric Gill, *Sacred and Secular Etc* (London: J.M. Dent, 1940), p. 193.

that this was an essay he would ‘always recommend to people who want a first introduction to the principles of anarchism’ (an idiosyncratic choice, it should be said). What especially impressed Read was that Gill ‘belonged to that rare company of *integral* socialists, whose lives are a consequence of their socialism, their socialism a consequence of their lives’: he had, Read thought, managed to live like an anarchist.<sup>11</sup> Attempting in the year of his death to summarize ‘the work which I have chiefly done in my life’, Gill wrote that it was

to make a cell of good living in the chaos of the world. Lettering, type-designing, engraving, stone-carving, drawing – these things are all very well, they are means to the service of God and of our fellows and therefore to the earning of a living, and I have earned my living by them. But what I hope above all things is that I have done something towards re-integrating bed and board, the small farm and the workshop, the home and the school, earth and heaven.<sup>12</sup>

The most important event of his life had undoubtedly come in 1913 when, on his thirty-first birthday, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church; and thereafter he pioneered a series of Catholic craft communities at Ditchling Common, Capel-y-ffin and Pigotts, the last near to Seer Green, Buckinghamshire, where Read was living at the close of the thirties.

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Eric Gill: Anarchist’, *War Commentary*, February 1941, is reprinted in Herbert Read, *A One-Man Manifesto and Other Writings for Freedom Press*, ed. David Goodway (London: Freedom Press, 1994), esp. pp. 57, 60. This was extended as ‘Eric Gill’, in Herbert Read, *A Coat of Many Colours: Occasional Essays* (London: George Routledge, 1945), pp. 5–16.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Gill, *Autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), p. 282. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 157–8.

Gill was initially an uncomplicated Arts and Craftsman, the progeny of Ruskin and Morris, and in the 1920s and 1930s became a prolific writer of articles, pamphlets and books spread over a similar range of subjects as theirs: art, the crafts, industrialism, society and politics. He reiterated continually from 1934 that ‘the artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist’, a dictum appropriated from the Anglo-Tamil art historian and aesthetician, Ananda Coomaraswamy.<sup>13</sup> Yet although he had joined the Art Workers’ Guild and Fabian Society, after half-a-dozen years he resigned from them both, converted to Catholicism, and moved to distributism and the advocacy of private property. This may explain his saying to Read that ‘in spite of the appearance to the contrary I am really in complete agreement with you’; but it should be stressed that, while Read was indeed a declared anarchist communist and syndicalist, distributism had much in common with Proudhonian mutualism and American individualist anarchism.<sup>14</sup>

In his *Autobiography* Gill was to recall the first decade of the twentieth century as a period when ‘it was inevitable that we should seem to find in the socialist parties the only hope of reform’ and ‘we still hoped for salvation through parliamentary action’. But he gradually became aware of the ‘meanness and corruption... fraudulence and hypocrisy’ of ‘actual political life’ and developed into a vehement anti-parliamentarian and opponent of the existing political process:

It began to be clear that the hateful world of the man of business and its hateful cruelties would

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<sup>13</sup> Eric Gill, *Last Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1942), p. 55; and the epigraphs to Eric Gill, *Art: And a Changing Civilisation* (London: John Lane, Bodley Head, 1934). See also Fiona MacCarthy, *Eric Gill* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), pp. 98–9.

<sup>14</sup> For distributism, the crafts and Gill, see Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (n.p.: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 155–7.



suggested 1790 as the starting-date; and because, as he afterwards admitted, 'I was hard up', in August 1959 a contract was signed for 'a book on "Working-Class Politics, 1790–1921", to be "approximately 60,000 words in length"'.<sup>53</sup>

As early as November 1953 Thompson had planned:

As soon as my Morris is through the press ... to start work on a short history of the people of the West Riding (social and industrial) from about 1750 to the present day: this would take anything up to 10 years to complete, but it is something we need very much indeed in our tutorial class work, as a kind of companion volume to Cole & Postgate's 'Common People'.

In December 1955 he intended to apply for a Leverhulme Research Award in order to write this book, but over Christmas he mislaid the papers and missed the closing date; and his application twelve months later was unsuccessful. By then he was envisaging a study that was 'mainly nineteenth century' and was 'not a comprehensive work of detailed scholarship'. His Leverhulme Fellowship did not materialize until 1962–3 – at the very *end* of the writing of *The Making of the English Working Class*. But the outcome of the aborted and failed applications of the mid-fifties was a teaching programme reduced to half in the two years 1957–9, to allow him to 'devote extra time to research on aspects of the social and political history of the West Riding'.<sup>54</sup> The two

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<sup>53</sup> John Saville, *Memoirs from the Left* (London: Merlin Press, 2003), p. 119; MARHO, *op. cit.*, p. 14; Thompson, *Making*, p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Department of History file: letter to Norman Gash, 29 November 1953; School of Continuing Education Archive: letters to S.G. Raybould, 15 December 1955, 3 January [1956], 11 December [1956] 10 March [1957]; De-

to help and I don't think it's satisfactory to be just a sleeping partner.<sup>62</sup>

Goldman proceeded to ask Huxley for a statement to be read at a 'literary and musical evening' to raise funds for the SIA.<sup>63</sup> His reply was very far from what she anticipated.

To my mind, the urgent problem at the moment is to find a satisfactory technique for giving practical realization to the ideal of philosophic anarchism. If we are to have decentralization, if we are to have genuine self-government, if we are to be free from the tyranny of political and big-business bosses, then we must find some satisfactory method by which people can become economically independent, at any rate in large measure. I am trying to collect relevant information on this subject and I am convinced that the technique for realizing the libertarian ideal in practice could be formulated and would work perfectly well, if intelligent people were to desire this consummation and were to set their minds to it. Much is to be learned from the theoretical and practical work of Ralph Borsodi while certain contemporary trends of invention – Kettering's work on small Diesel power plants for domestic purposes, Abbott's [*sic*] work on a machine for making direct use of solar energy – point clearly to the possibility of realizing that economic independence which must be the material basis of a libertarian society. Borsodi has demonstrated that about two-thirds of all

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<sup>62</sup> GA, XXXI, letter of 28 January 1938 (printed in Aldous Huxley, *Selected Letters*, ed. James Sexton (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), p. 351).

<sup>63</sup> GA, VI, copy of letter of 15 February 1938.

production can actually be carried out more economically in small domestic or co-operative units than in large, highly centralized, mass-producing units. But so obsessed are modern men by the idea of centralization and mass production that they can think in no other terms. I feel strongly that this purely practical, material side of anarchism is the side that, in the immediate future, requires the most intensive study, together with practical application wherever possible.<sup>64</sup>

Goldman was aghast. She knew none of the names cited by Huxley and wrote desperately to Rudolf Rocker (in Crompond, New York State). Rocker was only well acquainted with Borsodi's ideas – indeed he had corresponded with Alexander Berkman about them – but did know about Kettering and, although he had not heard of Abbot, was familiar with principle of utilizing solar (and tidal) energy.<sup>65</sup> A month later Huxley was telling his brother Julian much the same:

... I'm ... collecting whatever information I can pick up in regard to the technique for giving a viable economic and social basis to philosophic anarchism – it being more and more clear that the

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<sup>64</sup> GA, VI, copy of letter of 15 March 1938.

<sup>65</sup> GA, XXVII A, letter from Rocker, 2 June 1938; letter to Rocker, 20 June 1938; letter to Huxley, 1 July 1938. Goldman's initial letter to Rocker, 4 May 1938, is partially printed in David Porter (ed.), *Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution* (New Paltz, NY: Commonground Press, 1983), p. 316. For Ralph Borsodi (1888–1977), see William H. Issel, 'Ralph Borsodi and the Agrarian Response to Modern America', *Agricultural History*, XLI (1961); Mildred J. Loomis, *Alternative Americas* (New York: Universe Books, 1982); and William O. Reichert, *Partisans of Freedom: A Study in American Anarchism* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976), pp. 520–5. Porter, pp. 326–7, is rightly impressed by this conjunction between old-style and contemporary anarchism, and also provides glosses on Abbot and Charles F. Kettering.

friendship, and her criticism. She has repeatedly laid aside her own work in order to answer enquiries or to read drafts of my material, until I have felt that parts of the book were less my own than a collaboration in which her guiding ideas have the main part.<sup>50</sup>

Thompson completed two chapters of *Tom Mann and His Times*, on 1890–2, which were to open the second volume. After Torr's death in late 1956 he remained 'committed to the Dona'; but in March (?) 1957 the Communist Party publisher, Lawrence & Wishart, withdrew from him 'the "commission"' since, in the words of her companion, Walter Holmes, 'judging by what I have learned, a public conflict between you & the Party is hardly to be avoided'.<sup>51</sup> This reads very oddly given the dramatic events that had already taken place in 1956 with the crisis in the CPGB. The two finished chapters eventually appeared in 1962 as the *Our History* pamphlet, *Tom Mann and His Times, 1890–92*, albeit maliciously 'massacred' by Joan Simon.<sup>52</sup>

When R.W. Harris wanted 'a textbook on the British labour movement, 1832 to 1945' for 'The Men and Ideas Series', intended for sixth-formers and university students, and which he was editing for Victor Gollancz, he approached John Saville. Saville declined, but recommended Thompson. Thompson

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<sup>50</sup> Torr Papers, CP/IND/TORR/0i/03; Dona Torr, *Tom Mann and His Times: Volume One (1856–1890)* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1956); *WMRR* (1955), p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Personal papers of John Saville: letters from Thompson to John Saville, n.d. [January (?) 1957], and to Randall Swingler, Ken Alexander and John Saville, n.d. [March (?) 1957]; Torr Papers, CP/IND/TORR/01/03: letter from James Klugmann to John Gollan, 13 December 1956. (I am exceptionally grateful to John Saville for unrestricted access to his archive, now in the Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull.)

<sup>52</sup> [E.P. Thompson], *Tom Mann and His Times, 1890–92 (Our History)*, nos. 26–7 [Summer/Autumn 1962]; Communist Party Archive, CP/Cent/Cult/8/4.

Maurice Cornforth, his publisher, he said, 'may have been, but he was extremely gentle in passing it on to me'. Yet even so soon after completion he acknowledged some self-indulgence: 'I am sure now that I *ought* to have cut it in the socialist section by about 100 pages.'<sup>48</sup> Thompson's *William Morris* is one of the most important books ever to have been written about Morris. Crucially, it reclaimed Morris for a socialism which is revolutionary, Marxist and highly original.

At this point it would have been natural for Thompson to have continued working on late-nineteenth-century labour history, even moving into the early-twentieth century; and indeed to some extent this is exactly what he did. The fine essay, 'Homage to Tom Maguire', devoted to the Socialist Leaguer who had appeared in *William Morris*, was written for the *Festschrift* for G.D.H. Cole, which in 1960 became his memorial volume.<sup>49</sup> It was also intended that Thompson should bring to publication the second volume of *Tom Mann and His Times*, covering the years 1890–1900 (including the formation and first years of the Independent Labour Party). He had been recruited, along with Christopher Hill (who was to bring in A.L. Morton) and John Saville, during the winter of 1954–5 to assist the ailing Dona Torr in completing the first two volumes (out of a projected four). Torr was the 'Communist scholar' to whom Thompson expressed deep indebtedness in the foreword to *William Morris* of January 1955:

From the conception of this book until its completion, [she] has given me her encouragement, her

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<sup>48</sup> People's History Museum, Manchester: Communist Party Archive, Dona Torr Papers, CP/IND/ TORR/01/03, letter from Thompson to James Klugmann, 3 January [1956]. The emphasis is Thompson's.

<sup>49</sup> Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History* (London: Macmillan, 1960). The essay is now reprinted in E.P. Thompson, *Persons and Polemics* (London: Merlin Press, 1994).

present system of production necessarily involves centralization and dictatorship, whatever the political context – communist, fascist or merely plutocratic. I was much interested, out East, in seeing Ralph Borsodi, whose work you probably know and who has set up what he calls a 'School of Living' for giving practical effect to his ideas about decentralization and small-scale production. One of the interesting things he has discovered, as a result of very careful observation of the subject from the point of view of a cost accountant (which was his profession) is that in 2/3 of the field of economics decentralized production in the home and the small workshop, using small power units and machines, is from 20% to 35% cheaper than centralized mass production. So that quite apart from any question of social and political desirability, decentralized production is in a large number of cases demonstrably more efficient, in contemporary circumstances, than mass production. Meanwhile, unfortunately, people are so much obsessed with the old idea that mass production is the only possible method, that economists and legislators go on working out more and more elaborate (and consequently more and more dictatorial) plans for the purpose of making a centralized mass-producing industry work. It's a bad and depressing business – like everything else.<sup>66</sup>

It is these ideas that William Propter expounds in *After Many a Summer* (1939) -Huxley's first book since *Ends and*

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<sup>66</sup> LAH, pp. 434–5. The School of Living was an educational centre established in 1936 as part of a group of small, self-sufficient homesteads at Suffern, New York. Nothing else is known about Huxley's visit there.

*Means* – citing Borsodi’s discovery (but without naming him) and arguing that Jeffersonian democracy was, and has to be, grounded on an independence from government and big business.<sup>67</sup> He has built a ‘system of trough-shaped reflectors, the tubes of oil heated to a temperature of four or five hundred degrees Fahrenheit; the boiler for raising steam, if you wanted to run a low-pressure engine; the cooking-range and water-heater, if you were using it only for domestic purposes’ and comments: ‘I’ve had two-horse power, eight hours a day... Not bad considering we’re still in January. We’ll have her working overtime all summer.’ This is ‘a gadget that Abbot of the Smithsonian has been working on for some time. A thing for making use of solar energy’ and is to run an electric generator. Charles Greeley Abbot, a leading astrophysicist and secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, had published his pioneering *The Sun and the Welfare of Man* in 1929.<sup>68</sup> Propter’s aspiration is to establish ‘a full-fledged community working under the new conditions’ and *in extenso* he points out:

‘Take a township of a thousand inhabitants; give it three or four thousand acres of land and a good system of producers’ and consumers’ co-operatives: it could feed itself completely; it could supply about two-thirds of its other needs on the spot; and it could produce a surplus to exchange for such things as it couldn’t produce itself. You could cover the State [of California] with such townships’.<sup>69</sup>

The first time that Huxley expressed Propter’s analysis and remedy in non-fictional publication was as late as 1946 (in the

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<sup>67</sup> Aldous Huxley, *After Many a Summer* (1939; London: Chatto & Windus, 1950 edn), pp. 131–3, 148. Cf. *LAH*, pp. 463–4.

<sup>68</sup> Huxley, *After Many a Summer*, pp. 130–1; Porter, p. 327.

<sup>69</sup> Huxley, *After Many a Summer*, pp. 144–5, 242.

as soon after Easter as I can’.<sup>44</sup> The book which enraged Thompson was Lloyd Eric Grey’s *William Morris: Prophet of England’s New Order* (1949), published in the USA in 1940 under, bizarrely, an entirely different name and title, and which he dissected in a lengthy article which appeared in *Arena* in the spring of 1951 (when it was said to have been written ‘nearly a year ago’).<sup>45</sup> Morris was far from a novel subject for a member of the CPGB, which viewed him as the outstanding intellectual exemplar of British Communism. Robin Page Arnot, in particular, had written his *William Morris: A Vindication* to mark the centenary, in 1934, of Morris’s birth.<sup>46</sup> Thompson’s PhD subject was correspondingly changed to ‘The Background and Origins of the Formation of the Independent Labour Party in Yorkshire and its Development between 1880 and 1900’, with Professor Guy Chapman of the Department of History still as supervisor (but this was ultimately abandoned, without a word of it produced, at the end of 1953).<sup>47</sup>

The ‘short booklet’ developed, of course, into the magisterial 908-page *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, which appeared in 1955. Early the following year he told an appreciative reader that he not been ‘under much pressure to cut it’.

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<sup>44</sup> MARHO, *op.cit.*, p. 13; University of Leeds, School of Continuing Education Archive: letter from Thompson to S.G. Raybould, 20 December [1950]. The emphases are Thompson’s.

<sup>45</sup> E.P. Thompson, ‘The Murder of William Morris’, *Arena*, April/May 1951. See also E.P. Thompson, ‘William Morris and the Moral Issues To-Day’, in *The American Threat to British Culture* (*Arena* special issue [1951]), and E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1955) [hereafter *WMRR* (1955)], pp. 741–6.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Bill Schwartz, ‘“The People” in History: The Communist Party Historians’ Group, 1946–56’, in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 77.

<sup>47</sup> Department of History file: letter from Chapman to Registrar, 6 July 1951; letter from Thompson to John Le Patourel, 10 October [1953]; letters from Thompson to Norman Gash, 29 November, 5 December 1953; letter from Gash to Thompson, 8 December 1953.

in 1946 with ten staff tutors and the formidable adult educator, S.G. (Sidney) Raybould, as its head. By 1950 the number of academic staff had leapt to thirty-four with appointments such as Thompson's. Raybould insisted on a policy of 'assimilation' of conditions of service and this he had implemented by 1953: with parity of status, salaries and titles between full-time extra-mural staff and their internal colleagues. The department was renamed the Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies (1952); a chair of Adult Education was instituted, with Raybould as the first occupant (1953); and the post of staff tutor disappeared, all academic staff becoming lecturers without organizational responsibilities.<sup>42</sup>

There must therefore have been significant pressure on Thompson to devote some of his time to research; and in June 1950 he was proposing to write a PhD thesis on 'The Influence of the Chartist Movement upon Adult Education in the Nineteenth Century', which was approved as 'Working-class Adult Education, 1840-60, with special reference to the West Riding', with the start later delayed until 'the beginning of session 1951-2'.<sup>43</sup> But by December 1950, having 'read one or two books so dreadful and ideological about Morris that I thought I *must* answer these', he was 'more or less committed to do a short booklet on William Morris for Lawrence and Wishart

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<sup>42</sup> Department of Adult Education and Extramural Studies, University of Leeds, *Twenty-One Years of Adult Education, 1946-67*; S.G. Raybould, 'Leeds University Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies', *Tutors' Bulletin of Adult Education*, no. 85 (January 1952). See also J.F.C. Harrison, *Learning and Living, 1790-1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 341-4.

<sup>43</sup> University of Leeds Archive, Thompson's Department of History file: letters from Thompson to Guy Chapman, 11 June, 20 August 1950; Chapman to Thompson, 19 June 1950; Chapman to Registrar, 29 June 1950; University of Leeds: Central Records, letter from Registrar to Thompson, 17 October 1950. (I am indebted to Hugh Cecil for preserving Thompson's Department of History file and handing me a copy.)

USA) in *Science, Liberty and Peace*, written at the request of the Christian-pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation and to which the royalties were assigned:

What is needed is a restatement of the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance – a restatement, not abstract and general, but fully documented with an account of all the presently available techniques for achieving independence within a localized, co-operative community. These techniques are of many kinds – agricultural techniques designed to supply the basic social unit, the family, with its staple food supply; mechanical techniques for the production of many consumer goods for a local market; financial techniques, such as those of the credit union, by means of which individuals can borrow money without increasing the power of the state or of commercial banks; legal techniques, through which a community can protect itself against the profiteer who speculates in land values, which he has done nothing whatever to increase.<sup>70</sup>

It is greatly to be regretted that it was Huxley's preoccupation with mysticism which had asserted itself, down to a renewed concern with human and social problems from the later 1940s,<sup>71</sup> and that *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945) was to be his substantial work of synthesis, not the fully documented account of all the techniques, including alternative technology, for achieving independence in a co-operative community, and which he had appeared to be contemplating in his letters

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<sup>70</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Science, Liberty and Peace* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1947), pp. 42-3; see also *ibid.*, pp. 21-4, and Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, pp. 158-61.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Bradshaw, 'The Flight from Gaza', pp. 25-6.

of spring 1938 to Emma Goldman and Julian Huxley, when he was gathering information with respect to the practical realization of philosophical anarchism. That could have been a book of major importance, a mid-twentieth-century updating of Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops*. As Rocker had commented to Goldman: 'A man like him can be of enormous use to our cause. Human liberation will probably come to us from a wholly different direction than we have usually assumed up until now. What we need are spirits without dogma ... people with gifts for observation and deep ethical consciousness.'<sup>72</sup> Yet what there is of Huxley's libertarian thinking is impressive enough, since it is an anticipation of the new kind of anarchism which has developed so strongly and influentially, particularly in Britain and the USA, since the 1960s. Huxley and Lewis Mumford, starting before the Second World War, can be considered as forerunners of the 'new anarchism'. Paul Goodman and Alex Comfort were the pioneers in the 1940s and 1950s. Colin Ward and, perhaps above all, Murray Bookchin in their very different ways exemplify this new anarchism of the late-twentieth century with its emphasis on biology, ecology, anthropology, alternative technology: as opposed to (in Comfort's words) 'Engels and economics'.<sup>73</sup>

George Woodcock complained on two occasions that 'the orthodox anarchists have never accepted [Huxley]' but it is really not surprising that they did not given Huxley's belief in the retention of some kind of state apparatus and – especially damning – in the need for world government, as well as his fail-

<sup>72</sup> GA, XXVII A, letter from Rocker, 2 June 1938. (I am indebted to Janet Biehl for assistance in the translation from the German.)

<sup>73</sup> University of Victoria, Victoria, BC: Read Archive, letter from Comfort to Read, 27 January 1951. Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 573, 577–8, also makes the connection between Bookchin and Huxley – on the basis of *Island* – and (more obviously) between Bookchin and Mumford.

ter his appointment at Leeds all his classes were in literature. Then, in 1951–2, he taught two history as well as two literature classes. The proportion of history to literature fluctuated over the following ten years (four history to one literature in 1954–5, for example). Yet in each of the three years 1959–62, the period when he was writing *The Making of the English Working Class*, he taught three literature classes and only one in history.<sup>40</sup>

During his first years in Yorkshire Thompson was not only active in the CPGB – he was 'politically important enough' to be elected to the Yorkshire District Committee – but was also deeply involved in the peace movement: he was chair of the Halifax Peace Committee, secretary of the Federation of West Yorkshire Peace Organizations, and editor of the monthly *Yorkshire Voice of Peace*. 'This,' he remembered, 'probably occupied half my time and professional teaching the other half.'<sup>41</sup>

The Department of Extra-Mural Studies for which Thompson was working professionally was new. It had been set up

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Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1999), was the first gathering, but included a booklet of 1983, *Infant and Emperor: Poems for Christmas*. For a rare discussion of Thompson's prose, see Perry Anderson, 'Diary', *London Review of Books*, 21 October 1993 (reprinted in Perry Anderson, *Spectrum* (London: Verso, 2005)).

<sup>40</sup> David Goodway, 'E.P. Thompson and the Making of *The Making of the English Working Class*', in Richard Taylor (ed.), *Beyond the Walls: 50 Years of Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Leeds, 1946–1996* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1996), pp. 133–4. For the adult education background of *The Making of the English Working Class*, see also Tom Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies: Adult Education, Cultural Politics and the 'English' Question* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997), chap. 7. Andy Croft, 'Walthamstow, Little Gidding and Middlesbrough: Edward Thompson the Literature Tutor', in Taylor, *Beyond the Walls* (a longer version of which appears in *Socialist History*, no. 8 (1995)), discusses Thompson as a teacher of literature. There is also Peter Searby and the Editors, 'Edward Thompson as a Teacher: Yorkshire and Warwick', in Rule and Malcolmson, pp. 1–17.

<sup>41</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', in Maurice Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978), p. 28; Bess, pp. 100–1; E.P. Thompson, 'Protest and Revise', *END Journal*, no. 37 (1989), pp. 36–7; MARHO, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Thompson's time at Cambridge was interrupted by three years' service as a tank commander in North Africa and Italy. On his return he took a first in Part One of the History Tripos and this, under wartime regulations, allowed him a degree; but he remained at Cambridge for another year (1946–7) of independent study in English literature and social history, mainly Elizabethan. In 1948 he was appointed as a staff tutor in the Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University of Leeds, and he now married Dorothy Sale (née Towers), who, as Dorothy Thompson, was also to become a respected historian, particularly of Chartism. They lived in Halifax and Thompson worked exclusively in adult education until 1965.<sup>37</sup>

When he applied for the post of staff tutor he offered to lecture not only in history but also in English literature, of which he wrote: 'I have no qualifications to lecture in this subject. However ... it has long been my chief interest, both in my attempts as a practising writer and as a field of study...'<sup>38</sup> It needs to be stressed that at this time – and indeed for much of the 1950s – Thompson saw himself primarily as a poet, a *Collected Poems* being eventually published in 1999. This goes far to account for the source of his superlative style, for he is one of the great English prose writers. He seems to be one of those, like Thoreau and his Cambridge near-contemporary, Comfort, 'whose best poetry is found in their prose – who can't stop playing with words'.<sup>39</sup> In the event, for the first three years af-

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*Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), chaps. 4–7 *passim*; Peter Conradi (ed.), *Iris Murdoch: A Writer at War: Letters and Diaries, 1939–45* (London: Short Books, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> For Dorothy Thompson's autobiographical reflections, see her *Outsiders: Class, Gender, Nation* (London: Verso, 1993), 'Introduction', as well as the interview with Sheila Rowbotham, 'The Personal and the Political', *NLR*, no. 200 (July/August 1993).

<sup>38</sup> University of Leeds: Central Records, Thompson's personnel file (to the existence of which I am grateful to Tom Steele for drawing my attention).

<sup>39</sup> Harold Drasdo, 'Alex Comfort's Art and Scope', *Anarchy*, no. 33 (November 1963), p. 355. E.P. Thompson, *Collected Poems* (Newcastle upon

ure to describe himself as an anarchist publicly.<sup>74</sup> Whereas he could inform a correspondent in 1937 that 'I quite agree that a complete change in the system of ownership is necessary – but I don't think such a change will do much good unless accompanied by decentralization, a reduction of the power of the state, self-government in every activity – in a word, anarchism in the sense in which Kropotkin uses the word',<sup>75</sup> the nearest he ever came to putting this in print was when, in the 1946 Introduction to *Brave New World*, he advocated a community in which 'economics would be decentralist and Henry-Georgian, politics Kropotkinesque and co-operative', as quoted earlier. 'Henry-Georgian', it may now be explained, presumably because Ralph Borsodi was a Georgeite or single-taxer. Despite these inadequacies, Woodcock is correct to insist that Huxley was consistent, from *Ends and Means* and *After Many a Summer* through *Science, Liberty and Peace* and *Themes and Variations* to *Brave New World Revisited* and *Island*, in maintaining an anarchist critique of existing society and advocating radical decentralization, the utilization of alternative energy sources, and the formation of self-governing, voluntarily co-operating communities. He also makes the plausible proposal that Huxley was a key mediating figure in the renewed popularity of anarchism among the youthful since the 1960s.<sup>76</sup>

During his years in America Huxley's output of books shrank markedly: from some twenty-seven titles between 1920 and 1937 to only seventeen between 1938 and his death in 1963. A final three-year contract expired in 1941 and thereafter a regular income as an advance on royalties was replaced by

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<sup>74</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism*, p. 400; Woodcock, *The Anarchist Reader*, p. 52. For world government see Huxley, *Science, Liberty and Peace*, pp. 48, 58, 61–2.

<sup>75</sup> *LAH*, p. 413.

<sup>76</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism*, p. 400–1; Woodcock, *The Anarchist Reader*, p. 51–2; Woodcock, *Beyond the Blue Mountains*, p. 215. For other important statements, see Huxley, *Science, Liberty and Peace*, pp. 55–60, and Huxley, *Themes and Variations*, pp. 52–5, 225–60.

royalty payments alone.<sup>77</sup> His first, but assured, historical work, *Grey Eminence* (1941), was followed by the even more successful *The Devils of Loudun* (1952). *The Art of Seeing* (1942), *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), *Science, Liberty and Peace* (1946) and *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) have already been mentioned. In this period there were only two collections of essays, *Themes and Variations* (1950) and *Adonis and the Alphabet* (entitled *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow in the States*) (1956), but they are to be counted among his very best books. His two brief accounts of his mescaline experiences, *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956), have been widely read, both titles being drawn of course from Blake but the first inspiring in turn the naming of Jim Morrison's *The Doors*. Collectively this diverse, accomplished body of work attracted considerable admiration. In contrast the fiction of a writer internationally renowned as a novelist excited increasing derision.

Whereas at first sight there is marked discontinuity between the early and later fiction, between the early and later Huxley, the talented anarchist critic D.S. Savage argued plausibly for continuity. Huxley himself freely confessed to having shared in his generation's adhesion to a philosophy of general meaninglessness, to having been an 'amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete',<sup>78</sup> but believed that all this had changed after the turning point of 1935 and his insistence on the need for non-attachment and a contemplative mysticism. For Savage the two divergent attitudes to life

originate in a common dislocation of being...  
Huxley's development follows not a spiral but  
an hour-glass pattern. The psychological structure  
underlying *Crome Yellow*, *Antic Hay*, and

<sup>77</sup> Bedford, II, p. 19.

<sup>78</sup> See Huxley, *Ends and Means*, pp. 269–70, 273–7, and Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 8.

Nehru's and other national leaders. So I grew up expecting governments to be mendacious and imperialist and expecting that one's stance ought to be hostile to government.'<sup>35</sup> Neighbours included John Masefield, Gilbert Murray and the archaeologist Arthur Evans. Edward junior's elder brother, Frank, was considered the clever one of the two and won a scholarship to Winchester and then Oxford. E.P. Thompson, in contrast, had to make do with Kingswood, the boarding-school for sons of the Methodist clergy, although his father had left the Methodist Church on his return to England. Thompson went up to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, in 1941 and promptly followed Frank in joining the CPGB. Frank, nowadays an increasingly well-regarded Second World War poet, died in 1944, at the age of 23, while working with the Bulgarian partisans – there remains, apparently, a Major Frank Thompson railway station, named in his honour, to the north of Sofia – and fraternal love, admiration and loyalty have been cited as factors in maintaining Thompson's commitment to Communism until as late as 1956.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. For the family background see Palmer, pp. 13–40; W.L. Webb, 'A Thoroughly English Dissident', *Guardian*, 30 August 1993 [reprinted in *Radical History Review*, no. 58 (Winter 1994)]; E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Edward Palmer Thompson, 1924–1993', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XC (1996), pp. 521–2; Michael Bess, *Realism, Utopia and the Mushroom Cloud: Four Activist Intellectuals and Their Strategies for Peace, 1945–1989* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 94–5; E.P. Thompson, *Writing by Candlelight* (London: Merlin Press, 1980), pp. 135–42; E.P. Thompson, 'Alien Homage': *Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. chap. 1 and pp. 174–5. The nearest thing to a biography of E.P. Thompson is Palmer, *op. cit.*; the fullest bibliography of his writings is in John Rule and Robert Malcolmson (eds.), *Protest and Survival: The Historical Experience: Essays for E.P. Thompson* (London: Merlin Press, 1993), pp. 417–21.

<sup>36</sup> For Frank Thompson see T.J.T. and E.P.T. (eds.), *There Is a Spirit in Europe...: A Memoir of Frank Thompson* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947); E.P. Thompson, *Beyond the Frontier: The Politics of a Failed Mission: Bulgaria 1944* (London: Merlin Press, 1997); Frank Thompson, *Selected Poems*, ed. Dorothy and Kate Thompson (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2003); Peter J. Conradi,



On the other hand, it has been commented that ‘it is now commonplace to argue the influence of Morris on Thompson: the relationship figures centrally in a virtual industry of Thompson commentary’.<sup>33</sup> This seems doubly exaggerated. Whatever the remainder of this chapter is contributing to isn’t yet an ‘industry’ and the relationship between Morris and Thompson is still imperfectly understood, despite Thompson’s constant insistence on the influence of Morris (as well as Marx and Blake) in his own extensive writings and several important interviews. I propose to focus on three matters: how Morris came to ‘seize’ Thompson;<sup>34</sup> how it was Morris who enabled Thompson to revise his Marxism radically, formulate his mature political philosophy and thereby proceed to the fundamental, organizing innovation of *The Making of the English Working Class*; and how Blake was a lifelong passion and subject of the posthumously published masterpiece, *Witness against the Beast*.

Edward Palmer Thompson was born in 1924, the son of Edward John Thompson, who had been a Methodist educational missionary in India and was married to Theodosia (Theo) Jesup, an American Methodist missionary whom he had met in Lebanon while serving as a chaplain in the First World War. In 1923 they settled at Boars Hill, just outside Oxford, where Edward senior had been appointed Lecturer in Bengali and ultimately became a Fellow of Oriel College. In his day a well-known man of letters – poet, novelist and translator of Rabindranath Tagore – he was to be an active supporter of the Indian National Congress and Gandhi and Nehru were visitors to the family home. ‘My father – both my parents, but my father in particular – was a very tough liberal,’ their son was to recall: ‘He was a continuous critic of British imperialism, a friend of

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*Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), pp. 276–80 (see also p. 109); information of Dorothy Thompson.

<sup>33</sup> Bryan D. Palmer, *E.P. Thompson: Objections and Oppositions* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 58.

<sup>34</sup> MARHO, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

*Those Barren Leaves* becomes modified as the novelist’s dissatisfaction with his non-committal relationship to life draws him towards a closer engagement, only to reassert itself with finality as he crosses over into a yet further detachment which is the obverse of the earlier attitude, and which reinforces its pronounced bias towards the impersonal, the non-human.

He maintained:

The novelist of futility, undergoing in mid-career a period in which the potentiality of meaning seemed for a time to offer itself – a potentiality accompanied by a realization of love and the value of human personality – has crossed over into a positive accentuation of futility accompanied by a positive doctrine of non-attachment and impersonality.<sup>79</sup>

Huxley’s novels, early and late, are pervaded with a distaste for the physical world, a disgust above all with sex, despite his persistent fascination with it, and, as we now know, his considerable appetite for heterosexual but emotionless affairs in which the bisexual Maria indulged him.<sup>80</sup> His fiction lacks human feeling, and is incapable of handling emotion. He himself was locked into a world of books, knowledge and ideas, and

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<sup>79</sup> D.S. Savage, *The Withered Branch: Six Studies in the Modern Novel* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950), pp. 131, 155. Savage’s chapter on Huxley originally appeared as D.S. Savage, ‘Aldous Huxley and the Dissociation of Personality’, in B. Rajan (ed.), *The Novelist as Thinker [Focus Four]* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1947), pp. 9–34. D.S. Savage, ‘Aldous Huxley: A Moralists’ Progression’, *NOW*, no. i (1943), is an earlier essay.

<sup>80</sup> Bedford, I, pp. 294–6; Murray, chap. 11. See also Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell [hereafter CWGO]* (London: Secker & Warburg, 20 vols., 1998), XX, pp. 52, 203; and the perceptive obituary in *The Times*, 25 November 1963.

appears to have been an emotional cripple: it will be recalled that during the writing of *Eyeless in Gaza* he had confessed to 'my besetting sin, the dread and avoidance of emotion'.<sup>81</sup> His family background together with the traumatic losses and near-blindness of 1908–14 render all this entirely explicable; yet any significant novelist – certainly a major novelist – requires an upbringing and formative experiences very different indeed.

There are five American novels, their publication becoming increasingly infrequent: *After Many a Summer* (1939), *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944), *Ape and Essence* (1948), *The Genius and the Goddess* (1955) and *Island* (1962). For Thomas Merton, scarcely a worldly critic (he was to take his vows as a Trappist monk the following year), *After Many a Summer*'s Mr Propter is 'the dullest character in the whole history of the English novel', and he rightly complained that Propter's 'interminable philoso-phizings', which constitute nearly a third of the book, are 'allowed to impede the movement of the story and to spoil the effect of the whole plan'. *Ape and Essence*, the powerful yet undeniably crude vision of a California devastated by nuclear and bacteriological warfare, was privately judged by Orwell to be 'awful'. Of the final novel Frank Kermode wrote: 'Reviewers ought to watch their superlatives, but *Island*, it is reasonable to say, must be one of the worst novels ever written ... it is permissible to hope that this is [Huxley's] last novel.' Huxley had not so much lost his skill for writing fiction as, in Kermode's opinion, 'lost interest in fiction'.<sup>82</sup> Merton's advice had been that Huxley should 'work in the medium in which he is really good: the Essay', and Kermode equally praised the essays,<sup>83</sup> whereas in the novels a single character's lengthy – indeed 'interminable' – monologues by means of which Huxley preaches at his readers had supplanted the fictional tension

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Heard, 'Poignant Prophet', p. 53; *CWGO*, XX, p. 52.

<sup>82</sup> Watt, pp. 323, 334, 453–4.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 324, 441–3, 454.

he was undoubtedly the principal theoretician – Thompson had flung himself into the nuclear disarmament movement. In the preface to the 1980 edition of *The Making of the English Working Class* he commented that 'looking back, I am puzzled to know when and how the book got itself written, since in 1959–62 I was also heavily engaged in the work of the first New Left, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and so on'. As he complained to Samuel in December 1961:

I have also SIX CLASSES, plus additional teaching for hospital administrators (NINE classes this week) plus being on four Department Committees, plus three children who keep having Guy Fawkes and birthdays, plus a miraculous growth of YCND [Youth CND] and CND in Halifax this past two months – which after so many dead years we can't just ignore (from nought to 150 for YCND in two months!) – plus the correspondence of Chairing a Board [of *New Left Review*] you may have heard of. My only affinity to Marx is that I get boils on my neck.<sup>31</sup>

When E.P. Thompson was asked in 1976 which thinkers were his 'chief historical forebears or inspirations', he replied: 'Vico, Marx, Blake, Morris – the last two showing how English I am.' While at Cambridge he had read Vico's *Autobiography* in the English translation of 1944 with an informal study group of Communist students, but was only to write about Vico on one occasion and the influence has gone largely unremarked.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1980), p. 14; letter to Ralph Samuel, 1 December [1961] (now in the closed Thompson Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, and for a copy of which I am indebted to Dorothy Thompson).

<sup>32</sup> MARHO: The Radical Historians Organization, *Visions of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, n.d.), p. 18; E.P. Thompson, *The*

The *ULR* group had been close to the DAC, while the *New Left Review* initially supported the Committee of 100, whose leaflets were inserted in its pages and a member of which, Alan Lovell, participated in a long and prominent interview about direct action and civil disobedience (although he had by then resigned from the *NLR* board). Nicolas Walter, a contributor to the *ULR*, was invited to write 'Damned Fools in Utopia' about the Committee for the *New Left Review*. Also the *University Libertarian* advertised in the *ULR*. But the most strikingly libertarian feature was the stress placed on industrial and participatory democracy, Denis Butt, a former Shipley woolsorter who had won a mature scholarship to Oxford, writing a notable article on workers' control.<sup>29</sup> As Peter Worsley was to recall:

Many of the key ideas of the early New Left were...revivals of older socialist traditions from Robert Owen to the Guild Socialists. The work initiated...drew upon classic socialist ideas about the need for self-rule by the producers themselves, rather than rule by politicians and technocrats. Running through was the theme of the emancipation of human capacities. For us democracy meant not just the ballot box but participation in decision-making at all levels, not just at work or at the level of national institutions but in all spheres of everyday life.<sup>30</sup>

Besides making a key organizational contribution to the formation of the British New Left – of which also, in its early years,

<sup>29</sup> 'Direct Action?', *NLR*, no. 8 (March-April 1961); Nicolas Walter, 'Men Only', *Universities and Left Review*, no. 7 (Autumn 1959), pp. 55–7; Denis Butt, 'Workers' Control', *NLR*, no. 10 (July-August 1961). See also Denis Butt, 'Men and Motors', *NLR*, no. 3 (May-June 1960). Taylor, pp. 182–4, 334–6, provides overviews of relations between the New Left and direct-action nuclear disarmament.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Worsley, 'Non-alignment and the New Left', in Archer *et al.*, p. 88.

and give-and-take between the rival ideas of different characters. In *Eyeless in Gaza* this sermonizing is confined to Anthony Beavis's diary, which is integrated into the novel by being cut up into fifteen brief chapters scattered throughout. In contrast the inclusion, in the contemporaneous selection of Huxley's writings for Everyman's Library, of the lengthy 'Diary of Anthony Beavis' intact (under, bizarrely, the heading of 'Stories') suggests that this was his preferred version.<sup>84</sup> But the aesthetic considerations behind dispersing the diary in *Eyeless in Gaza* pay off handsomely in fictional terms; and it is such considerations which are entirely lacking in the succeeding novels.

*Island*, in contradistinction to *Brave New World* and *Ape and Essence*, equally nightmarish in their different ways, is Huxley's utopia, his long-deliberated depiction of the good society and belated vision of the practical realization of 'philosophic anarchism'. Indeed *Island* represents the first fully realized libertarian utopia since Morris's *News from Nowhere*, although Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* was soon to follow in 1975. *Island* was a book that meant a great deal to Huxley who regarded it as a serious contribution to social thought. He viewed it as 'a kind of pragmatic dream.... And yet, if we weren't all so busy trying to do something else, we *could*...make this world a place fit for fully human beings to live in.'<sup>85</sup> The critics were divided and those who did not like the book were exceedingly hostile.<sup>86</sup> His brother Julian recalled that Huxley was 'saddened and upset by the incomprehension of so many of the reviewers, who treated it as a not very successful work of fiction, and science fiction at that'; and his second wife, Laura, that he was 'appalled ... that what he wrote in *Island* was not taken seriously ... each one of the ways of living he described in *Island*

<sup>84</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Stories, Essays, and Poems* (London: J.M. Dent, 1937), pp. 153–89.

<sup>85</sup> *LAH*, p. 944.

<sup>86</sup> Dunaway, *Huxley in Hollywood*, p. 366. See Watt, pp. 29–30, 446–55, for some examples.

was not a product of his fantasy, but something that had been tried in one place or another, some of them in our own everyday life'.<sup>87</sup> By the end of the decade, however, Theodore Roszak judged *Island* as 'cluttered with brilliant communitarian ideas and insights' and to have 'had great influence among its young readers'; and Sybille Bedford states that it was 'to reach a wide public'.<sup>88</sup> Even Kermode admitted: 'Much of *Island*, the sermonizing in fact, has great interest...' For Cyril Connolly, an old admirer but who had not been chary of being critical: 'It deserves to rank among the true philosophical novels where real people act and are acted upon and discuss at the same time problems which engross us all...';<sup>89</sup> and an outstanding novelist of a later generation, Anthony Burgess, considered: 'We cannot deny its brilliance, its learning, its honest attempt to answer the big human question.'<sup>90</sup> For others '*Island* exemplifies Huxley's particular contribution to twentieth-century letters'.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Julian Huxley, *Aldous Huxley*, pp. 23–4; Laura Archera Huxley, *This Timeless Moment: A Personal View of Aldous Huxley* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 308. For a review by an anthropologist, discussing the novel on Huxley's terms, see Geoffrey Gorer, 'There is a Happy Land...', *Encounter*, no. 106 (July 1962), pp. 83–6. Much of the thinking contemporary to *Islands* immediate gestation appears in the lectures of 1959 published posthumously as Huxley, *The Human Situation*.

<sup>88</sup> Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), p. 300; Bedford, II, p. 330. Cf. Dunaway, *Huxley in Hollywood*, p. 364.

<sup>89</sup> Watt, pp. 448–9, 454.

<sup>90</sup> From his *Yorkshire Post* review, quoted on the cover of Aldous Huxley, *Island* (Harmondsworth: Penguin edn, 1964). Burgess included *Island* in his *Ninety-Nine Novels: The Best in English since 1939* (London: Allison & Busby, 1984), but that is not as impressive as it might be given his choice also of *After Many a Summer and Ape and Essence* (pp. 24, 41, 85).

<sup>91</sup> David Bradshaw, 'Aldous Huxley (1894–1963)' [the admirable, unpaginated introduction that prefaces all the Flamingo editions of Huxley's works: e.g., *Point Counter Point* (London: Flamingo, 1994)]. *Island* has attracted astonishingly little attention, but see Marshall, *Demanding*, pp. 572–3; Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 226, 286, 408–9, 420; and most interesting of all, the

to include Ken Alexander, Michael Barratt Brown, Mervyn Jones, Doris Lessing, Ralph Miliband, Peter Worsley and Randall Swingler (an editor of *Left Review* in the thirties and significantly older than the others). Several months before the first issue of the *New Reasoner*, the *Universities and Left Review* (*ULR*) had appeared, edited by four recent Oxford graduates, Stuart Hall, Gabriel Pearson, Ralph (Raphael) Samuel and Charles Taylor. When the *ULR* constructed its editorial board among its members were Alasdair MacIntyre, Alan Lovell and Michael Barratt Brown (the formal link between the two journals). After ten issues of the *New Reasoner* and seven of the *ULR*, they merged in 1960 to become the *New Left Review*, the composite board of which was also to bring in Denis Butt, Lawrence Daly, Paul Hogarth, John Rex, Dorothy Thompson and Raymond Williams.

From 1962 a second New Left was to emerge when Perry Anderson took over the editorship of the *New Left Review*, re-shaping it as much more internationalist and often dauntingly theoretical, committed to introducing the thinkers of what he was to call 'Western Marxism' to an English readership, both in the journal and through the publishing house of New Left Books, eventually renamed Verso. This New Left was far from libertarian, the only survivor of the old guard on the new editorial group being Pearson. The traditions of the first New Left were continued in *The Socialist Register*, edited annually from 1964 by Miliband and Saville and brought out by Merlin Press, which was to become Thompson's principal publisher.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> The best work on the New Left is Lin Chun, *The British New Left* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993). There is also Michael Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals after Stalin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995). For Dorothy Thompson's very considerable reservations about both books, see her 'On The Trail of the New Left', *NLR*, no. 219 (September–October 1996). Robin Archer *et al.* (eds.), *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On* (London: Verso, 1989), is a interesting, very useful collection. For *The Socialist Register*, see Marion Kozak, 'How It All Began: A Footnote to History', in Leo Panitch (ed.), *The Socialist Register* igg5.

decades after the Russian Revolution most Marxists in whatever part of the world had subjected themselves to thought control from Moscow as they joined – and were generated by – the national Communist Parties. The only significant exceptions were, from the 1930s, the minuscule groups of Trotskyists, purged in the Soviet Union and Spain and hounded everywhere they were active. From 1956 all this changed with large numbers of former Communists remaining Marxists and, while Trotskyism was one of the gainers, most were not prepared to submit to its equally dogmatic and authoritarian sects, relishing instead their freedom as independent, dissident Marxists.<sup>26</sup>

In the turmoil following the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956 and the publication of Khrushchev's 'secret letter' in the West, E.P. Thompson and John Saville, then lecturers at the Universities of Leeds and Hull respectively, had co-edited the *Reasoner*, a mimeographed discussion journal, the first unauthorized publication ever to have been circulated within the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) since its foundation in 1920. The masthead carried a quotation from Marx: 'To leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality.' After three issues and the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution the two men resigned from the Party – along with around 7,000 other people.<sup>27</sup> In 1957 Thompson and Saville began to bring out the *New Reasoner*, with an editorial board that was

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*An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), chap. 7, although this is a study concerned disproportionately with the American experience.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), pp. 201–2, 210–11.

<sup>27</sup> Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1959), pp. 194 *et seq.*; John Saville, 'The Twentieth Congress and the British Communist Party', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1976*; John Saville, 'Edward Thompson, the Communist Party and 1956', in Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1994*.

Huxley's utopia is Pala, an island in the Indian Ocean, lying close to Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula (this was a part of the globe with which he had some familiarity from the journey written up as *Jesting Pilate* [1926]).<sup>92</sup> In the 1840s a Scottish doctor had been summoned by the dying Raja of Pala, whom he was able to save by inspirationally adopting James Esdaile's use of hypnosis to produce anaesthesia (a technique also employed by Callimachus, the Greek physician to Nero, in Comfort's *Imperial Patient* [1987]). Dr MacPhail and the Raja proceeded to reform Palanese society and improve its agriculture by utilizing the best both of Western science and rationalism and of Eastern religion and culture:

If the king and the doctor were ... teaching one another to make the best of both worlds – the Oriental and the European, the ancient and the modern – it was in order to help the whole nation do the same. To make the best of both worlds – what am I saying? To make the best of *all* the worlds – the worlds already realized within the various cultures and beyond them, the worlds of still unrealized potentialities.<sup>93</sup>

A century later Pala is still a monarchy and has a government and parliament but it is also, and more importantly, a federation of self-governing units, whether economic, geographical or professional. We are told that the Palanese 'found it quite easy to pass from mutual aid in a village community to streamlined co-operative techniques for buying and selling and profit-sharing and financing'.<sup>94</sup> The tyranny of the tradi-

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controversial French novelist, Michel Houellebecq, in *Atomized* (1999; London: Vintage, 2001), chap. 10.

<sup>92</sup> There has been some lazy confusion about Pala's location, but see Huxley, *Island*, pp. 113, 135, 281, and also *LAH*, p. 791.

<sup>93</sup> Huxley, *Island*, p. 134.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

tional family, nuclear as well as extended, has been overcome by building on the Palanese foundations of 'Buddhist ethics and primitive village communism'; and Mutual Adoption Clubs integrate each individual into a vast extended family of between fifteen and twenty-five couples and all *their* relatives. Sexuality is not merely free and guiltless but fundamental to the Mahayana Buddhism of the Palanese: *maithuna* is the yoga of love – 'When you do *maithuna*, profane love is sacred love' – and therefore lovemaking is a form of enlightenment and contemplation. This entails that *maithuna* is part of the school curriculum.<sup>95</sup> The soma of *Brave New World* has become the consciousness-heightening mo/bha-medicine, producing 'boundless compassion, fathomless mystery... meaning... [and] inexpressible joy'.<sup>96</sup> There is no army. The island has avoided industrialization by always choosing to adapt its economy and technology to human beings, not the human beings to 'somebody else's economy and technology'.<sup>97</sup> There is no division of labour between mental and manual workers: each professor or government official enjoys a couple of hours of daily agricultural labour. The teaching of and research into the sciences of life and mind – biology, ecology, psychology- are emphasized at the expense of physics and chemistry. Ecology is central to the social and global perspectives of the Palanese:

Never give children a chance of imagining that anything exists in isolation. Make it plain from the very first that all living is relationship... 'Do as you would be done by' applies to our dealings with all kinds of life in every part of the world. We shall be permitted to live on this planet only for as long as we treat all nature with compassion and

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77–82 (Huxley's emphasis).

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

whether it is possible for a person who has not gone a considerable part of the way in reorienting his domestic relations – father-daughter, mother-son, husband-wife – on the basis of equality, to attempt to reorient his social or employment relations according to the same principle.

In order to achieve freedom and obedience to the autonomous internal restraints of conscience, it is necessary not only to stand up to power, it is necessary also for man to have overcome his own appetite for power....<sup>24</sup>

Exactly concurrent with the mobilization of the nuclear disarmament movement, although with completely unrelated origins, was the emergence of the British New Left, with its members and journals giving vigorous support to the larger and broader movement against nuclear weapons. It needs to be emphasized that the New Left in Britain not only predated that in the USA by several years; it was also much less student-based, with university teachers and established, albeit young, intellectuals taking the lead, and also much less anarchic, while possessing important libertarian characteristics.<sup>25</sup> For almost four

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8. See also two other pieces by Sampson: *The Bramble of Power* (Corinth, VT: Black Mountain Press, n.d.) [an article reprinted from the *Nation*, 16 December 1968]; and 'The Will to Power: From Reason of State to Reason of the Heart', in Alex Comfort and Ronald Sampson, *War, Delinquency and Power* (London: Peace Pledge Union, 1990). A brief obituary appeared in the *University of Bristol Newsletter*, 18 November 1999. The DAC and Committee of 100 were also central in the formation of Stuart Christie's anarchism, although he was to become one of the most prominent modern advocates of violent action (see his *My Granny Made Me an Anarchist: The Christie File: Part 1, 1946–1964* (Hastings: Christiebooks, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2002), pp. 121–7, 144–54, and *Granny Made Me an Anarchist* (London: Scribner, 2004), pp. 57–64, 76–9).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. xi, 5–6, 541–2, 659. See also Nigel Young,

Sampson was to participate fully in the nuclear disarmament movement and, working at the University of Bristol, became a member of the West of England Committee of 100. Like Read, Comfort and Carter, he came to perceive that pacifism and anarchism are interdependent, although in his case this led to an ardent Tolstoyism, the last of his three books being *Tolstoy: The Discovery of Peace* (1973). And it was hearing as a school-boy an inspirational lecture by Sampson, whom he describes as 'the most articulate and beguiling Tolstoyan of contemporary times', that led A.N. Wilson to learn Russian and eventually write an important -even if unlibertarian - biography of Tolstoy (as well as to edit an anthology of the religious writings).<sup>22</sup> As Sampson argued in his PPU pamphlet, *The Anarchist Basis of Pacifism*, later reissued as *Society without the State*:

In order to abolish war, it is certainly necessary to refuse to take part in it, but it is also necessary to live in a way that is conducive to peace and not to war. The way of life that leads to war is one that is based on competition in wealth-getting in order to secure primacy of power and prestige over others...<sup>23</sup>

Sampson's first book, *Progress in the Age of Reason: The Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (1956), was an able but conventional study. In contrast his next, *Equality and Power* (1965) - or, as it was perhaps more appropriately titled in the USA, *The Psychology of Power* - was a very novel, Tolstoyan exploration of power, paying especial attention to sexual inequality and authoritarian relationships within the family. He was, in fact, to advocate a revolution in everyday life, doubting

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<sup>22</sup> A.N. Wilson, *Tolstoy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), pp. ix, 165.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Sampson, *The Anarchist Basis of Pacifism* (London: Peace Pledge Union [1970]), pp. 17-18.

intelligence. Elementary ecology leads straight to elementary Buddhism.<sup>98</sup>

In *Island* Huxley undeniably overloads the mystical religion - and this after his publishers had, for the first time ever, insisted on cuts<sup>99</sup> - but Pala is a society in which I personally would be delighted to live.

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

<sup>99</sup> Bedford, II, p. 282; Dunaway, *Huxley in Hollywood*, pp. 365, 432 1145.

## 11. Alex Comfort

At first sight it may seem bathetic to follow a chapter on Aldous Huxley with a discussion of Alex Comfort, that theirs is a grossly unequal proximity: Huxley one of the most admired and widely read novelists of the first half of the twentieth century and Comfort a mere sexologist. Yet although the brilliant dystopian *Brave New World* continues to impress, Huxley's formerly vastly admired novels of the 1920s – *Crome Yellow*, *Antic Hay*, *Those Barren Leaves*, *Point Counter Point* – hold up much less well. On the other hand, Comfort's achievements as a pioneering scientist and acclaimed creative writer have been obscured by the extraordinary international success of *The Joy of Sex*; and a reassessment of his best novels – *The Power House* and *On This Side Nothing* – and most distinctive poetry – *The Signal to Engage* and *And All But He Departed* – is much overdue.

Huxley and Comfort also have a great deal in common. They were both polymaths. They had a background and/or interests in biology and medicine. They both became active pacifists and stalwarts of the Peace Pledge Union (PPU). For both it was their pacifism that led them to anarchism. Although neither were socialists, both were influential in the development of a new anarchism of the late-twentieth century, grounded not in class conflict and economics, but in biology, psychology, ecology and alternative technology. Both men had a more than usual interest in sexuality (or certainly were not afraid to express it). Both emigrated to California, where each was to write on mystical and religious experience. And while Comfort never shared Huxley's interest in drugs,

in contrast to 'the liberal-democratic state'.<sup>19</sup> Since then she has moved beyond, without renouncing, her earlier views in two major, very rich books, *The Problem of Political Obligation* (1979) and *The Sexual Contract* (1988), informed negatively by the modern revival of contract theory and positively by second-wave feminism. Although she rejects the anarchism of William Godwin and Robert Paul Wolff, objecting to their individualism and philosophical scepticism, she is convinced that 'the political theory of anarchism is ... a theory of a specific form of sociopolitical organization that is, as it must be, ordered and rule-governed', and continues to propose 'a non-statist political community' consisting of 'a multiplicity of political associations'.<sup>20</sup>

For another academic specializing in political theory, but twenty years older than Carter and Pateman, it was 'the deliberate and calculated aggression of the British Government (and others) against Egypt' in the Suez Crisis of 1956 that had 'the cathartic effect of enabling [him] to question anew basic assumptions about the nature and cause of war'.<sup>21</sup> Ronald

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<sup>19</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 111.

<sup>20</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critique of Liberal Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985 edn), pp. 141, 174. See also Robert Graham, 'The Role of Contract in Anarchist Ideology', in David Goodway (ed.), *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 168–73; Barbara Sullivan, 'Carole Pateman: Participatory Democracy and Feminism', in April Carter and Geoffrey Stokes (eds.), *Liberal Democracy and Its Critics: Perspectives in Contemporary Political Thought* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); and the reviews by Graham Baugh of *The Problem of Political Obligation*, *The Disorder of Women* and *The Sexual Contract*, in *Our Generation*, XIX, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1987–8), pp. 20iA–i3A, and XXIII, no. 1 (Winter 1992), pp. 110–22. For some autobiography there is Carole Pateman, 'An Unfinished Political Education', in Madge Dawson and Heather Radi (eds.), *Against the Odds: Fifteen Professional Women Reflect on Their Lives and Careers* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1984), pp. 38–55.

<sup>21</sup> R.V. Sampson, *Tolstoy: The Discovery of Peace* (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp. vii–viii.



Carole Pateman was a member of the Oxford Committee of 100 while an assistant in the original Oxfam shop and an anarchist throughout the 1960s – and she says that ‘the critique of subordination which runs throughout my work has its genesis in anarchist political theory’.<sup>17</sup> She went to Ruskin College as a mature student, took degrees at Oxford University and has since enjoyed a distinguished career at the Universities of Sydney and California, Los Angeles. In her first book, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970), she examined the work of three theorists of participatory democracy – Rousseau, to whose ideas she has always felt closest, John Stuart Mill and G.D.H. Cole – and the empirical evidence concerning participation in the workplace as well as the Yugoslav experience of worker’s self-management. Attacking the elitist advocates of liberal democracy, she concluded:

When the problem of participation and its role in democratic theory is placed in a wider context than that provided by the contemporary theory of democracy, and the relevant empirical material is related to the theoretical issues, it becomes clear that neither the demands for more participation, nor the theory of participatory democracy itself, are based ... on dangerous illusions or an outmoded and unrealistic theoretical foundation. We can still have a modern, viable theory of democracy which retains the notion of participation at its heart.<sup>18</sup>

In an essay of 1975 she was urging the feasibility of ‘a political community composed of a multiplicity of participatory or self-managed units’, or ‘a self-managing democracy’,

<sup>17</sup> Email from Carole Pateman to the writer, 11 August 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 111.

it is otherwise the congruities that are striking, similarities which link the personalities and careers of two maverick, very atypical Englishmen.<sup>1</sup>

Alex Comfort was born in Edmonton, Middlesex, in 1920, the son of Alexander Comfort and his wife, Daisy (née Fenner), and was brought up in New Barnet. Both parents came from working-class families yet, upwardly mobile, they took degrees at Birkbeck College, his father becoming Assistant Education Officer at the London County Council, and his mother a teacher of modern languages. Their son won a scholarship in 1932 to a public school, Highgate, which he attended as a day-boy and where he was a classicist and a prodigiously successful pupil. A contemporary was Tony Crosland, the future author of *The Future of Socialism* and Labour politician, and Mrs Comfort and Mrs Crosland were in competition as to which of their clever sons would win the most prizes, Comfort recalling that he always required ‘a wheelbarrow’ to collect the books he was awarded.<sup>2</sup> During the summer of 1936 he went on a six weeks’ voyage with his father to Argentina and Senegal, his account of which, *The Silver River* (1938), was published commercially

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of these similarities, see David Goodway, ‘Aldous Huxley and Alex Comfort: A Comparison’, in H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight (eds.), *To Hell with Culture’: Anarchism and Twentieth-Century English Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 111–25.

<sup>2</sup> The details of Comfort’s life in this chapter are dependent on the only book so far written about him, Arthur E. Salmon, *Alex Comfort* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1978); Tom Arie’s entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; and correspondence and conversations with the present writer. The nearest he ever came to autobiography is a poem in Alex Comfort, *Mikrokosmos* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), pp. 38–42. Robert D. Callahan, ‘Alexander Comfort: A Bibliography in Process’, *West Coast Review*, III, no. 3 [Winter 1969], pp. 48–67, is an ambitiously comprehensive bibliography down to 1967; but the listing by Derek Stanford in D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Contemporary Novelists* (London: St James Press, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, 1986), pp. 198–9, is also extremely useful. For the Croslands, see also Susan Crosland, *Tony Crosland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), pp. 9–10.

while he was still a schoolboy by Chapman & Hall, where his publisher was Arthur Waugh, father of Evelyn Waugh whose novels the firm also handled.

In 1938 Comfort went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, as Robert Styring Scholar in Classics, but read medicine. His first novel to be published, *No Such Liberty*, written as a Cambridge undergraduate, appeared in 1941; and *The Almond Tree* (written between June and October 1941, after his graduation) followed in 1942, both again under the imprint of Chapman & Hall. Although his poetry had been printed since he was at school, he had to wait until 1941 and *France and Other Poems*, a strange broadsheet-cum-pamphlet collection in Peter Baker's Resurgam Younger Poets series for his first independent appearance as a poet. The same year he visited Charles Wrey Gardiner, who explained his 'editorial policy of printing both the older writers and the young' in his *Poetry Quarterly*, Comfort retorting, 'Can't be did... You should back the younger generation.' Under Comfort's tutelage, the magazine was completely redesigned, the Bodoni font adopted – 'Among a great many other things he knew quite a lot about typography,' Gardiner, twenty years his senior, recalled – he encouraged his Cambridge contemporaries to submit work, and shortly *Poetry Quarterly* and the associated Grey Walls Press were moved from Billericay in Essex to Holborn in central London where they were to be with Tambimuttu's *Poetry London* and Editions Poetry London, the twin publishing enterprises of British Neo-Romanticism. Comfort was to become the leading spokesman and theorist for the New Romantics of the 1940s, just as Herbert Read was acknowledged as their principal influence from the previous generation and acted as their patron.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Wrey Gardiner, 'The Octopus of Love: An Autobiography' (typescript, 1972–5, now held by Stanford University), ff. 180–1. See also Alan Smith, 'Grey Walls Press', *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review*, XIII (1986), pp. 328–37. After the war Peter Baker, son of the joint owner of Ealing Studios, founded the Falcon Press, which became commercially and financially interlinked

non-violent direct action is 'democracy in action', 'a method of maintaining the values inherent in the idea of democracy'.<sup>14</sup> She had been converted to pacifism as a schoolgirl of thirteen by the Gandhianism of her cousin, David Hoggett, previously an army sergeant who had been court-martialled and imprisoned. (Hoggett went on to become librarian of the Commonwealth Collection, the best peace library in Britain and now at the University of Bradford, the only British university to possess a Department of Peace Studies.) Carter gave up an Oxford scholarship to work for the DAC, but afterwards studied politics at the LSE and has since taught political theory at the Universities of Lancaster, Oxford and Queensland. Her first book, *The Political Theory of Anarchism* (1971), is an attractive short introduction. Two years later she returned at greater length to the relationship between direct action and liberal democracy, praising direct action for inherently favouring 'political participation and direct democracy rather than parliamentary styles of government': 'It creates a potential for social change by releasing new energy and determination and encouraging social imagination'.<sup>15</sup> In *Authority and Democracy* (1979) Carter defends some forms of both professional and political authority against their libertarian critics, yet still held to an anarchism, concurrently maintaining that 'anarchist beliefs ... require adherence to nonviolence': 'The utopianism of anarchism logically entails also the utopianism of pacifism, in the sense of rejecting all forms of organized violence'.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> April Carter, *Direct Action* (London: Peace News, 1962), pp. 32–3.

<sup>15</sup> April Carter, *Direct Action and Liberal Democracy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 139, 159. See also Taylor, pp. 185–6.

<sup>16</sup> April Carter, *Authority and Democracy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), esp. pp. 67–71; April Carter, 'Anarchism and Violence', in J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (eds.), *Nomos XIX: Anarchism* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), pp. 334, 339. For Carter's biography, see Driver, pp. 23–4, 49, and April Carter, David Hoggett and Adam Roberts, *Non-Violent Action: Theory and Practice: A Selected Bibliography* (London: Housmans, 1966).

Japanese, its popularity reputedly leading some anarchist parents to name their boys 'Nicolas'.<sup>12</sup>

The nuclear disarmament movement, especially the Committee of 100, was also important in the repudiation of Trotskyism by Christopher Pallis and the Solidarity Group and their espousal of a libertarian socialism. Unlike the Soviet sympathizers embedded in CND's leadership or the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League (SLL) with its risible defence of the 'workers' bomb', the Committee was unequivocally opposed to all nuclear weapons. Pallis was never a member but his closest friend and political collaborator, Ken Weller, was a member of the London Committee of 100. In addition Solidarity, like Ward, considered the Committee to be 'at one and the same time [an organ] of struggle against the ruling class and its State – and [a new form] of social organization, based on principles radically opposed to those of bourgeois society', as described by their primary theoretical influence, Cornelius Castoriadis, in a *Socialisme ou Barbarie* article translated as 'Working Class Consciousness' by Pallis in 1962 and regarded by them as a 'basic statement' of their views.<sup>13</sup>

Two of the most interesting libertarian political theorists of the late-twentieth century were active as young women in direct-action nuclear disarmament. April Carter was secretary of the DAC from 1958 to 1961 and as such produced the much-reprinted Peace News pamphlet, *Direct Action*, arguing that

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<sup>12</sup> Natasha Walter in her obituary of her father, *Independent*, 13 March 2000. Other obituaries appeared in the *Guardian*, 13 March 2000; *The Times*, 14 March 2000; *Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 2000; *Freedom*, 25 March 2000. See also the memorial lecture by David Goodway, 'Nicolas Walter 1934–2000', *Ethical Record*, CVII, no. 6 (July–August 2002) – and intended as the 'Introduction' to what became Nicolas Walter, *The Anarchist Past and Other Essays*, ed. David Goodway (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> *Solidarity*, II, no. 2 (April 1962), p. 26, and VII, no. 12 (July 1969), p. 8. See Cornelius Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings*, ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 3 vols., 1988–93), II, esp. p. 198, and cf. Taylor, pp. 252–3.

Comfort's first proper collection of poems appeared in 1942, when Routledge brought out *A Wreath for the Living*. His admiring publisher now became Herbert Read himself, with whom he soon developed a friendship and close literary and political association; and Routledge were responsible for the publication of almost all his books down to the 1960s. Further volumes of poetry were *Elegies* (1944), peaking with *The Signal to Engage* (1946) and *And All But He Departed* (1951) and the finding of a distinctive personal voice, as in 'None But My Foe To Be My Guide':

For Freedom and Beauty are not fixed stars,  
but cut by man only from his own flesh,  
but lit by man, only for his sojourn  
because our shout into the cup of sky  
brings back no echo, brings back no echo ever:  
because man's mind lives at his stature's length  
because the stars have for us no earnest of winning  
because there is no resurrection  
because all things are against us, we are ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

He was co-editor of his own little poetry magazine, *Poetry Folios*, between 1942 and 1947, as well of the first two impressive volumes of the Grey Walls Press's annual *New Road: New Directions in European Art and Letters* in 1943 and 1944.

He had gone in 1941 for his clinical training to the London Hospital, again as a scholar, and proceeded to write *The Power House*, a long and accomplished novel widely acclaimed on publication in 1944, being praised by V.S. Pritchett as a 'powerful, bitter, and Romantic novel' and 'an immensely exciting

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with Grey Walls Press. Elected a Conservative MP in 1950, four years later he was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for forgery, Grey Walls Press being lost in the concomitant liquidation.

<sup>4</sup> Alex Comfort, *The Signal to Engage* (London: Routledge, 1946), p. 22.

narrative', 'to be read by all who are interested in the talents of the future'.<sup>5</sup> His potential was regarded as very considerable both as a poet and, perhaps particularly, as a novelist. He published *Letters from an Outpost*, his only collection of short stories, in 1947; and his next novels were *On This Side Nothing* (1949) – probably his most assured, P.H. Newby commenting: 'It impresses' – and *A Giant's Strength* (1952).<sup>6</sup>

He graduated as MB (Cantab) in 1944; worked for a year as Resident Medical Officer at the Royal Waterloo Hospital, London, picking up a Diploma in Child Health and thereby his psychological training; and in 1945 he returned to the London Hospital as a Demonstrator, and later Lecturer, in Physiology. He now built on his boyhood hobby of conchology and in 1949 was awarded a PhD in biochemistry from London University for his research into the nature of molluscan shell pigments. His dual background in medicine and biology enabled him to be appointed in 1951 as Honorary Research Associate and then, the following year, as Nuffield Research Fellow in the Biology of Senescence, in the Department of Zoology, University College London, working in association with the distinguished biologist and eventual Nobel laureate for medicine, P.B. Medawar.

It was these eight years, 1944–52, a period of intense professional activity, that saw the production of most of Comfort's social and political writings, and a dizzying outpouring of publications over a polymathic range. In addition to the poetry and fiction already mentioned, his books were: *Cecil Collins* (1946), the first, small work on the painter, who had become his friend, and having its origins in Comfort's stint as art critic for the *New English Weekly*; *Art and Social Responsibility* (1946), his first collection of articles; *The Novel and Our Time* (1948), an excursion into literary criticism; *Barbarism and Sexual Free-*

<sup>5</sup> University College London: Alex Comfort Papers, clippings books, transcript of BBC broadcast, 26 June 1944.

<sup>6</sup> P.H. Newby, *The Novel, 1945–1950* (London: Longmans, Green for British Council, 1951), p. 17.

voice of nuclear disarmament, much more than Bertrand Russell or anyone else' and who was their principal theoretical influence.<sup>10</sup>

Walter was also one of the Spies for Peace, only one of two members ever to have declared themselves publicly, in his case doing so unambiguously as early as 1968, remarkably, and on the radio at that:

... there are things which I have done in the general anti-war movement, which I suppose one could say are the sort of things which I've done as an anarchist. One thing was being involved in the Spies for Peace .... information fell into the hands of people in the Committee of 100, of whom I was one. And we published it, secretly, we didn't want to get caught.<sup>11</sup>

Walter was to write profusely for the anarchist press, particularly *Freedom*, *Anarchy* and the *Raven*, but his most sustained anarchist publication came in 1969 when Ward turned over the whole of *Anarchy 100* to *About Anarchism*. This fourfold explanation of what anarchists believe, how they differ, what they want and what they do appeared the same year as a separate pamphlet and has been translated into many other languages, including Russian, Serbo-Croat, Greek, Turkish, Chinese and

<sup>10</sup> This description of Comfort, omitted from Nicolas Walter, *Nonviolent Resistance: Men against War* (London: Nonviolence 63, 1963), appears in 'Disobedience and the New Pacifism', *Anarchy*, no. 14 (April 1962), p. 112. The two other articles are 'Damned Fools in Utopia', *New Left Review* [hereafter NLR], nos. 13–14 (January–April 1962), and 'Direct Action and the New Pacifism', *Anarchy*, no. 13 (March 1962).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Boston, 'Conversations about Anarchy', *Anarchy*, no. 85 (March 1968), p. 68. Walter's account, 'The Spies for Peace Story', *Inside Story*, nos. 8 and 9 (March/April and May/June 1973), was revised as 'The Spies for Peace and After', *Raven*, no. 5 (June 1988), on both occasions being unsigned.

While Nicolas Walter was still an Oxford undergraduate, a collective letter he had signed in the *Manchester Guardian* on the Suez Crisis resulted in Colin Ward sending him a sample copy of *Freedom* in 1956, although the letter betrays no indication of incipient anarchism.<sup>8</sup> Ward was trying to increase the readership of the excellent paper, of which he had been an editor since 1947, although that was not to materialize until the beginning of the next decade when he also launched *Anarchy*. But Walter began to visit Freedom Bookshop in Red Lion Street after he had started working in London, and to attend the London Anarchist Group's weekly meetings. From 1959 he became a contributor to *Freedom*, an association only to be ended by his death. At the time the Committee of 100 was being set up, he had a letter published in *The Times* defending the dissidents, and as a consequence was invited to become a member of the Committee to help round up the well-known names to the all important figure of one hundred. He was to remark: 'I was never at all important in the Committee of 100, but it was very important to me.'<sup>9</sup> In the grip of the events of 1960–2, and spending as much time as possible, outside of work and his considerable political activity, in the Reading Room of the British Museum during the winter of 1961–2, he attempted, with considerable success, to work out the historical lineage and above all the political theory of the Committee of 100 in 'Damned Fools in Utopia' for the *New Left Review* and especially in 'Direct Action and the New Pacifism' and 'Disobedience and the New Pacifism', two articles in *Anarchy* subsequently revised as a pamphlet, *Non-violent Resistance: Men against War*. (This was a task performed for the preceding DAC by April Carter.) The *Anarchy* essays won Walter the greatly valued friendship of Alex Comfort, whom he properly concluded was 'the true

<sup>8</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1956 (reprinted in *Guardian*, 4 May 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Nicolas Walter, 'Postscript, 1979', to 'Nonviolent Resistance: Men Against War, Part II', *Studies in Nonviolence*, no. 5 (April 1979), p. 27.

*dom* (1948), published by Freedom Press; *First-Year Physiological Technique* (1948), his London Hospital lectures; *The Pattern of the Future* (1949), the text of a series of four BBC talks; *Sexual Behaviour in Society* (1950), a staid offshoot from *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom* in Duckworth's Social Science Studies series; and *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* (1950), his outstanding contribution to anarchist thought, which will be discussed later.

When Comfort went up to Cambridge in 1938 he had become an active Congregationalist. This must have been, at least in part, a strong reaction against his completely non-religious family background. Initially he was – as his fellow poet and undergraduate Nicholas Moore remembered him – 'a born-first-time-Christian'.<sup>7</sup> Much more fundamentally, though, Comfort was a pacifist, his pacifism resulting 'from reading WWI reminiscences when at school'.<sup>8</sup> In this he was, on one of the rare occasions in his life, following a general trend and for, in addition, the conventional reason or reasons: he adhered to the anti-war and pacifist sentiment of the 1930s under the common influence of revulsion at the slaughter of 1914–18.

Unlike most of the thirties pacifists, though, he held to his pacifism throughout – and beyond – the Second World War. He became moreover 'an aggressive antimilitarist', as he described himself, coming to head while still a medical student the campaign against indiscriminate bombing.<sup>9</sup> Quite what 'aggressive anti-militarism' entails is clearly conveyed by a letter to *Tribune*:

As an Englishman I have a part in the infamy and degradation of our bombing policy, and it is a bur-

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Moore, 'At the Start of the Forties', *Aquarius*, nos. 17/18 (1986–7), p. 105.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Comfort to the writer [October 1988].

<sup>9</sup> Alex Comfort, *Art and Social Responsibility: Lectures on the Ideology of Romanticism* (London: Falcon Press, 1946), frontispiece.

den of contempt and hatred which no moderate repudiation can lighten. The bombardment of Europe is not the work of soldiers nor of responsible statesmen. It is the work of bloodthirsty fools. I doubt if the devotion of a citizen Air Force could be more bitterly insulted than by the tasks which our present leadership expects it to perform: no consideration of personal risk run, or personal courage, will be sufficient to solace the conscience of many friends of mine who are pilots.

We deceive neither ourselves, nor the public of Europe, nor the judgment of history. If their own experience at the hands of our enemies had left any doubt in the public's mind of the meaning of organized bombardment, the exhibitions of photographs which tour the country, and the tone of our broadcast commentaries would dispel it. Night after night those Europeans who risk their liberty to listen can hear the emetic boastings and threatenings of bloody-minded and reactionary civilians. They contrast the alacrity and satisfaction which attend each contemptible operation with the subterfuge and sloth which we have displayed in such tasks of constructive policy as the admission to sanctuary of the Jewish refugees.

In contemplating and combating such leaders moderation of thought is neither desirable nor possible. We seem to be in the hands of a Government which wishes to cover itself in detail with every infamy it has denounced in the enemy. The contamination of what they have done will extend to all of us, individually, and no repudiation or expostulation will serve to restore us. We condemn the German public and the German

there can be no doubt that the programme, the policy, the assumptions, and the priorities of the Committee became more and more closely attuned to anarchism through 1962 and 1963, although the influence of 'formal Anarchism' remained small.... Nevertheless, both the practice and ideology of the Committee in 1962–3 were strongly anarchist in flavour, and in underlying ideological assumptions.

It was now that the Solidarity Group became 'one of the most important influences ... in the Committee of 100': 'in 1962, 1963, and beyond'. Taylor concludes: 'It was in practice a combination of *Solidarity* and anarchistic activists who constituted the militant hard core of the Committee in this period.'<sup>5</sup>

The radicals were to circulate within the London Committee of 100 'Beyond Counting Arses', a discussion document advocating radical subversive action: 'We must attempt to hinder the warfare state in every possible way'.<sup>6</sup> It was essentially this group who constituted the Spies for Peace, locating and breaking into the Regional Seat of Government (RSG) at Warren Row, Berkshire, and producing the pamphlet, *Danger! Official Secret: RSG-6*, for distribution on the 1963 Aldermaston March. The disclosure of the preparations to rule the country, in the event of nuclear war, through fourteen RSGs represented, of course, 'a substantial breach of official secrecy' and caused (as one had assumed) Harold Macmillan's ministry real concern.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, none of the eight Spies for Peace, two of whom were women, were ever prosecuted.

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<sup>5</sup> Taylor, pp. 247, 249–50.

<sup>6</sup> 'Beyond Counting Arses', reprinted in *Solidarity*, II, no. 11 [1963], p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 2002), pp. 101 *et seq.*, 169.

in a way a model of the kind of organization we should be building in every field of life': as the expression of – to use Martin Buber's distinction – 'the social principle in opposition to the political principle'.<sup>3</sup> The two best-known anarchists of the time, Read and Comfort, were among the Committee's approximately one hundred members, while two more, the veteran painter Augustus John and George Melly, then a jazz singer but later also an admired critic and autobiographer, were also members and another notable libertarian, A.S. Neill, a supporter.<sup>4</sup>

The Committee of 100 called for mass civil disobedience against the preparations for nuclear war and its sit-downs in central London reached their peak in September 1961 when, with Bertrand Russell, its 89-year-old president, and thirty-one other members, including Comfort, in prison, 12,000 sat down in Trafalgar Square and 1,300 were arrested. The failure of the demonstration at the Wethersfield airbase in December, however, led to the decentralization of the Committee into thirteen regional Committees (several of which were already existent). Although there was a nominal National Committee of 100, the dominant body was to be the London Committee of 100 (set up in April 1962). Richard Taylor, the most authoritative historian of the nuclear disarmament movement, considers

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<sup>3</sup> Ward, 'Future'. For Buber's distinction, see Colin Ward, *Influences: Voices of Creative Dissent* (Hartland, Devon: Green Books, 1991), pp. 88–90; and chapter 14 below.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Taylor, *Against the Bomb: The British Peace Movement, 1958–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), is the major work on the first nuclear disarmament movement, devoting especial attention to the DAC (pp. 115–89) and the Committee of 100 (pp. 190–272). But Christopher Driver, *The Disarmers: A Study in Protest* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964), continues to be useful and James Hinton, *Protests and Visions: Peace Politics in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), chap. 13, provides a perceptive overview. See also April Carter, *Peace Movements: International Protest and World Politics since 1945* (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 45–57.

writers who made no protest over Lidice. We had better have been silent until our own protest had vindicated us. It seems to me that a particular responsibility belongs to the English writers and artists. They, at least, pretend to value both life and culture internationally. There are times when denunciation is both a moral and an aesthetic duty. The present seems to me to be one such, and I invite other writers who share my feeling to say so publicly and as soon as possible.<sup>10</sup>

The following week none other than Peter Baker, who was later to publish Comfort's *Art and Social Responsibility* at his Falcon Press, forcefully denounced him from the Home Forces as 'a humbug'. Comfort replied in typically combative style (a collection of his letters to the press over the years would make lively, probably exhilarating, reading):

It seems a strange reversal to say that one is only entitled to denounce if one participates in the activities one is denouncing. I refused military service, and I mean to continue to refuse it, because if I had not done so I should I have forfeited all moral right to object, no matter what was done. I know that it is all war, and not this particular manifestation of bombing, which I believe to be unjustified, but there are times when a single act of folly and brutality seems so signal that one dare not remain silent. I am not interested in Sinclair or General Quade's remarks about 'legitimate operations of war'. Even if I believe that no operation of war is legitimate, some are less so than others. Lidice was a legitimate security operation (or rather, if it had happened

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<sup>10</sup> *Tribune*, 2 April 1943.

in India, that is what we should have called it) but the odium of it will remain. The same is true of our air bombardment. Lieut. Baker is wrong in thinking that one can shuffle off responsibility by being a pacifist. I want to be able to go about in Europe without having to wear a poster saying: 'I am English, but I didn't do it'. Surely Lieut. Baker sees that there are some things that not even a soldier who accepts war should stomach?..

I do not want to say more, except that another couple of thousand people (our allies, this time) were killed last week in Rotterdam, Antwerp and some of the Essen factories. But, of course, they enjoy it. It was a bitter humorist who called our bombers Liberators.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, early in 1944, Comfort drafted a declaration protesting against the Allied bombings and organized the signing of the petition by 'writers, artists and musicians', among them Herbert Read, Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears, Clifford Curzon, Laurence Housman, James Kirkup, Denton Welch, Julian Symons, D.S. Savage and George Woodcock (there was significant overlap with the Freedom Defence Committee, for which see chapter 6).<sup>12</sup> In consequence Comfort was officially blacklisted by the BBC (which was to make its peace five years later by inviting him to give the uncompromising broadcasts of *The Pattern of the Future*).

This aggressive pacifism, emphasizing individual responsibility and direct action, is one of the threads running through Comfort's superficially disparate career. His analysis of, and opposition to, the total war of 1939–45, was extended seamlessly to nuclear weapons: 'The atomic bomb is not different in

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 16 April 1943.

<sup>12</sup> Comfort Papers, Box 6, File 2, for details.

(DAC), which launched a series of small non-violent and illegal actions at missile bases and against the deployment of Polaris submarines on Holy Loch, as well as an industrial campaign to halt the production of nuclear weapons. Comfort acted as a sponsor of both Committees and Herbert Read of the DAC alone. The year 1958 saw the beginning of a mass legal agitation for unilateral nuclear disarmament with the foundation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), with its annual marches between the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston in Berkshire and Trafalgar Square, initially from London to Aldermaston but from Easter 1959 starting at Aldermaston and ending in London. Read was among CND's sponsors.

With a strong presence in the working-class movement, CND's preoccupation was with the Labour Party adopting unilateral nuclear disarmament as party policy. This was actually achieved at Labour's annual conference at Scarborough in 1960, only to be overturned the following year. But the government of the time was Conservative – Labour was out of office between 1951 and 1964 – and CND's constitutionalism and its narrow focus on Labour politics did not answer the urgency felt by the many in the movement who feared impending nuclear war (which was indeed almost realized with the Cuban missile crisis of 1963). As early as October 1960, therefore, the direct-action Committee of 100 was formed, leading the DAC to disband, after a few months of overlapping existence, in May 1961. The Committee of 100 was the most important anarchist – or at least near-anarchist – political organization of modern Britain, with its collective decision-making and responsibility (in a form of direct democracy) and almost exclusive emphasis on direct action as the means of struggle. As Colin Ward commented, 'functional, temporary, experimental, and based not on the formal democratic principle of votes, membership cards and so on, but on that of letting the people who are willing to undertake the work get on with it, [it] is



a profound social re-ordering, without indeed revolutionary change? Surely the problem was rooted in the very nature of governmental society and the State? Colin Ward was to ask

what if we are forced to conclude that the same coercive power which controls national law and order is responsible for the threat to world peace and survival? What if we are driven to see war and the threat of war as implicit in the nature of government and the state, to conclude in fact that war is the *trade* of government, the *health* of the state?

Ward continued:

If we are impotent about the Bomb it is because we are impotent about everything else, and we are powerless precisely because we have surrendered our power over our own destinies, and if we are ever to get it back we need to start thinking about a different kind of politics rather than see the issue in constitutional or electoral terms.<sup>2</sup>

The nuclear disarmament movement finally began to mobilize with the British government's announcement in 1957 that it was to develop the hydrogen bomb. The Emergency Committee for Direct Action Against Nuclear War was immediately set up to support Harold Steele in his attempt to enter the testing area in the Pacific. At the end of 1957 the Emergency Committee became the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War

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<sup>2</sup> Colin Ward, 'The Future of the Committee of 100: An Anarchist View', *Peace News*, 26 January 1962 (Ward's emphasis). That there was a convergence between anarchism and pacifism after the Second World War is agreed by Martin Ceadel, *Thinking about Peace and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 148–50, and Geoffrey Ostergaard, 'Resisting the Nation-State: The Pacifist and Anarchist Traditions', in Leonard Tivey (ed.), *The Nation-State: The Formation of Modern Politics* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981), pp. 188–93.

kind or in result from the other weapons and methods of war which characterize contemporary society.<sup>13</sup> For twenty years he was a foremost campaigner against war and the preparations for war: as a speaker and pamphleteer for the PPU; as a sponsor of the Direct Action Committee (Against Nuclear War) (and its precursors); as an activist in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND); and as a member of the Committee of 100 (he was one of the 'names', including Bertrand Russell, imprisoned in September 1961 for calling the Trafalgar Square sit-down). Comfort remained – and maintained his subscriptions during his eleven years' residence from 1973 in the USA – a member of both the PPU and CND.

Comfort's thoroughgoing pacifism (he opposed all war in the modern period) is not combined, unusually, with a Gandhian advocacy of non-violence. 'I do not believe it is evil to fight,' he explained in 1946: 'We have to fight obedience in this generation as the French maquisards fought it, with the reservation that terrorism, while it is understandable, is not an effective instrument of combating tyranny.'<sup>14</sup> The French Maquis provided Comfort during the Second World War with a major inspiration, affording him a model of popular resistance, by individuals not in association with any State. This is exemplified especially – indeed anticipated – in his novel *The Power House*.

His pacifist rhetoric could be extraordinarily violent in language, although it is usually unclear exactly what acts he is advocating.

We have just witnessed an act of criminal lunacy  
which must be without parallel in recorded history.

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<sup>13</sup> Alex Comfort, 'An Anarchist View: The Political Relevance of Pacifism', *Peace News*, 7 December 1945 (reprinted in David Goodway (ed.), *Against Power and Death: The Anarchist Articles and Pamphlets of Alex Comfort* (London: Freedom Press, 1994) [hereafter APD], p. 49).

<sup>14</sup> Alex Comfort, *Peace and Disobedience* (London: Peace News [1946]), p. 2–3 (reprinted in APD, p. 80).

A city of 300,000 people has been suddenly and deliberately obliterated and its inhabitants murdered by the English and American Governments.... It is difficult to express in coherent language the contempt and shame which we feel .... The only remedy which is possible to us, if we are to remain human beings, and not to be lepers in the eyes of every decent person and every period of history is the condign punishment of the men responsible. Not one political leader who has tolerated this filthy thing, or the indiscriminate bombardment of Germany which preceded it, should be permitted to escape the consequence of what he has done.... It is high time we tried our own war criminals...

It was in this way that he greeted the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima; but the American editors of the *Conscientious Objector*, which, as well as of *War Commentary*, printed his statement, disassociated themselves at some length from his 'implied conclusion': 'In the first place, we don't know what punishment fits the crime in this case. And, in the second place, if we did we would not inflict it.'<sup>15</sup> Comfort did know and wrote in a contemporary poem:

There is one freedom only –  
to take the hands of men called enemies  
and you and they walking together go  
to seek out every throat that told you Kill<sup>16</sup>

For Comfort 'the tenets which ... make up the political expression of pacifism' were threefold:

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<sup>15</sup> Alex Comfort, 'Hiroshima Bombing Is Held Criminal Lunacy', *Conscientious Objector*, September 1945. Comfort's statement is reprinted in *APD*, pp. 48–9.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Wingless Victory', in Comfort, *Signal to Engage*, p. 11. Cf. Derek Stanford, *Inside the Forties: Literary Memoirs 1937–1957* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1977), pp. 97–9.

## 12. Nuclear disarmament, the New Left – and the case of E.P. Thompson

The Second World War culminated with the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The twin problems which were now to confront both pacifists and pacifists were nuclear weapons and the Cold War; but a surprisingly long time was to elapse before sustained campaigns against the testing and possession of nuclear weapons got under way in the late 1950s. As early as 1945 Alex Comfort observed: 'The atomic bomb is not different in kind or in result from the other weapons and methods of war which characterize contemporary society...'<sup>1</sup> To most participants in the future nuclear disarmament movement this assertion would have seemed a nonsense, since for them nuclear weapons were demonstrably, monstrously different from conventional armaments and it was exactly this difference which motivated their activism. Yet a significant minority were led – largely independently of theorists and ideology – to deduce libertarian conclusions as a result of their experiences, especially their involvement in the non-violent direct action of civil disobedience, and of their reflections on the relationship between 'the Bomb' and the State. How could nuclear weapons be eliminated without

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Comfort, 'An Anarchist View: The Political Relevance of Pacifism', *Peace News*, 7 December 1945 (reprinted in David Goodway (ed.), *Against Power and Death: The Anarchist Articles and Pamphlets of Alex Comfort* [hereafter *APD*] (London: Freedom Press, 1994), p. 49).

1944) – is reprinted in its much rewritten and expanded 1946 version in *APD*, pp. 52–78, while ‘The End of a War’ is reprinted in *APD*, pp. 36–41, in its first manifestation, ‘October, 1944’, from *NOW*, vol. 4 (n.d.).

... that every appeal to organized force, by its inevitable degeneration into irresponsibility, is a counter-revolutionary process, and tends to produce tyranny[;] that the only effective answer to total regimentation is total disobedience; and that there is nothing which is more disastrous than contemporary war – nothing which can make war a ‘lesser evil’.

He therefore came to believe that ‘pacifism rests solely upon the historical theory of anarchism’.<sup>17</sup> On being asked many years later when he became an anarchist, he replied: ‘... oddly enough I don’t recall, but it clearly occurred or crystallized over time after about 1940. One might be able to check when I first used the title as identification.’ Although it has not proved possible to establish when he first began to call himself an anarchist, he was certainly one by 1942–3;<sup>18</sup> and *The Power House* (published in 1944, but written in 1942–3) is an intransigent anarchist novel.<sup>19</sup>

It seems clear, then, that Comfort came to anarchism through pacifism. It was certainly not through either socialism or anarchist writers. His ideas developed independently of intellectual influence, until he came to realize that they corresponded to an existing ‘historical theory’: anarchism.

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<sup>17</sup> Comfort, *Peace and Disobedience*, pp. 2–3 (reprinted in *APD*, pp. 79–80).

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Comfort to the writer [October 1988]; University of Victoria, Victoria, BC: Read Archive, letters from Read to Comfort, 8 August 1943, and from Comfort to Read, 3 November 1943; University of Reading: Routledge Archive, Box 1844, letter from Comfort to Read, 10 August [1943]; Alex Comfort, ‘An Exposition of Irresponsibility’, *Life and Letters To-Day*, XXXIX, October 1943, pp. 52–8 (and reprinted in *APD*, pp. 31–6).

<sup>19</sup> Comfort dated the writing of *The Power House* (London: George Routledge, 1944), p. 322, as ‘February IC, 1942, to July 14, 1943’. But cf. *Readers News*, VIII, no. 6 (January 1946), where he states: ‘I began it in 1941, at the London Hospital Annexe at Brentwood’ (Comfort Papers, clippings books).

I write as an anarchist, that is, as one who rejects the conception of power in society as a force which is both anti-social and unsound in terms of general biological principle. If I have any metaphysical and ethical rule on which to base my ideas, it is that of human solidarity and mutual aid against a hostile environment...<sup>20</sup>

Comfort's political theory is simple but highly individual and original. The existing situation is one of *social barbarism* or *irresponsible society*, dependent on *obedience*. *Civilization* can only be defended – or expanded – by *individual resistance*, by the individual exercising *responsibility* through *disobedience*:

Resistance and disobedience are still the only forces able to cope with barbarism, and so long as we do not practice them we are unarmed...We have one enemy, irresponsible government, against which we are committed to a perpetual and unrelenting Maquis. Every Government that intends war is as much our enemy as ever the Germans were.... Wars are not deplorable accidents produced by the perfidy of degenerate nations – they are the results of calculated policy: we will set them outside the bounds of calculation. Atrocities are not only the work of sadists – your friends and relatives who butchered the whole of Hamburg were not sadists – they are the result of obedience, an obedience which forgets its humanity. We will not accept that obedience. The safeguard of peace is not a vast army, but an unreliable public, a public that will fill the streets and empty the factories at the word War, that will

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<sup>20</sup> Alex Comfort, *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom* (London: Freedom Press, 1948), p. 3.

Here we have Comfort continuing, as he had done in the 1940s, to stress the centrality of responsibility and to adhere to a politics combining direct action with mutual aid. Very little, if anything, had altered, in spite of *The Joy of Sex* and his undoubted remoteness from the so-called anarchist movement.

Neither had his combativity and subversiveness changed. His conception in his penultimate book, *The Philosophers*, of cyber-terrorists employing non-violent dirty tricks is a return to the advocacy of forming a Maquis to resist the 'Occupying Power', although by now Thatcherism.<sup>60</sup> Nor had he lost his ability to write a rousing letter, as with this on the poll tax:

It is quite clear that in contrast to the Government's expectations in introducing the poll tax, many people who will profit from it in comparison with the rates view the tax and its authors with contempt. They would like to place themselves on the side of the victimized by helping to make the tax uncollectable, but refusal to pay will be traduced as greed.

I am considering paying the bulk of the tax, but withholding 10 or 20 pounds and telling the local authority that they will have to come and get it. That will forestall attempts to blame the collapse of services on the non-payment campaign, while adding to the inevitable chaos.<sup>61</sup>

*Listener*, 9 December 1948, and *Freedom*, 24 December 1948. The pamphlet *The Right Thing To Do* also contained 'The Wrong Thing To Do', a speech delivered at a PPU meeting. 'Art and Social Responsibility', *NOW*, vol. 2 (n.d.) – which also appeared in Alex Comfort and John Bayliss (eds.), *New Road, 1944: New Directions in European Art and Letters* (London: Grey Walls Press,

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<sup>60</sup> Comfort, *The Philosophers*, esp. pp. 78, 101–2.

<sup>61</sup> *Guardian*, 19 May 1990.

He maintained:

If the majority's alguazils forbid him the use of certain medications which he considers necessary and beneficial, he will ignore or outwit them, as he should. Recognition of exactly what our ideology is, in relation to society, bureaucracy, medical independence, our responsibility to the community, and the crosscurrents of combat over 'public' and 'private' medicine is a help, not a hindrance. It as a practical matter, too – what is our final relation to authority? Do we serve the patient in a one-to-one human relationship? Or do we serve the hospital, the Army, the prison service...? If your answer is 'yes' to the first question and 'no' to the second group of alternatives, then you are an anarchist, like Hippocrates, and you might as well get comfortable with the label. It has nothing to do with 'right' and 'left' or with communism and capitalism or with Tweedle-Rep. and Tweedle-Dem. It is something you do in the privacy of your office, not the hustings or the voting booth.

And he concluded:

Actually the lack of a label which cannot be misconstrued is one of the limitations on the vigorous force of American populism which believes in doing things yourself (direct action) with the cooperation of, and for the good of, others (mutual aid). Nor can you vote for an anarchist, because that would be a contradiction in terms.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Alex Comfort, *What Is a Doctor? Essays on Medicine and Human Natural History* (Philadelphia, PA: George F. Stickley, 1980), pp. 7–8.

learn and accept the lesson of resistance. The only way to stop atrocities is to refuse to participate in them.<sup>21</sup>

This is from *Peace and Disobedience*, a seven-page Peace News Pamphlet of 1946, from which I have already quoted twice. It is Comfort's finest single statement of his anarchist politics, eloquent and relatively comprehensive. But there is also another Peace News Pamphlet, *The Right Thing To Do* (1949) – until their appearance in 1994 in *Against Power and Death: The Anarchist Articles and Pamphlets of Alex Comfort* neither pamphlet had ever been republished – while *Art and Social Responsibility* (1946), his first collection of essays, contains his most extended political declarations in 'Art and Social Responsibility' and 'The End of a War' (originally titled 'October, 1944'), both of which first appeared in George Woodcock's *NOW*.<sup>22</sup>

Comfort was always a prolific writer and spectacularly so during the ten years from the early 1940s to early 1950s. His anarchism is expressed and developed not just in his explicitly political and polemical essays and pamphlets, but also in his novels – especially *The Power House* and *On This Side Nothing* – the short stories of *Letters from an Outpost*, his volumes of poetry, and his critical works (notably *The Novel and Our Time*), as well as his important socio-political treatises, *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom* and *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State*. But he always thought of himself as primarily a poet; and Harold Drasdo is convincing when he comments that in the 1940s

he seems to be one of those writers like Thoreau whose best poetry is found in their prose – who

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<sup>21</sup> Comfort, *Peace and Disobedience*, pp. 6–7 (reprinted in *APD*, p. 83).

<sup>22</sup> 'The Right Thing to Do', a BBC talk, was first printed, as 'The Standard(s) of Humanity', in the

can't stop playing with words. We see this in *The Power House ...* and *Art and Social Responsibility ...* when, for example, 'Europe stinks of murder and groans with partings' is varied as 'Europe stinks of blood and groans with separation'.<sup>23</sup>

But Comfort also continually recycled his work (especially reviews and other articles) – as a professional scientist writing in his spare time he could not afford not to.

Still, fundamentally, for Comfort 'it is all one project'. That is how he reacted towards the end of his life to comments on the diverse spread of his activities; and he had been saying the same thing forty years previously:

If the mixture of books and pamphlets which I have produced ... seems confused, I can only say that it represents a unified effort as far as I am concerned. While the suspicion of propagandist art is sound, it obscures the fact that all writing has content. The content of mine is what I think and believe about human responsibility, and accordingly everything I write is didactic, since I have tried to express my preoccupations both in action and in print.<sup>24</sup>

However this may be, in the 1940s Comfort was constantly rephrasing and developing his ideas and certainly expounding his anarchism in all the literary forms he was using. Two examples of this may be drawn from a poem and a political essay. In the section entitled 'Notes for My Son' of 'The Song of Lazarus' he writes

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<sup>23</sup> Harold Drasdo, 'Alex Comfort's Art and Scope', *Anarchy*, no. 33 (November 1963), p. 355. The quotations are from Comfort, *Power House*, p. 318, and Comfort, *Art and Social Responsibility*, p.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley J. Kunitz (ed.), *Twentieth Century Authors: First Supplement* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1955), p. 21.

had an interesting conversation with a highly intelligent Black official about the influence of Godwin on Thomas Jefferson, and I explained to him that anarchists in the modern world are about the only people who do not believe in terrorism and throwing large spherical bombs – simply in taking responsibility for our own actions.<sup>58</sup> And when asked in 1988 whether he was still an anarchist, he thought for a moment, then reached for his most recent collection of articles, *What Is a Doctor?*, and found the following lengthy passage, addressed to an American medical readership:

I am an anarchist, and that gives rise to problems at once: 'anarchist' in some minds means a violent and disruptive radical... In fact it simply means someone who thinks that centralized power should be reduced to the practical minimum and individual responsibility increased to the practical maximum – not at all a frightening idea to Americans used to talking about free enterprise. One could have refused combat by using some other name, but the ideology is important to doctors as a professional matter, because it is already implicit in our acceptance of the independence of the physician, his responsibility to the patient, and the patient's inalienable rights. A decent doctor practising excellent medicine is an ideological 'anarchist' whether he likes it or not, and regardless of how, or whether, he votes. The doctor is anarchistic not democratic, mind you – for if the majority vote to withhold treatment from Jews or to kill persons over 70, he will tell the majority to go to the devil, as he should.

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<sup>58</sup> Alex Comfort, 'Letter after America', *Freedom*, Centenary Edition, October 1986, p. 54 (reprinted in APD, p. 165).

the relationship between sexuality and politics under the heading of 'selfishness':

... acquiring the awareness and the attitudes which can come from [good sexual] experience doesn't make for selfish withdrawal: it's more inclined to radicalize people.

The antisexualism of authoritarian societies and the people who run them doesn't spring from conviction (they themselves have sex), but from the vague perception that freedom here might lead to a liking for freedom elsewhere. People who have erotized their experience of themselves and the world are, on the one hand, inconveniently unwarlike and on the other, violently combative in resisting goons, political salesmen [and] racists and 'garbage' people generally who threaten the personal freedom they've attained and want to see others share.

The obsession with money-grubbing and power-hunting is quite largely fuelled by early distortions of body image and of self-esteem – distortions that carry over into a whole range of political behaviours, from hating and bullying people to wrecking the countryside for a profit you don't need and can't use. In fact, most great powers are now run by a minority of sick people, suffering from their inability to erotize and hence humanize their experience, who use the rest of us for play therapy.<sup>57</sup>

So Comfort's politics continued unchanged. On applying for an American visa in 1972, he declared himself an anarchist: I

<sup>57</sup> Alex Comfort, *More Joy: A Lovemaking Companion to 'The Joy of Sex'* (London: Guild Publishing, 1984 edn), pp. 133–4.

Remember when you hear them beginning to say  
Freedom  
Look carefully – see who it is they want you to  
butcher

and in 'The End of a War': '...when they begin to say "Look, injustice", you must reply "Whom do you want me to kill?"' In 'Notes for My Son' he memorably enjoins

*... when they come to sell you their bloody corruption  
you will gather the spit of your chest  
and plant it in their faces*

but in 'The End of a War' he declares even more effectively, 'I hope so to instruct my sons that they will give the recruiting agent the one reply he merits, a good eyeful of spit.'<sup>25</sup>

Comfort's is a harsh and powerful anarchism, urgent and compelling. My first, mesmerizing acquaintance with these remarkable pamphlets and articles was through the lengthy extracts quoted in 1962 by Nicolas Walter in 'Disobedience and the New Pacifism', in Colin Ward's *Anarchy*. Walter concluded persuasively that Comfort's was 'the true voice of nuclear disarmament, much more than that of Bertrand Russell or anyone else'. 'At the end of the last war', he continued, Comfort

wrote its obituary and drew its moral. What he said is as valid and valuable as it was then, when he was a very young man who kept his head when all about were losing theirs, and I can think of nothing better to say to very young people who are trying to do the same thing eighteen years later...<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Comfort, *Signal to Engage*, pp. 31–2; Comfort, *Art and Social Responsibility*, p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas Walter, 'Disobedience and the New Pacifism', *Anarchy*, no. 14 (April 1962), p. 112. This and the preceding article, 'Direct Action and the

Comfort's voice was never a widely influential one; but I suspect that many of those who responded favourably to it during the twenty years of his aggressive anti-militarist campaigning find, like me, its rhythms, analysis and imperatives unforgettable. It comes as little surprise to learn that the poet Adrian Mitchell, who was to write 'Tell Me Lies about Vietnam', regarded *Art and Social Responsibility* as 'one of my bibles', when enduring National Service around 1952: 'In my airforce pack I used to carry Alex Comfort and Kenneth Patchen.'<sup>27</sup>

For all this, Comfort's political theory, his pacifist anarchism, is severely limited. Three major criticisms may be levelled at it. First, the theory is centred entirely on the notion of obedience. As E.P. Thompson commented in a review of *The Signal to Engage* (1946):

He comes forward as a prophet with a simple message – that war (this war the same as all others) is caused by Obedience and we have only to kill those who ask us to Obey to end war ... war (not this war, any war) becomes a shadowy abstraction, many times removed from the real battles of living men making real history, the real problems and the real anguish which make up a part of the lives of all of us.<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, and closely connected with this justified complaint of the absence of 'the real battles of living men making real history', Comfort's anarchism lacks an historical theory or any significant sense of history. Thirdly, I have described Comfort's view of anarchism as 'original'. But its originality

New Pacifism', *Anarchy*, no. 13 (March 1962), were revised (with the deletion of the passage quoted) as *Nonviolent Resistance: Men against War* (London: Nonviolence 63, 1963).

<sup>27</sup> 'Adrian Mitchell Interviewed by John Rety', *Freedom*, 24 January 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Comfort Papers, clippings books: 'Poetry's Not So Easy', *Our Time*, date unknown.

though unashamedly a high-spirited fantasy novel involving much sex and adventure, it is also quasi-utopian and wholly Blakean. In the sexually fulfilled Losian world the daily greeting is 'Did you love well?' and the elaborate 'Fourfold philosophy', encompassing passion, sensation, reason (which characterizes the dystopian Verula, enemy of the Losian city of Adambara) and imagination and creativity (Los itself), is derived from Blake's *Milton*. In *I and That* Comfort praises Blake as 'almost alone among western explorers of the intuitive structure of mind, both in the richness of his interpretation, and in the clarity with which he seems to have perceived what he was doing', regarding him as 'expounding the religion of the twenty-first century', while in *The Philosophers* he is called 'one of the most important British philosophers'.<sup>54</sup>

Political anarchism had, however, ceased to be of the central importance it was for him for the ten years or so from the early 1940s. Some feminists give *The Joy of Sex* a rough handling, complaining that 'it is the male voice and masculine values that predominate in the end'.<sup>55</sup> Most anarchists, though, female as well as male, will probably be inclined to agree with Peter Marshall's estimation of *The Joy of Sex* as representing Comfort's 'hedonistic and libertarian message in its most popular form': 'While it is one of the least inhibited books about sex ever written, its dominant note is one of tenderness and joy.'<sup>56</sup> *More Joy* even contains a short anarchist disquisition on

<sup>54</sup> Alex Comfort, *Tetrarch* (London: Wildwood House, 1981), p. 305; Alex Comfort, *I and That: Notes on the Biology of Religion* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 1979), pp. i19–23; Alex Comfort, *The Philosophers* (London: Duckworth, 1989), p. 38.

<sup>55</sup> Rosalind Brunt, 'Permissive Advice in the 1970s', in Rosalind Brunt and Caroline Rowan (eds.), *Feminism, Culture and Politics* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1982), pp. 160, 166–7. I am grateful to Judy Greenway for drawing my attention to these substantial reservations in general and Brunt's critique in particular.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 596–7.



He had wed Ruth Harris, a nurse, in 1943, and there was to be one son, Nicholas, but they were divorced in 1973 and, although he had immediately married Jane Henderson, a lecturer at the London School of Economics, there were at least six other lovers or 'muses'.<sup>53</sup>

In 1973, the year of his marital rearrangements, Comfort emigrated to the USA to work at a radical think-tank, the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Santa Barbara. The Center folded the following year, but he remained in California holding a series of posts that illustrate his professional versatility: Clinical Lecturer in Psychiatry, Stanford University; Professor of Pathology, University of California School of Medicine, Irvine; Consultant Psychiatrist, Brentwood Veterans' Hospital, Los Angeles; Adjunct Professor, Neuropsychiatric Institute, University of California, Los Angeles; Consultant in Medical Education, Ventura County Hospital. In the USA he had taught himself the new specialism of geriatric psychiatry, even publishing *Practice of Geriatric Psychiatry* (1980), a short textbook. In 1985 he retired and returned to live in England, where he was to die in 2000.

During the 1960s Comfort had written several works of scientific popularization – *The Process of Ageing* (1964), *Nature and Human Nature* (1965), *The Anxiety Makers* (1967) – but, although there was also to be *A Good Age* (1976), some later books, notably *I and That: Notes on the Biology of Religion* (1979) and the related *Reality and Empathy: Physics, Mind, and Science in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1984) were to be a good deal more abstruse. After the sixties he published only three more novels – *Tetrarch* (1980), *Imperial Patient* (1987) and *The Philosophers* (1989) – and two final volumes of poetry: *Poems for Jane* (1979) and *Mikrokosmos* (1994). *Tetrarch* is of special interest since, al-

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<sup>53</sup> Alex Comfort, *Poems for Jane* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979), pp. 42, 52. But for Comfort's creativity, cf. Tony Gibson, 'Alex Comfort: Alive and Kicking', *Freedom*, 17 September 1994.

is largely to be explained by its initial formulation independent of intellectual influence. Its limitations can be equally understood by the realization that it did not develop within a living, dialectical tradition of thought and action. Similarly, Comfort's ideas and conceptual terms were not taken up, adapted and employed by other libertarian writers. After his striking exposition of them in the 1940s, he himself ceased to elaborate – certainly to develop – them. *Social Responsibility in Science and Art*, a Third Programme talk published as another Peace News Pamphlet, and very much a repetition of earlier writings, marks his effective withdrawal from political theory by 1952.<sup>29</sup>

What has been discussed so far is been Comfort's anarchist political theory – as opposed to his total conception of anarchism. In a preface to the selected poems of Kenneth Patchen, Comfort declared: 'The existence of medical science and of this kind of poetry are the only two factors which give contemporary Western life any claim to be called a civilization.'<sup>30</sup> This statement points to the second principal facet of Comfort's anarchism: its grounding in science.

Comfort qualified as and worked as a doctor in the 1940s (and again as a locum after his retirement in 1985); he had a PhD in biochemistry; and he was the pioneer of gerontology in this country, this being his central activity as a Research Fellow at University College London (where he remained from his appointment in 1951 until his emigration to the USA in 1973). For him it is science which comes first, not anarchism:

I recognize two obligations – to do nothing to increase the total of human suffering, and to leave

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<sup>29</sup> Alex Comfort, *Social Responsibility in Science and Art* (London: Peace News, 1952), and originally published in *Freedom*, 1, 8 December 1951, is reprinted in *APD*, pp. 139–46.

<sup>30</sup> Alex Comfort, 'Preface', to Kenneth Patchen, *Outlaw of the Lowest Planet* (London: Grey Walls Press, 1946), p. v (reprinted in *APD*, p. 86).

nothing undone which diminishes it. For that reason I personally think I should split my time between letters and applied science, and do... I feel that art is concerned to state the problem, and science and direct action (not 'politics' but mutual aid) to solve it in so far as it can be solved.

I think this view is at root scientific, and if I find contrary evidence I'll certainly alter it – publicly – but at present it explains more observed facts than any other theory of reality which I know.<sup>31</sup>

So 'his scientific conclusions drove him to anarchism, and ... if scientific investigation led him elsewhere he would abandon anarchism'. This is Colin Ward's summary of Comfort's position and he commented: 'I think he was wrong. I do not think the case for anarchism rests on "science". I think it is ultimately based on the aspirations of the heart rather than the deductions of the mind.'<sup>32</sup> John Doheny, a Canadian literary academic and an admirer of Comfort's oeuvre and his friend from the early 1950s, retorted: 'If I understand Comfort, he is not "wrong", for "deductions of the mind" (or "science") are merely the ideas, the momentary end result of the processes, that were begun by "the aspirations of the heart"...I would suggest that the "deductions of the mind" are the aspirations crystallized.'<sup>33</sup> Doheny's attempt at reconciling these divergent positions seems entirely misguided. Comfort's stance may appear extreme to contemporary anarchists – and Ward's reformulation disarmingly attractive. Historically, though, anarchists have, with few or no reservations, regarded science as a force for progress: being the revelation of the structure of the natural world (including hu-

<sup>31</sup> 'Philosophies in Little, I: Alex Comfort', *Resistance* (London), October 1946 (reprinted in *APD*, p. 97).

<sup>32</sup> Colin Ward, 'From the Outside Looking in', *University Libertarian*, no. i (December 1955).

<sup>33</sup> *University Libertarian*, no. 2 (Winter 1957).

visit India at the suggestion of his former colleague, the geneticist J.B.S. Haldane. His interest in and knowledge of Indian erotology were already apparent in the effervescent comic novel, *Come Out To Play*, but his return from Calcutta was followed in 1964 by a 'translation' from the Sanskrit of the medieval treatise, *The Koka Shastra*. Comfort's own manuals, *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking* and *More Joy: A Lovemaking Companion to The Joy of Sex*, which he wrote as a medical biologist – he always denied being a sexologist – were to appear in 1972 and 1973 respectively. They have achieved phenomenal sales worldwide – twelve million as of 1993 – and he is now best known as their author, his other reputations and achievements being overwhelmed and lost sight of in consequence of their success. The paucity of his imaginative writing after the early 1950s had, however, already resulted in a diminution of critical interest.<sup>52</sup> There was also a decline in its quality which he himself recognized, attributing it in a poem that is a graphic example of the problem, to the sexual experimentation he had begun to practise from around 1960:

I wonder where the man I was is gone –  
not here, not dead, not sleeping: somewhere else.  
I've shed his fears and many of his talents  
also his inexperience;  
I could not write poems like his today.  
And so I love women he did not know,  
think thoughts he did not think...  
I wonder where the man I was is gone.

<sup>52</sup> But see Derek Stanford, *The Freedom of Poetry: Studies in Contemporary Verse* (London: Falcon Press, 1947), pp. 74–122; Wayne Burns, 'Kafka and Alex Comfort: The Penal Colony Revisited', *Arizona Quarterly*, VIII, no. 2 (Summer 1952); Wayne Burns, 'Milton and Alex Comfort', *Interim*, IV (1954); John Doheny, 'Alex Comfort as Novelist', *Limbo* I, no. 9 (November 1964); as well as Drasdo (1963) and Salmon (1978).

It has been seen that Comfort had effectively withdrawn from political theory by 1952. Almost exactly the same applies to the cascade of ideas relating anarchism to the life sciences, particularly sociology. That also came to just as complete an end -and even more unexpected - in the course of 1951. What is the explanation for this?

First, it seems probable that Comfort was discouraged by a negative reaction to his enthusiastic programme for an Anarchist Encyclopaedia in January 1951. Certainly nothing more was heard of this project. He had been a fairly frequent contributor to *Freedom* since 1947 and especially between May 1950 and May 1951, when he published in it ten items (articles and letters). From May 1951 this terminated - with the solitary exception of the printing of the text of his radio talk, 'Social Responsibility in Science and Art', in December 1951.

Overriding these considerations, the cessation of his anarchist writing and theorizing must also relate to his appointment to the Department of Zoology, University College London in 1951-2. The 1950s saw Comfort's main effort concentrated on the biology of ageing. He published the standard textbook on the subject, *The Biology of Senescence*, in 1956; he received the Ciba Foundation Prize for research into the nature of age processes in 1958; and in 1963 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science by the University of London for his work on gerontology. After *And All But He Departed* (1951) there was not another volume of poetry until *Haste to the Wedding* (1962). After *A Giant's Strength* (1952) no novel appeared until *Come Out To Play* (1961). *Art and Social Responsibility* had been a first, precocious collection of articles in 1946; his second, *Darwin and the Naked Lady*, was not published till 1962.

The 1960s were a transitional decade for Comfort. *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom*, his Freedom Press book of 1948, had been the starting-point for *Sexual Behaviour in Society* (1950), which was revised as *Sex in Society* (1963). Then, in 1962, came a formative experience when he was invited to

man beings) and hence in opposition to the mystifying claims of religious superstition, of class rule and, after 1917, of ideology. It was only in the late-twentieth century that science and radical politics were uncoupled - with the rejection frequently of many of the applications of science in contradistinction to scientific knowledge *per se*.<sup>34</sup>

What kind of science can 'solve' 'the problem'? The relevant sciences, for Comfort, are biological, medical and social - the life sciences, we might say. During a key period in his thinking - which produced *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* (1950) - it was social psychology and sociology which he judged most relevant:

At the present time we are just beginning to approach the problems of society, of which war is perhaps the chief, by way of scientific study instead of along the traditional lines of what we can call Western political thought. We want to deal with these problems, if possible, by the same general methods as we have used, with such outstanding success in dealing with phenomena like smallpox. And I feel pretty certain that the most important addition to our understanding of man and society since the beginning of the century has been the demonstration that human behaviour is comprehensible - not something springing from a mystical background of original sin and original virtue but an intelligible response of an entity, human character, to its environment.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> In addition to the works of Kropotkin, see, for example, April Carter, *The Political Theory of Anarchism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 99-100, and Frank Harrison, 'Science and Anarchism: From Bakunin to Bookchin', *Our Generation*, XX, no. 2 (Spring 1989). Doheny was to concede privately his assent to my summary junking of his position.

<sup>35</sup> Alex Comfort, 'The Individual and World Peace', *One World*, August-September 1950 (reprinted in *APD*, pp. 146-7).

This is from an article of 1950. Comfort republished it in the New York anarchist journal *Resistance* in 1954, now adding in conclusion:

The task of the ‘revolutionary’, the individual committed to the purposive changing of the pattern of society toward the life-centred values, can now no longer be treated as a task of political intrigue. It is a branch of medicine – its main weapons are study and conciliation upon one hand, and readiness to disobey, based upon combined love and self-interest upon the other.<sup>36</sup>

So he could begin the final chapter of *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* with a bold – and much admired and reprinted – flourish on ‘Revolution’:

This is an age of discouraged revolutionaries. The nineteenth-century pattern of violent social change from below commands the full allegiance of serious sociologists only in those countries which lagged behind in the pattern of centralization – the Balkan States, Spain and Italy, the Communist States, and the emergent nationalist movements of the East.

He maintained that ‘modern sociology would seem to uphold the libertarian-anarchist rather than the totalitarian-institutional conception of social change’, and that ‘the basic tenets of many of the earlier anarchist writers, fundamental human sociality, the inappropriateness of coercive means to modify cultural patterns, and the basing of political change upon the assumption of personal responsibility by individuals,

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<sup>36</sup> Alex Comfort, ‘The Individual and World Peace’, *Resistance* (New York), June 1954, p. 5 (reprinted in APD, p. 154).

Similarly, he responded warmly to Kafka, Jean Giono, Ignazio Silone and, above all, Albert Camus. In his view Camus was probably ‘the most important living novelist’ and he was so impressed by *The Plague*, published in Paris in 1947, that he was inspired to write *On This Side Nothing* (1949), which although it has a derivative North African setting I consider Comfort’s most successful novel. For Comfort the key passage in *The Plague* is that in which the mysterious Tarrou explains his background, experiences and thinking to Rieux, the doctor. Tarrou says: ‘All I maintain is that on this earth there are pestilences and there are victims, and it’s up to us, so far as possible, not to join forces with the pestilences’ – a statement which Comfort kept repeating in his own political writings.<sup>49</sup> Comfort concluded: ‘Very few readers who share anything of the insight of Tarrou will read this novel without being as profoundly influenced by it as Shelley was by *Political Justice*. UNESCO should have it printed and sent free to every human being in Europe.’<sup>50</sup> Comfort was particularly struck by the relationship between Godwin and Shelley, saying, for example, ‘If [Godwin] did not make anarchism popular, at least he inspired Shelley.’<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> In his own translation. See Alex Comfort, *The Right Thing To Do* (London: Peace News, 1949), p. 6 (reprinted in APD, p. 112), and Comfort, *Social Responsibility in Science and Art*, pp. 7–8 (reprinted in APD, p. 145). I have quoted from the standard translation by Stuart Gilbert: Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1948; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), p. 207. See *ibid.*, pp. 201–9 for Tarrou’s full exposition.

<sup>50</sup> The two quotations are from Alex Comfort, ‘Keep Endless Watch’, *Readers News*, c. 1949 (Comfort Papers, clippings books), reprinted in APD, pp. 117, 119; but Comfort had previously reviewed *The Plague* for both *Tribune* and another journal, possibly the *Listener*. See also Salmon, pp. 90–2, for the influence of Camus on Comfort.

<sup>51</sup> Alex Comfort, *Darwin and the Naked Lady: Discursive Essays on Biology and Art* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 21, 98. ‘The Rape of Andromeda’, the essay from which the quotation is taken, was printed in abridged form, as Alex Comfort, ‘Sex-and-Violence and the Origin of the Novel’, *Anarchy*, no. 1 (March 1961), oddly his sole contribution to *Anarchy*.

so fruitfully, especially in Britain and the USA. Lewis Mumford and Aldous Huxley can be regarded, not unrealistically (and as explained in the previous chapter), as its precursors in the 1930s. During the second half of the century Colin Ward and Murray Bookchin, although in some significant ways opposites, developed this innovative anarchism, grounded in psychology, biology, ecology, anthropology, sociology, alternative technology: in contrast to 'Engels and economics'. Comfort, though, is different from Ward and Bookchin in one important respect. Both the others are optimists with a rosy view of human beings and their potentialities. Comfort contrasts by having a pessimistic edge, black and paranoid: the thrust of his anarchism is not in the release of humankind's innate goodness, despite his belief in its natural sociability, but in checking and dispersing the endless capacity for destructiveness and cruelty.<sup>47</sup>

Given the way 'it is all one project' for him, Comfort's literary affinities are very relevant to any consideration of his politics. His typically memorable declaration, in connection with Kenneth Patchen's poems, has already been quoted: 'The existence of medical science and of this kind of poetry are the only two factors which give contemporary Western life any claim to be called a civilization.' In the postwar years it was Patchen and other American writers such as Henry Miller, e. e. cummings and Kenneth Rexroth, whom he admired. They wrote 'as if they were citizens of an occupied country'; for them '“victory” in the conventional sense amounted to a defeat'. It is to their blend of pessimistic humanism and libertarian individualism that Comfort's own novels and poetry are most akin – rather than to any of his British contemporaries.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> I am indebted to Nicolas Walter for pressing me to this formulation, leading me to realize that it is this characteristic of Comfort's anarchism that I have always found especially appealing.

<sup>48</sup> Alex Comfort, 'War, Peace and Literature', unattributed article, c. 1946, in Comfort Papers, clippings books (reprinted in *APD*, pp. 88, 90).

through "mutual aid" and "direct action", retain general validity in terms of the new conception of sociology...' The conclusion for him is:

If the word 'anarchism', as a name for the attempt to effect changes away from the centralized and institutional towards the social and 'life-oriented' society, carries irrational implications, or suggests a preconceived ideology either of man or of society, we may hesitate to accept it. No branch of science can afford to ally itself with revolutionary fantasy, with emotionally determined ideas of human conduct, or with psychopathic attitudes. On the other hand suggested alternatives – 'biotechnic civilization' (Mumford), 'para-primitive society' (G.R. Taylor) – have little advantage beyond their novelty, and acknowledge none of the debts which we owe to the pioneers....

If, therefore, the intervention of sociology in modern affairs tends to propagate a form of anarchism, it is an anarchism based on observational research, which has little in common with the older revolutionary theory beside its objectives. It rests upon standards of scientific assessment to which the propagandist and actionist elements in nineteenth-century revolutionary thought are highly inimical. It is also experimental and tentative rather than dogmatic and Messianic. As a theory of revolution it recognizes the revolutionary process as one to which no further limit can be imposed – revolution of this kind is not a single act of redress or vengeance followed by

a golden age, but a continuous human activity whose objectives recede as it progresses.<sup>37</sup>

*Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* was Comfort's classic contribution to libertarian theory, applying the findings of psychiatry and social psychology to contemporary politics. Its argument had been outlined in 'Power and Democracy', the third talk of *The Pattern of the Future*; and the book was to be reissued as simply *Authority and Delinquency* in both 1970 and 1988, with the original subtitle of 'A Criminological Approach to the Problem of Power' replaced by 'A Study in the Psychology of Power'.<sup>38</sup> Comfort maintains that the modern state attracts psychopaths selectively to positions of authority and, furthermore, fosters and increases delinquent behaviour in its power holders. It is therefore, in effect, a treatise on Acton's dictum 'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely' for the conditions of the mid-twentieth century. I first read *Authority and Delinquency* at the age of twenty-one and it made an indelible impact on me. I have never since, for almost fifty years, been able to take seriously the pretensions of any occupants of positions of power, especially politicians; and this commends the work to me and should increasingly do so to others.

In a lecture to the Anarchist Summer School of 1950 Comfort was to make yet another of his striking statements:

Personally, I would like to see more of us, those who can, taking training in social sciences or engaging in research in this field. I do not want to

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<sup>37</sup> Alex Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State: A Criminological Approach to the Problem of Power* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 195c), pp. 86, 93–4, 96. Gordon Rattray Taylor originated the concept of a 'para-primitive society' in *Conditions of Happiness* (1949); Lewis Mumford developed that of a 'biotechnic civilization' in *The Culture of Cities* (1938).

<sup>38</sup> Alex Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency* (London: Sphere Books, 1970; London: Zwan Publications, 1988).

viously overlooked. To Marxism we have to add social anthropology, and we revise in adding...

A proletariat, a body of dispossessed people attempting to secure its rights, is a social unit. You can rally it, organize it as a mob or a class, and base your estimate of its probable conduct on knowledge of the common attitudes of its members to one another and to other classes. Dispossession in contemporary urban society, both here and in America, is of an entirely different kind. It is biological rather than economic, it affects the management as well as the citizens, and where it is canalized into overt acts, those acts tend to take the form, not of revolutionary action, but of individual delinquency or communal aggression. The economic proletariat has nothing to lose but its chains; the dispossessed today, as they figure in social anthropology or attend out-patient clinics, have lost everything but their identity.<sup>45</sup>

So Comfort comprehensively rejects not only Marxism but also the quasi-Marxist 'class-struggle' anarchism of anarchism's late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century heyday. He himself had never embraced either in his own idiosyncratic route to anarchism – for he was never, at any point, a socialist. As he wrote during the Second World War: 'The war is not between classes. The war is at root between individuals and barbarian society.'<sup>46</sup>

In total, Comfort was a pioneer, along with Paul Goodman in the 1940s and 1950s, of the new anarchism which emerged

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<sup>45</sup> Alex Comfort, 'On Defending a Telephone Exchange', *New Statesman and Nation*, 6 November 1948 (reprinted in *APD*, pp. 106–7).

<sup>46</sup> Comfort, *Art and Social Responsibility*, p. 29.

Herbert Read, his fellow anarchist polymath, considered that Comfort's 'syllabus' alone omitted agriculture, but that the project's 'possibility depends on being able to bring in outsiders like Mumford and Scott Williamson'.<sup>43</sup>

Attention should be drawn to several noteworthy features of Comfort's letter. There is his hubris: he has the ability to produce a work of the stature of *Das Kapital*, it is only the time that he lacks. There is his conviction that the role of anarchism in Britain had become that of an 'ideas-factory', not a mass movement, something that the Freedom Press Group indirectly acknowledged when it published *Anarchy* between 1960 and 1970 and thereby allowed Ward his head. There is the seeming correspondence with Huxley's abortive project of 1938 of collecting data 'in regard to the technique for giving a viable economic and social basis to philosophic anarchism'.<sup>44</sup> There is also his assurance that 'Engels and economics' needed to be replaced by psychology. This line of thinking was expanded upon in a remarkable short *New Statesman* article of three years earlier and prophetic of the social breakdown of a half a century afterwards:

The changes in our patterns of living have gone so far since Marx and Engels that some of their comment on historical forces looks as archaic as a full-bottomed wig. To the economic factors of the Industrial Revolution, which began the present process, we have to add innumerable new factors, pre-

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<sup>43</sup> Read Archive, letter from Read to Comfort, 25 January 1951; letter from Comfort to Read, 27 January 1951. (There is a photocopy of Read's letter in the Comfort Papers, Box 5, File 1.) Scott Williamson was a physician and one of the founders of the Peckham Health Centre (for which see Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), pp. 29–30, and *Anarchy*, no. 60 (February 1966), pp. 52–64). See Afterword below, pp. 363–4.

<sup>44</sup> Grover Smith (ed.), *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 434.

try to turn anarchism into a sociological Fabian Society, from which non-scientists are excluded. I want to see something done which has not been done before – a concerted, unbiased, and properly documented attempt to disseminate accurate teaching of the results of modern child psychiatry, social psychology and political psychology to the general public on the same scale as we have in the past tried to disseminate revolutionary propaganda.<sup>39</sup>

Colin Ward (writing under one of his pseudonyms, 'John Ellerby') quoted the passage in 1963 in *Anarchy* and remarked, 'Some anarchists took this advice seriously – a by-product of the result can be seen in some of the authoritative material which has been published in this journal...'<sup>40</sup> How influential was Comfort in directing the attention of sociologists to the fit between their discipline and anarchism? One of *Anarchy's* contributors, Stan Cohen, reiterated in 1985 that anarchism is 'the political philosophy most consistent with sociology'. That is, both anarchism and sociology highlight the centrality of such concepts as mutual aid, fraternity, good-neighbourliness.<sup>41</sup> But the only example of a prominent sociologist responding directly to Comfort's conception of a libertarian action sociology appears to have been T.B. (Tom) Bottomore. In 1951 Bottomore, then a research assistant at the London School of Economics, wrote to Comfort, after reading *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State*, asking for information about the experimental social groups advocated there, as he

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<sup>39</sup> Alex Comfort, *Delinquency* (London: Freedom Press, 1951), p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> John Ellerby, 'The Anarchism of Alex Comfort', *Anarchy*, no. 33 (November 1963), p. 337.

<sup>41</sup> Stan Cohen, *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment and Classification* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), pp. 267, 272. But for a different interpretation, see David Downes, 'Sociology as Subversion', *Freedom*, 12 December 1992.

wished to participate in one himself. Yet Bottomore, who was to found the Department of Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology for the new Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, and later returned to Britain as Professor at the University of Sussex, went on to become a Marxist, not an anarchist, sociologist.<sup>42</sup>

Yet there can be no doubt that Comfort anticipated the applied, pragmatic anarchism of Colin Ward and *Anarchy* (and Ward acknowledges the importance of Comfort's influence on him). This is made entirely explicit by Comfort's proposals in 1951 for some kind of an Anarchist Encyclopaedia as well as an anarchist exhibition connected with the Festival of Britain. Unfortunately, no copy of his 'syllabus', the outline of a book to be published not by Routledge but, presumably, by Freedom Press, appears to have survived. What does is Herbert Read's reply, beginning

What an optimist you are! I don't mean philosophically, but practically – to think (1) that the people exist to carry through your scheme; and (2) that FREEDOM would stand for it. But still I am entirely with you. Such a reassessment is what we need, and if we cannot produce it, our essential weakness is revealed.

Comfort's response to Read gives the fullest idea of what he had in mind:

I agree I'm an optimist. But unless libertarians are a little clearer in their own heads they lay themselves wide open, especially when the C[ommunist] P[arty] and others can produce a

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<sup>42</sup> Comfort Papers, Box 2, File 4, letters from Thomas Bottomore, 4, 29 March 1951. See Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State*, p. 105, for the relevant passage.

perfectly explicit account of what they propose and how they mean to get it. I mean to see what can be done via *Freedom* (Vero [Richards] and John [Hewetson] were both keen) and if the result there isn't fully adequate I mean to try to assemble a kind of Encyclopaedia of my own. Could we ourselves try to convoke a group of men we know to be sympathetic to the broader principle (not necessarily 'anarchism' with a slogan on a pole) who could write a manifesto of this kind in detail? I think at the present time it could have real historical importance. Failing that, I shall have to do the requisite reading and concoct the whole thing myself, but it would need a book of the general stature of *Das Kapital*, and I need to be exiled to find time to write it. I'm satisfied it has to be done, with psychology replacing Engels and economics.

I'm also talking the others into staging a small anarchist exhibition for the Festival [of Britain]! I thought it would draw a crowd – to see some of the historical material F[reedom] P[ress] possess, much of it interesting, and a pictorial montage of what anarchist thought has actually achieved, by way of impact on thought in other fields, from Godwin to the present: I wanted to include its influence on socialism, town-planning, psychology, education, and communal living experiments. John liked the idea and didn't regard it as beyond our resources. I do think the others are coming to accept our role as being that of an ideas-factory, for the present and in this country, rather than a mass movement.



fleshed out and developed a longstanding preoccupation, as he explored the manner in which ‘the social principle’ has been overborne by ‘the political principle’ in modern Britain. Since the late nineteenth century ‘the tradition of fraternal and autonomous associations springing up from below’ had been successively displaced by one of ‘authoritarian institutions directed from above’.<sup>50</sup> He saw a ‘sinister alliance of Fabians and Marxists, both of whom believed implicitly in the state, and assumed that they would be the particular elite in control of it’, effectively combining with ‘the equally sinister alliance of bureaucrats and professionals: the British civil service and the British professional classes, with their undisguised contempt for the way ordinary people organized anything’. The result was: ‘The great tradition of working-class self-help and mutual aid was written off, not just as irrelevant, but as an actual impediment, by the political and professional architects of the welfare state ... The contribution that the recipients had to make ... was ignored as a mere embarrassment...’<sup>51</sup> Drawing upon several recent historical works, he was able to show that the nineteenth-century dame schools, set up by working-class parents for working-class children and under working-class control, were swept away by the board schools of the 1870s; and similarly the self-organization of patients in the working-class medical societies was to be lost in the cre-

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printed with his acknowledgement to Ward omitted (letter from Young to Ward, 21 March 1997, for a copy of which I am obliged to Colin Ward).

<sup>50</sup> Ward, ‘Path Not Taken’, p. 195. He said these phrases (which also appear in Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (1973 edn), p. 123) were first published in 1956 in *Freedom*; but the original printing is actually located in a long letter of 30 June 1960 to the *Listener*, and his ‘Origins of the Welfare State’, *Freedom*, 12 June 1959, prefigures it only weakly. For other early engagements with theme see, for example, his articles, ‘Moving with Times...But Not in Step’, *Anarchy*, no. 3 (May 1961); ‘Anarchists and Fabians: An Anniversary Symposium’, *Anarchy*, no. 8 (October 1961); ‘House and Home’, *Anarchy*, no. 35 (January 1964).

<sup>51</sup> Ward, ‘Path Not Taken’, p. 196.

projects, the social and industrial history of the West Riding and the textbook for Gollancz, were to fuse and emerged, radically transformed, as *The Making of the English Working Class*. The result is probably the most influential historical work to have been published in English since the Second World War.<sup>55</sup>

The key section of *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* for my argument – and for Thompson’s intellectual and political development – is the fourth and final Part: ‘Necessity and Desire’; and within it, especially, the sub-section, ‘Desire and Necessity’, with these central terms significantly reversed. ‘Necessity’ is Marxist economic determinism, the course of the productive forces and the relations of production in society. ‘Desire’, in contrast, is morality, conscience, human will and, what became for Thompson the defining term, ‘agency’.<sup>56</sup> Operating in tandem, ‘desire’ and ‘necessity’ together constitute ‘moral realism’. This is the quality upon which Thompson identifies Morris’s ‘claim to greatness’ being founded.<sup>57</sup>

Thompson quotes Morris distinguishing between ‘the two great forces which rule the world, Necessity and Morality’: ‘if we give it all up into the hands of necessity, Society will explode volcanically with such a crash as the world has not yet witnessed’; and, again, from ‘The Society of the Future’:

I am not going into argument on the matter of free will and predestination; I am only going to assert that if individual men are the creatures of their surrounding conditions, as indeed I think they are, it

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partment of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, University of Leeds, *Annual Report*, 1958–9.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Eric Hobsbawm’s splendid obituary of Thompson, *Independent*, 30 August 1993 [reprinted in *Radical History Review*, no. 58 (Winter 1994)].

<sup>56</sup> *WMRR* (1955), p. 838.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 828.

must be the business of man as a social animal ... to make the surroundings which make the individual man what he is. Man must and does create the conditions under which he lives...<sup>58</sup>

In a passage excised from the second edition of 1977, Thompson contends:

This unity, in the fight for Socialism, of necessity and desire ... is central to the thought of Marx and Engels. It is perhaps Morris's most important contribution to English culture to have brought his rich store of historical and artistic knowledge, and the passionate moral insight of a great artist, to the task of revealing the full meaning of this.<sup>59</sup>

Yet elsewhere in the book Thompson criticizes Morris for being, in effect, too Marxist: '...Morris has not emphasized sufficiently the *ideological* role of art, its active agency in *changing* human beings and society as a whole, its agency in man's class-divided history'; and again: '...while this dialectical understanding of change, growth and decay, was ever-present in his writing, he saw man's economic and social development always as the master-process, and tended to suggest that the arts were passively dependent upon social change'.<sup>60</sup> Raymond Williams cited these two passages in *Culture and Society*, rightly commenting of the latter: 'It has normally been assumed that this was precisely what Marx taught, and the position that Marxists wished to defend.... Morris's "master-process"... is surely Marx's "real foundation", which "determines consciousness"'.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 838.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 837.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 763, 770 (Thompson's emphasis).

<sup>61</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 265.

Ward was, with good reason, scornful of most other anarchists' obsession with the history, whether glorious or infamous, of their tradition: 'I think the besetting sin of anarchism has been its preoccupation with its own past...'<sup>46</sup> Still, despite his own emphasis on the here-and-now and the future, he wrote four historical books, the first two with Dennis Hardy and the third with David Crouch: *Arcadia for All: The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* (1984); *Goodnight Campers! The History of the British Holiday Camp* (1986); *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture* (1988); and *Cotters and Squatters: Housing's Hidden History* (2002). The masterly *Arcadia for All*, a history of the 'plotlands' of south-east England, is simply a natural extension back into the recent past of his major interest in self-build and squatting in the present, while *Cotters and Squatters* draws from their entire historical record in England and Wales; and *The Allotment* touches upon similar issues. In *Goodnight Campers!* the entrepreneurial holiday camps are traced to their origins in the early twentieth century and the 'pioneer camps', in which a key role was played by the major organizations of working-class self-help and mutual aid: the co-operative movement and trade unions.<sup>47</sup> The historic importance of such institutions in the provision of welfare and the maintenance of social solidarity was to become after *Goodnight Campers!* a theme of increasing significance in Ward's work.<sup>48</sup>

He stated his case in 'The Path Not Taken', a striking short article of 1987;<sup>49</sup> but his analysis over the next ten years

<sup>46</sup> 'Colin Ward Interview', *Freedom*, June 1984.

<sup>47</sup> Colin Ward and Dennis Hardy, *Goodnight Campers! The History of the British Holiday Camp* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1986), esp. chap. 2.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, three of his articles: 'Those Talking Co-op Blues', *Freedom*, ii June 1994; 'A Token Anarchist's Week', *Freedom*, 29 April 1995; 'Coping with Jobless Capitalism', *Freedom*, 26 April 1997.

<sup>49</sup> Colin Ward, 'The Path Not Taken', *Raven*, no. 3 (November 1987), abridged as 'Rebels Finding Their Cause', *Guardian*, 12 October 1987. The apparently independently convergent views of Michael Young (in conjunction with Gerald Lemos), 'Roots of Revival', *Guardian*, 19 March 1997, were

similar anarchism to Ward's he began to expound from 'The May Pamphlet', included in his *Art and Social Nature* (1946), onwards. Goodman became a frequent contributor to *Anarchy* and *Anarchy in Action* is dedicated to his memory; yet Ward was only to meet him once (when he was in London in 1967 for the Dialectics of Liberation conference).<sup>43</sup> In an issue of *Anarchy* celebrating the work of Alex Comfort, Ward drew attention to the similarities between Goodman and Comfort, and the Comfort of *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* (1950) and *Delinquency* (1951), in which he calls for anarchism to become a libertarian action sociology, is the final significant influence on Ward's anarchism.<sup>44</sup>

In total, as he explained in 1958:

To my mind the most striking feature of the unwritten handbook of twentieth-century anarchism is not in its rejection of the insights of the classical anarchist thinkers, Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, but its widening and deepening of them. But it is selective, it rejects perfectionism, utopian fantasy, conspiratorial romanticism, revolutionary optimism; it draws from the classical anarchists their most valid, not their most questionable ideas. And it adds to them the subtler contribution of later (and neglected because untranslated) thinkers like Landauer and Malatesta. It also adds the evidence provided in this century by the social sciences, by psychology and anthropology, and by technical change.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ward, *Influences*, pp. 115–32. See also *Anarchy*, no. 11 (January 1962), a special Goodman number.

<sup>44</sup> 'John Ellerby', 'The Anarchism of Alex Comfort', *Anarchy*, no. 33 (November 1963), esp. pp. 329–32.

<sup>45</sup> *Freedom*, 28 June 1958. Also quoted in *TA*, pp. 54–5.

Morris's insistence upon the central role of morality must have been influenced by – maybe even derived from – his co-laborator, the heterodox Marxist, Ernest Belfort Bax, co-author with him of 'Socialism from the Root up', serialized in 23 articles in *Commonweal*, 1886–8, and reprinted in 1893 as *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome*. Bax, who had been partly educated in Germany and was an initiate of its philosophy, recast historical materialism by stressing the autonomy of other ideas also and of cultural factors in general, just as Thompson himself (despite a disparaging assessment of Bax) was eventually to do.<sup>62</sup>

Thompson was later to consider 'Morris, by 1955, had claimed me',<sup>63</sup> and we can see that he had already begun to revise classical Marxism in this volume, rather remarkably published by the Communist Party's Lawrence & Wishart. In what must have been his last interview he contended, too sweepingly: 'Apart from my first edition of *William Morris*, I haven't written any pious, orthodox Marxist history at all.'<sup>64</sup> He came to realize that 'Morris could (and did) take certain Marxist propositions as his point of departure, but used these as a springboard from which his imagination made a utopian leap'; and that 'Morris may be assimilated to Marxism only in the course of a process of self-criticism and re-ordering within Marxism itself'.<sup>65</sup> What this entailed, practically, was that: 'When, in 1956, my disagreements with

<sup>62</sup> Ruth Kinna, *William Morris: The Art of Socialism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 97–9, 110–12; Ernest Belfort Bax, *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and Late Victorian* (1918; New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967), pp. 46–8; E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1977) [hereafter *WMRR* (1977)], pp. 372–5. See also Mark Bevir, 'Ernest Belfort Bax: Marxist, Idealist, and Positivist', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, LIV (1993), esp. pp. 131–5.

<sup>63</sup> *WMRR* (1977), p. 810.

<sup>64</sup> 'Edward Thompson, 1924–1993: Scholar and Activist' [edited transcript of BBC Radio Three interview, 20 May 1993], *Socialist History*, no. 6 (Autumn 1994), p. 29.

<sup>65</sup> *WMRR* (1977), pp. 790, 802.

orthodox Marxism became fully articulate, I fell back on modes of perception which I'd learned in those years of close company with Morris.<sup>66</sup> In his editorials and articles in the *Reasoner*, the *New Reasoner* and the early *New Left Review*, Morris's name and example are continually invoked and the dialectical interaction between necessity and desire elaborated upon. Especially noteworthy articles are 'Socialist Humanism' (*New Reasoner*, no. 1, Summer 1957) and 'Agency and Choice' (*New Reasoner*, no. 5, Summer 1958).

The emphasis on agency is what I referred to earlier as the organizing innovation of *The Making of the English Working Class*, which is structured in part by the rejection of academic positivist social science but, fundamentally, by a critique of Marxist orthodoxy, 'which supposed that the working class was the more-or-less spontaneous generation of new productive forces and relations'.<sup>67</sup> *The Making of the English Working Class* opens famously: 'This book has a clumsy title, but it is one which meets its purpose. *Making*, because it is a study in an active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning. The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making.'<sup>68</sup>

In the 1960S and 1970S it was Louis Althusser who emerged as the creative theorist of orthodox, determinist Marxism. Thompson's furious polemic against him, advocating 'desire', 'agency' and now 'voluntarism', appeared in 1978 as 'The Poverty of Theory', an 'essay' of more than 200 pages.<sup>69</sup> The previous year had seen the publication of the second edition of *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, with its long and very important Postscript – important both for Morris studies and in Thompson's oeuvre. Here

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 810.

<sup>67</sup> Thompson, *Making*, p. i4. See also MARHO, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7; and 'Edward Thompson, 1924–1993', *Socialist History*, p. 29.

<sup>68</sup> Thompson, *Making*, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> In Thompson, *Poverty* (see esp. pp. 263–5).

the Oxford Anarchist Group, although asserting that he had 'every sympathy' with *Anarchy*: 'I am very sorry, I should like to oblige.'<sup>40</sup> George Orwell and his 'pretty anarchical' version of socialism also need to be mentioned; and in 1955 Ward published 'Orwell and Anarchism', a persuasively argued series of five articles, in *Freedom*.<sup>41</sup>

From across the Atlantic two periodicals, which were available from Freedom Bookshop, were important. *politics* (1944–49), edited by Dwight Macdonald in the course of his transition from Marxism to a pacifist anarchism, Ward considered 'my ideal of a political journal', admiring its 'breadth, sophistication, dryness'. Although Macdonald lived in London in 1956–7 and again in 1960–61, he had by then moved to the right – although participating in the Committee of 100's first sit-down demonstration in Whitehall in February 1961 – and Ward was to meet him only two or three times.<sup>42</sup> *Why?* (1942–7), later *Resistance* (1947–54), was edited by a group which included David Wieck and Paul Goodman. Goodman, who also contributed to *politics*, was another principal influence, firstly and always, for *Communitas* (1947), the planning classic he wrote with his brother Percival, but also for the very

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<sup>40</sup> Ward, *Influences*, p. 50; letter from Berlin to Ward, 10 January [1964] (for a copy of which I am indebted to Colin Ward). Woodcock's article on Herzen was reprinted in George Woodcock, *The Writer and Politics* (London: Porcupine Press, 1948), chap. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with CW. 'Orwell and Anarchism' has been reprinted in [Vernon Richards (ed.)] *George Orwell at Home (and among the Anarchists): Essays and Photographs* (London: Freedom Press, 1998), pp. 15–45.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with CW. For Macdonald and *politics*, see Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Critical American: The Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (Guilford, CT: Archon Books, 1984); Michael Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); and Gregory D. Sumner, *Dwight Macdonald and the 'politics' Circle* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). For Macdonald in London, see NW, 'A Rebel in Defence of Tradition', *Freedom*, 10 December 1994; Vernon Richards, *A Weekend Photographer's Notebook* (London: Freedom Press, 1996), p. 44 and note 59.

If progress is the goal, for whom then are we working? Who is this Moloch who, as the toilers approach him, instead of rewarding them, draws back, and as a consolation to the exhausted multitudes shouting, 'We, who are about to die, salute thee!', can only give the mocking answer that after their death all will be beautiful on earth. Do you really wish to condemn human beings alive today to the mere sad role of caryatids supporting a floor for others one day to dance upon? Of wretched galley slaves who, up to their knees in mud, drag a barge with the humble words 'Future Progress' on its flag.

A goal which is indefinitely remote is not a goal at all, it is a deception. A goal must be closer – at the very least the labourer's wage or pleasure in the work performed. Each epoch, each generation, each life has had, and has, its own experience, and *en route* new demands grow, new methods.

Herzen's conclusion is that 'the end of each generation must be itself'.<sup>39</sup> By extension another influence on Ward is Herzen's outstanding expositor in English, Isaiah Berlin, whose major liberal statements, *Historical Inevitability* and *Two Concepts of Liberty*, he also prized. Yet he was familiar with Herzen long before Berlin's 'A Marvellous Decade', George Woodcock having published an article on him in *politics*, whose editor, Dwight Macdonald, was another Herzen aficionado. Berlin was to decline Ward's invitation to write a piece on Zeno of Citium, on whom he was due to speak to

<sup>39</sup> Cited in full in Ward, *Anarchism*, p. 32. A shorter version, from which the conclusion is drawn, appears in Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (1973 edn), p. 136. The passage, but in a different translation, is quoted in Colin Ward, *Housing Is Theft, Housing Is Freedom* (Nottingham: Old Hammond Press, n.d.), p. 9; Ward, *Influences*, p. 60; TA, p. 86. (The emphasis is Ward's.)

Thompson wades into another French Stalinist, Paul Meier, and the book which was to be translated as *William Morris: The Marxist Dreamer*: 'It seemed one had extricated Morris, twenty-one years ago, from an antiMarxist myth, only to see him assimilated curtly within a myth of Marxist orthodoxy.'<sup>70</sup> Against Meier Thompson advocates the work of a third French theorist, Miguel Abensour, whom Perry Anderson (in his impressive counterblast, *Arguments within English Marxism*) rightly identifies as 'a libertarian' – that is, as some kind of anarchist.<sup>71</sup> It is, in fact, just around this time that Thompson declared, in 'The Poverty of Theory', for what he called 'libertarian Communism', which he described as 'a Socialism which is both democratic and revolutionary in its means, its strategy and objectives'.<sup>72</sup> He was also identifying himself in the 1980s as, in addition to a 'libertarian Communist', a 'dissident Communist'; yet it is probably 'dissident' which is the significant adjective here, with 'libertarian' denoting a Communist who upholds full civil liberties.<sup>73</sup> 'Libertarian Communism' seems, all the same, a particularly apt way of designating both Morris's and Thompson's socialism.

It was the anarchist tradition which originally insisted on the essential role of 'desire' – manifested in will, revolt, insurrection – as opposed to the classical Marxist, pre-Leninist waiting upon the outcome of 'necessity'. I have, for my own part, always found this Marxist realism a salutary counterweight and correction; and further I believe Thompson, noble though his endeavour undoubtedly is, gave undue, unrealistic and increasing emphasis, indeed precedence, to desire (or agency) over necessity (or determinism) – to the point where he ceased to be

<sup>70</sup> WMRR (i977), p. 802.

<sup>71</sup> Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 159, 161–2.

<sup>72</sup> Thompson, *Poverty*, pp. 380–4. See also the important interview, 'E.P. Thompson: Recovering the Libertarian Tradition', *Leveller*, 22 January 1979.

<sup>73</sup> Bess, p. 117.

a Marxist.<sup>74</sup> As his widow has explained, ‘he increasingly hesitated to call himself a Marxist’, preferring ‘to say that he wrote within a Marxist tradition’.<sup>75</sup>

Thompson derived this foundation of his life’s work – its ‘key organizing theme’, as Anderson has put it<sup>76</sup> – from his great predecessor, William Morris. The odyssey from Stalinism to libertarian Communism had been virtually effected in terms of theory as early as 1955. For Thompson: ‘...the prevailing note of Morris’s later actions and writings [is] the appeal to man’s conscience as a vital agency of social change.’<sup>77</sup> Similarly, he believed that Morris discovered independently

The understanding that ... the age-old contradiction between the unfolding possibilities of life and their negation by class oppression, between aspiration and reality, was at last ended; or, if not ended, at last transmuted into the contradiction between man’s boundless desire and the necessary limitations imposed by his environment and nature.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> There is, in general, the very detailed analysis by Anderson, *Arguments*, chaps. 2, 3, as well as John Goode, ‘E.P. Thompson and “the Significance of Literature”’, in Harvey J. Kaye and Keith McClelland (eds.), *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 192. See also Raphael Samuel, ‘Born-again Socialism’, in Archer *et al.*, p. 49.

<sup>75</sup> Dorothy Thompson (ed.), *The Essential E.P. Thompson* (New York: New Press, 2001), p. x. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 492–4.

<sup>76</sup> Anderson, *Arguments*, p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> *WMRR* (1955), p. 831. Gregor McLennan is dishonest in implying that this emphasis is new to the 1977 edition, where it merely reads ‘the prevailing note of Morris’s later actions and writings [is] the appeal to *the moral consciousness* as a vital agency of social change’ (*WMRR* (1977), p. 721 (my italics)), although he is certainly right that the claim that ‘Morris’s moral criticism of society is... entirely compatible with dialectical materialism’ (*WMRR* (1955), p. 832) is omitted from the second edition (‘E.P. Thompson and the Discipline of Historical Context’, in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, p. 108).

<sup>78</sup> *WMRR* (1955), p. 835.

extent, did recycle his *War Commentary* and *Freedom* pieces on postwar squatting.<sup>35</sup>

Ward’s difference of emphasis is, in part, to be explained by the fact that he was approaching anarchism from a background of architecture, town planning, the Garden City movement – ‘You could see the links between Ebenezer Howard and Kropotkin’ – and regional planning.<sup>36</sup> He was considerably influenced by Patrick Geddes (who is acknowledged accordingly in *Influences*), Lewis Mumford and the regionalist approach.<sup>37</sup> William Morris was also important – ‘As the decades roll by, it becomes more and more evident that the truly creative socialist thinker of the nineteenth century was not Karl Marx, but William Morris’ – but not for his political lectures, which were not to Ward’s taste, but rather as mediated by the Arts and Crafts Movement (his early employer, Sidney Caulfield, had actually known Morris) and, in particular, as has been seen, by Lethaby.<sup>38</sup> It is Alexander Herzen, though not an anarchist, whom he regards as his principal political influence, repeatedly quoting – just as with Buber’s paragraph from ‘Society and the State’ – the same passage from *From the Other Shore*, praising it as ‘a splendidly-phrased political message for every twentieth-century zealot, prepared to sacrifice his generation for the sake of *his* version of the future’:

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<sup>35</sup> Colin Ward, *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (London: Freedom Press, 1976), pp. 13–27.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with CW. For Ward on Howard and the Garden City movement, see Peter Hall and Colin Ward, *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1998), esp. chaps. 1–3; *TA*, pp. 70–73.

<sup>37</sup> Ward, *Influences*, pp. 105–i. For Ward on Mumford, see Colin Ward, ‘Introduction’, to Lewis Mumford, *The Future of Technics and Civilization* (London: Freedom Press, 1986).

<sup>38</sup> William Morris, *A Factory as It Might Be*; Colin Ward, *The Factory We Never Had* (Nottingham: Mushroom Bookshop, 1994), p. 21. See also Colin Ward, ‘An Old House amongst New Folk: Making Nowhere Somewhere’, in Stephen Coleman and Paddy O’Sullivan (eds.), *William Morris and News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time* (Hartford, Devon: Green Books, 1990), pp. 127–36.

created by the organizational requirements of society in a period of rapid population growth and industrialization at a time when unrestricted exploitation had to yield to a growing extent to the demands of the exploited, has been filled by the State, because of the weakness, inadequacy or incompleteness of libertarian alternatives. Thus the State, in its role as a form of social organization rather than in its basic function as an instrument of internal and external coercion, is not so much the villain of the piece as the result of the inadequacy of the other answers to social needs.<sup>33</sup>

It seems extraordinary that Wardian anarchism was nurtured within a Freedom Press Group whose other members were looking back to the workers' and soldiers' councils of the Russian and German Revolutions and the collectives of the Spanish Revolution. He never believed in an imminent revolution: 'That's just not my view of anarchism. I think it's un-historical....I don't think you'll ever see any of my writings in *Freedom* which are remotely demanding revolution next week.' When he tried to interest his comrades in the late 1940s in a pamphlet on the squatters' movement – to give them the idea he had even pasted his articles up – he recalled that 'it wasn't thought that this is somehow relevant to anarchism'.<sup>34</sup> Although they deserve great credit for allowing him to go his own way with *Anarchy*, it was not until after the success of *Tenants Take Over*, published by the Architectural Press in 1974, that Freedom Press suggested that he write a book for them. The result was *Housing: An Anarchist Approach*, which, to some

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For years this last was the only significant English translation of a book by Landauer, but it has now been supplemented by Gustav Landauer, *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader*, ed. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> *Freedom*, 28 June 1958.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with CW.

Thompson left Yorkshire in 1965 for the new University of Warwick and its Centre for the Study of Social History (although he was to resign in 1970 and never again held a permanent academic post). He once again moved back in his historical research, now focusing on the eighteenth century. The first books of this phase were published in 1975: the collaborative *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, produced in conjunction with four former research students, and in which his contribution was 'The Crime of Anonymity', and *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act. Customs in Common* (1991) collected several seminal articles from the previous twenty-five years, notably 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism' and 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', as well as 'The Sale of Wives', previously unpublished but already greatly admired as a much-delivered paper.

The substantial interval between *Albion's Fatal Tree*, *Whigs and Hunters* and *Customs in Common* is to be explained principally by NATO's announcement in 1979 that land-based intermediate-range nuclear missiles would be deployed in Europe from 1983. Thompson reacted by mobilizing his considerable physical and intellectual energy in the campaign to thwart this decision. His impassioned oratory, magnificent eloquence and charismatic presence contributed significantly to a major revival of CND as he addressed numerous meetings throughout the country, averaging ten public appearances each month between 1980 and 1982. He answered the official *Protect and Survive* – offering 'civil defence' advice as to how to survive a nuclear war – with an instant classic of radical mockery and counter-argument, *Protest and Survive*. And he played the leading role in a new campaign for European Nuclear Disarmament (END), seeking a nuclear-free zone on both sides of the Iron Curtain, in Eastern and Western Europe. One consequence of this intense activity in the early

eighties was that he became very well known throughout the revitalized peace movement, occupying a position comparable to Bertrand Russell during the first wave of the agitation for nuclear disarmament. When a future A.J.P. Taylor comes to write an updated version of *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy 1792–1939*, a chapter will necessarily be allocated to E.P. Thompson.<sup>79</sup>

While fifteen years in the writing, the little-read *The Sykaos Papers*, published in 1988, belongs to this activist period. It was Thompson's only foray into fiction yet, moving and frequently highly comic, it is also immensely accomplished. Renewed contact between the Earth and the planet Oitar, which although in remote galaxies possess some intimate common history, results in the inevitable nuclear self-immolation of a warring humanity unable to unite in the face of an external threat. The novel concludes with the disobedience and resistance of the significantly named Adam – offspring of Oi Paz, an Oitarian astronaut (as well as poet and gardener), and the female anthropologist he has met on Earth – who challenges the centralized, completely controlled society of Oitar with an affirmation of human imperfection: 'There is nothing in the universe...which is not cross-grained, contradictory, divided against itself, awkward, and at odds. It is in the dialectic of nature to be so.' In his obituary appreciation Perry Anderson, Thompson's astutest critic, rightly described *The Sykaos Papers* as 'the most complete single statement of his thought, giving imaginative form to ideas that find comparable expression nowhere else in his work'.<sup>80</sup>

Thompson had rashly pledged that he would write no more history until all cruise missiles had been removed from – yet they are still stationed on – British soil. He relented

<sup>79</sup> For CND's second wave and END, see Hinton, chap. i5; Carter, *Peace Movements*, chaps. 5, 7; Bess, pp. i24–54.

<sup>80</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Sykaos Papers* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), p. 476; Anderson, 'Diary' (reprinted in Anderson, *Spectrum*); Palmer, p. 153.

exemplified by all spontaneous human associations built around shared needs or interests, such the family, informal groups, co-ops of all kinds, trade unions and communities, as opposed to 'the political principle', manifested in authority, power, hierarchy and, of course, the State. Buber maintained:

All forms of government have this in common: each possesses more power than is required by the given conditions; in fact, this excess in the capacity for making dispositions is actually what we understand by political power. The measure of this excess ... represents the exact difference between Administration and Government. I call it the 'political surplus'. Its justification derives from the external and internal instability, from the latent state of crisis between nations and within every nation...The political principle is always stronger in relation to the social principle than the given conditions require. The result is a continuous diminution in social spontaneity.

Ward comments that these words 'cut the rhetoric of politics down to size' and that ever since he first read them he has 'found Buber's terminology far more valuable as an explanation of events in the real world ... than a dozen lectures on political theory or on sociology'.<sup>32</sup> In 'The Unwritten Handbook', he himself wrote that a power vacuum,

<sup>32</sup> Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, pp. 19–21; Ward, *Influences*, pp. 88–9; TA, pp. 86–7; Colin Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 26–7. See also the Buber-Landauer-Muhsam issue of *Anarchy*, no. 54 (August 1965), where 'Society and the State' is reprinted (Ward's quotation is on p. 241). For Landauer, see Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973); also Charles B. Maurer, *Call to Revolution: The Mystical Anarchism of Gustav Landauer* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), and Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism* (St Louis: Telos Press, 1978) [with a helpful introduction by Russell Berman and Tim Luke].



footnote to Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*<sup>30</sup> Yet Kropotkin prepared for a bloody social revolution; and Ward also goes far beyond him in the types of co-operative groups he identifies in modern societies and the centrality he accords to them in anarchist transformation.

Ward is still closer to the remarkable Landauer. He even goes so far as to say that his 'is not a new version of anarchism. Gustav Landauer saw it, not as the founding of something new, "but as the actualization and reconstitution of something that has always been present, which exists alongside the state, albeit buried and laid waste."' And one of Ward's favourite quotations, which he rightly regards as 'a profound and simple contribution to the analysis of the state and society in one sentence' derives from an article by Landauer of 1910: 'The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently.'<sup>31</sup> What this led Landauer to advocate was the formation of producers' and consumers' co-operatives, but especially of agrarian communes; and his emphasis is substantially different to Ward's exploration of 'anarchist solutions' to 'immediate issues'. In any case, for many years Ward only knew of Landauer through a chapter in Martin Buber's *Paths in Utopia* (1949); and it is Buber, who had been Landauer's friend, executor and editor and shared similar views concerning the relationship between society and the State but, although sympathetic, was not an anarchist himself, whom Ward acknowledges as his influence with respect to 'society'. He was deeply impressed by 'Society and the State' – a lecture of 1950 that he has perpetually cited – in which Buber distinguishes between 'the social principle',

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<sup>30</sup> Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (1973 edn), pp. 11, 19.

and, his health broken, brought to completion a number of long-standing historical and literary projects during his final half-dozen years.<sup>81</sup> Although there have now been four other posthumous volumes, it was particularly fitting that the book published three months after his death in August 1993 was the study of William Blake that he had been intending for decades. The third number of the *New Reasoner* had included a supplement celebrating the bicentenary of Blake's birth together with, unusually, a pseudonymous article (employing Thompson's mother's maiden name), pointing to Blake's 'revolutionary view of the true code of Christian love', sexual and otherwise, and summarizing his indictment in 'London' of 'the acquisitive ethic which divides man from man, leads him into mental and moral captivity, destroys the sources of joy, and brings, as its reward, death'. Blake is a constant presence in *The Making of the English Working Class*, which Thompson concludes thus:

After William Blake, no mind was at home in both cultures [of Romantics and Radical craftsmen], nor had the genius to interpret the two traditions to each other .... In the failure of the two traditions to come to a point of juncture, something was lost. How much we cannot be sure, for we are among the losers.

In *The Sykaos Papers*, the imaginative companion to *Witness against the Beast*, Adam's mother, Helena Sage, takes her copy of Blake on her mission to the Moon and at the end of the principal narrative, just before she commits suicide, quotes from it. I would therefore even go so far as to say that of the influences on Thompson's career, Blake was more significant overall than

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<sup>81</sup> Thompson, *Persons*, 360–2; Palmer, 141–4; Hobsbawm, 'Edward Palmer Thompson', pp. 534–5.

Morris, and of equal importance to – probably even of more importance than – Marx. As Thompson himself insisted in 1973: ‘If I devised my own pantheon I would without hesitation place within it the Christian antinomian, William Blake, and I would place him beside Marx.’<sup>82</sup>

It is therefore scarcely surprising that *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* is a stunning, undoubtedly major work. In the first half of the book Thompson situates Blake within the tradition of antinomianism and, more specifically, suggests that the relevant antinomian version was that of the Muggletonians and that Blake may well have been born into a Muggletonian family. Much of this is foreshadowed by two or three compelling pages in *The Making of the English Working Class*, where Thompson quotes Blake’s lines:

The Strongest Poison ever known  
Came from Caesar’s Laurel Crown

(the last three words of which were to form the title of one of D.S. Savage’s unpublished books).<sup>83</sup> In the second part of *Witness against the Beast* Thompson concentrates on the period 1788 to 1794, examining both Blake’s involvement in the (Swedenborgian) Church of the New Jerusalem and the confluence during these years of Christian, deist and Jacobin ideas which influenced his outlook and art. This section includes close readings of three of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*: ‘The Divine Image’, ‘London’ and ‘The Human’. Much of Thompson’s discussion is tough going, especially the lengthy passages on the theological doctrines of anti-nomian and other sects – and

<sup>82</sup> F.W. Jessup, ‘The Making of “London”’, *New Reasoner*, no. 3 (Winter 1957–8), pp. 66, 68; Thompson, *Making*, p. 915; E.P. Thompson, ‘An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski’, in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1973*, p. 14 [reprinted in Thompson, *Poverty*, p. 106]. Palmer, pp. 70–2, provides a valuable conspectus of Thompson’s engagement with Blake.

<sup>83</sup> Thompson, *Making*, pp. 54–7.

to *Architects* (1996) and (with Peter Hall) *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (1998); education: *Talking Schools* (1995); education and the environment: *Streetwork: The Exploding School* (1973) (with Anthony Fyson), *The Child in the City* (1978) and *The Child in the Country* (1988); education, work and housing: *Havens and Springboards: The Foyer Movement in Context* (1997); education and housing: *Undermining the Central Line* (1989) (with Ruth Rendell); transport: *Freedom to Go: After the Motor Age* (1991); and water: *Reflected in Water: A Crisis of Social Responsibility* (1997). As can be seen from this (incomplete) list, a surprisingly large number of his books, despite their distinctiveness, have been written in collaboration, something he particularly enjoyed.<sup>28</sup>

How did Ward come to espouse such an anarchism? Who are the thinkers and which are the traditions responsible for shaping his outlook? First, it should be said that some would argue that there is no originality in Wardian anarchism since it is all anticipated by Peter Kropotkin and Gustav Landauer. There is indeed no denying Ward’s very considerable debt to Kropotkin. He names Kropotkin as his economic influence; described himself as ‘an anarchist-communist, in the Kropotkin tradition’; and, regarding *Fields, Factories and Workshops* as ‘one of those great prophetic works of the nineteenth century whose hour is yet to come’, brought it up to date as *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* (1974).<sup>29</sup> It is also the case that Kropotkin in his great *Mutual Aid* demonstrates that co-operation is pervasive within both the animal and the human worlds, in his concluding chapter giving contemporary clubs and voluntary societies, such as the Lifeboat Association, as examples. Ward, with his typical modesty, writes that in a sense *Anarchy in Action* is ‘simply an extended, updating

<sup>28</sup> See TA, p. 84.

<sup>29</sup> Boston, p.65; Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Today*, ed. Colin Ward (London: Freedom Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1985), p. iv. See also Ward, *Influences*, chap. 3; TA, p. 85.

contrast to the excessively rational and intellectual France and Italy.<sup>25</sup>

It is Ward's vision of anarchism, along with his many years of working in architecture and planning, that account for his concentration on 'anarchist applications' or 'anarchist solutions' to 'immediate issues in which people *are actually likely to get involved*'.<sup>26</sup> Although he told me in 1997 that in his opinion 'all my books hang together as an exploration of the relations between people and their environment' (by which he means the built, rather than the 'natural', environment), and while this clearly covers three-quarters of his output, it seems rather (as he had put it thirteen years earlier) that all his publications were 'looking at life from an anarchist point of view'.<sup>27</sup> So the 'anarchist applications' concern housing: *Tenants Take Over* (1974), *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (1976), *When We Build Again, Let's Have Housing That Works!* (1985) and *Talking Houses* (1990); architecture and planning: *Welcome, Thinner City: Urban Survival in the 1990s* (1989), *New Town, Home Town: The Lessons of Experience* (1993), *Talking*

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<sup>25</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1986), pp. 421. There is, however, a penetrating analysis of *Anarchy* by David Stafford, 'Anarchists in Britain Today', in David E. Apter and James Joll (eds.), *Anarchism Today* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 91–6, as well as Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), chap. 4, 'Practical Anarchism'. Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), shamefully contained no discussion of Ward (though this is rectified in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), pp. 676–7), unlike the stimulating Rodney Barker, *Political Ideas in Modern Britain* (London: Methuen, 1978), pp. 203–5. See also David Miller, *Anarchism* (London: J.M. Dent, 1984), pp. 151, 205 n26; and George Crowder, *Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 195–6.

<sup>26</sup> David Goodway (ed.), *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 14; CW, 'After a Hundred Issues', p. 279 (Ward's emphasis).

<sup>27</sup> Interview with CW; Goodway, p. 21 n52.

this may be why the book has received so little attention – but it is all immensely rewarding.

The antinomian position which Thompson identifies as most relevant to the 1790s and Blake carries

to an extreme the advocacy of grace, and [brings] the gospel of Christ into direct *antagonism* to ... the 'moral law'. That is, in the view of critics, there is not just too much emphasis upon grace and faith, too little upon moral law: the two are seen as being radically opposed to each other.... The Ten Commandments and the Gospel of Jesus stand directly opposed to each other: the first is a code of repression and prohibition, the second a gospel of forgiveness and love. The two might have flowed from the minds of opposing gods.<sup>84</sup>

Thompson cites as Blake's 'most concise expression of antinomian doctrine' this verse:

When Satan first the black bow bent  
And the Moral Law from the Gospel rent  
He forgd the Law into a Sword  
And spilld the blood of Mercys Lord.<sup>85</sup>

Antinomianism can therefore be seen to constitute a variety of Christian anarchism.

Muggletonianism emerged from the remnants of the shortlived Ranters. John Reeve was God's messenger and his cousin, Ludowick Muggleton, was his 'mouth'. Their first 'commission' was to visit in 1652 the Ranting prophets, John Robins and Thomas Tany, and to pronounce them eternally

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<sup>84</sup> E.P. Thompson, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994 edn), pp. 13–14 (Thompson's emphasis).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.197.

damned. Reeve had previously been one of Robins's disciples; and Laurence Clarkson was later to renounce Ranting and to become a Muggletonian. The Muggletonian church was always a tiny sect, never more than some two hundred and fifty men, women and children throughout the eighteenth century, and overwhelmingly of Londoners. It had neither ministers nor premises, holding its meetings in hired rooms in various pubs, where their books and records would be secured in a locked cupboard. A principal activity was the keeping in print of the works of Reeve, Muggleton and later Muggletonians. The church's documents were circulated and hymn-books, both manuscript and printed, were produced, that of 1829 with the title of *Divine Songs of the Muggletonians*. Membership was primarily artisan, women played a prominent role, and a sexual frankness and an impressive intellectuality were displayed. Thompson observes, 'I like these Muggletonians...'<sup>86</sup>

He has a marvellous appendix on 'The Muggletonian Archive', recounting how in 1975 he established contact through a correspondence in the *Times Literary Supplement* with 'the last Muggletonian', a Kentish fruit farmer. This 'last repository of a 300-year-old tradition' had driven up to London with a load of apples after the Muggletonians' final meeting-place in Worship Street had been fire-bombed during the Second World War and packed the church's archive into over eighty apple boxes; and more than thirty years on Thompson was taken to inspect these in a furniture repository in Tunbridge Wells. Among the contents of the apple boxes were several manuscript hymn-books of the mid-eighteenth century containing two songs by a George Hermitage. Since Blake's mother, Catherine, had first been married to Thomas Hermitage, Thompson considers that it is possible not only that Catherine and George were related but that William Blake received a Muggletonian upbringing. The latter supposition

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

means of direct action, while organizing freely. Ward is primarily concerned with the forms of direct action, in the world of the here-and-now, which are 'liberating the great network of human co-operation'. In 1973 he considered that 'the very growth of the state and its bureaucracy, the giant corporation and its privileged hierarchy ... are ... giving rise to parallel organizations, counter organizations, alternative organizations, which exemplify the anarchist method'; and he proceeded to itemize the revived demand for workers' control, the de-schooling movement, self-help therapeutic groups, squatter movements and tenants' co-operatives, food co-operatives, claimants' unions, and community organizations of every conceivable kind.<sup>23</sup> During the following thirty years he additionally drew attention to self-build activities – he was particularly impressed by achievements in the shanty towns of the poor countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia – co-operatives of all types, the informal economy and LETS (Local Exchange Trading Schemes).<sup>24</sup> New self-organizing activities are continually emerging: "Do-it-yourself" is ... the essence of anarchist action, and the more people apply it on every level, in education, in the workplace, in the family, the more ineffective restrictive structures will become and the more dependence will be replaced by individual and collective self-reliance.' This is another quotation from Woodcock, who was one of the most appreciative and perceptive of Ward's commentators; but otherwise discussion of his writings has been remarkably limited, presumably because they are perceived as insufficiently theoretical, the unpretentious originality of his pragmatic anarchism not being appreciated. He observed that it is in the Netherlands and Germany with their down-to-earth empiricism that his books are most popular in

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<sup>23</sup> Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (1973 edn), p. 137.

<sup>24</sup> For LETS, see Jonathan Croall, 'Local, Mutual, Voluntary and Simple: The Power of Local Exchange Trading Systems', in Worpole, pp. 145–58.

George Woodcock observed in an essay on Paul Goodman that, according to this conception of anarchism,

the anarchist does not seek to destroy the present political order so that it may be replaced by a better system of organization ... rather he proposes to clear the existing structure of coercive institutions away so that the natural society which has survived in a largely subterranean way from earlier, freer and more originative periods can be liberated to flower again in a different future.

Woodcock continued:

The anarchists have never been nihilists, wishing to destroy present society entirely and replace it with something new... The anarchists have always valued the endurance of natural social impulses and the voluntary institutions they create, and it is to liberating the great network of human co-operation that even now spreads through all levels of our lives rather than to creating or even imagining brave new worlds that they have bent their efforts. That is why there are so few utopian writings among the anarchists; they have always believed that human social instincts, once set free, could be trusted to adapt society in desirable and practical ways without plans – which are always constrictive – being made beforehand.<sup>22</sup>

Anarchists seek, in summary form, the end (that is, the goal) of voluntary co-operation or mutual aid using the

<sup>22</sup> George Woodcock, 'The Artist as Conservative', in Peter Parisi (ed.), *Artist of the Actual: Essays on Paul Goodman* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986), pp. 16–17, reprinted with changes (and errors) in Woodcock, *Anarchism and Anarchists*, p. 231.

appears entirely plausible and would go far to explain the apparently idiosyncratic nature of Blake's mindset.

Central to *Witness against the Beast* is Thompson's contention that it was Blake's antinomian inheritance that enabled him to reject so decisively 'Reason' and the materialist epistemology and psychology which he associated with his derided Newton and Locke and hence dismiss as well the rationalist radicalism of Paine, Godwin and others with its grounding on self-love. So

if Blake found congenial the Painite denunciation of the repressive institutions of State and Church, it did not follow that humanity's redemption from this state could be effected by a political reorganization of these institutions alone. There must be some utopian leap, some human rebirth, from Mystery to renewed imaginative life.

And again:

... within the prevailing naturalistic psychology of the time there was no way to derive, no place into which to insert, the central antinomian affirmatives of *Thou Shalt: Thou Shalt Love, or Thou Shalt Forgive...* One might add that these affirmatives cannot be easily derived from materialist thought today. That is why every realization of these values... is a plank in the floor upon which the future must walk.<sup>87</sup>

Thompson had elsewhere listed the 'signatures' of the antinomian tradition in Blake's thought as including 'the radical suspicion of Reason, the repudiation of adulterous relations between Church and State...the refusal of any worship entailing

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193, 228 (Thompson's emphasis).

self-abasement and professed humility, and above all, the absolute rejection of “the Moral Law”; and commented: ‘In discarding the prohibitive Moral Law of “Thou Shalt Not” Blake could put trust only in an active affirmative “Thou Shalt Love”’.<sup>88</sup>

Thompson’s Blake is then an anarchist – although Thompson never uses the word – just as Peter Marshall has argued in his *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist!*<sup>89</sup> What of Thompson himself? How are his politics to be categorized? In the introduction to *Witness against the Beast* he recalls announcing to an excited student audience in New York during 1968 that Blake was ‘the founder of the obscure sect to which I myself belong, the Muggletonian Marxists’. He comments, but unfortunately does not explicate: ‘As the years have gone by I have become less certain of both parts of the combination’. He explained in 1980 that he was ‘like Blake an angry anti-state pacifist’. Six years later he articulated his vision of a free Europe:

The nation-state begins to decline in importance, giving way to a heightened sense of regional and cultural identities.... One would hope to see what used to be called workers’ control or greater autonomy, smaller units of control; public industry being co-operative, or corporations municipally controlled, and so on. And that would underpin, perhaps, a growth in local and regional consciousness. But for larger economic, cultural and legal arrangements you would have bridging arrangements.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Quoted by Palmer, p. 71, seemingly from the transcript of a lecture of 1980.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Marshall, *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* (London: Freedom Press, 1988).

<sup>90</sup> Thompson, *Witness*, p. xxv; Peter Scott, ‘Voluntary Exile from History’s Mainstream’, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 27 June 1980; Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 200n.

well as feasible, how is it that it has never come into being or lasted no longer than a few months (or years). Ward’s answer is that anarchism is already partially in existence and that he can show us examples ‘in action’. The second problem is how can humans be taught to become co-operative, thereby enabling a transition from the present order to a co-operative society to be attained, and is the same problem the solution to which, it has been shown in chapter 2, separated Morris from Kropotkin. Ward’s response here is that humans are naturally co-operative and that current societies and institutions, however capitalist and individualist, would completely fall apart without the integrating powers, even if unvalued, of mutual aid and federation. Nor will social transformation be a matter of climactic revolution, attained in a millennial moment, but rather a prolonged situation of dual power in the age-old struggle between authoritarian and libertarian tendencies, with outright victory for either tendency most improbable. As he explained in a remarkable manifesto of 1958, ‘The Unwritten Handbook’, published in his ‘People and Ideas’ column, his is an anarchism

which recognizes that the conflict between authority and liberty is a permanent aspect of the human condition and not something that can be resolved by a vaguely specified social revolution. It recognizes that the choice between libertarian and authoritarian solutions occurs every day and in every way, and the extent to which we choose, or accept, or are fobbed off with, or lack the imagination and inventiveness to discover alternatives to, the authoritarian solutions to small problems is the extent to which we are their powerless victims in big affairs.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Freedom*, 28 June 1958. Quoted also in TA, pp. 54–5.

of an article that had appeared in *Anarchy* 62 (April 1966) – but the publishers, Allen & Unwin, insisted on *Anarchy in Action*.

It is in *Anarchy in Action* that Ward makes entirely explicit the highly distinctive anarchism that had informed his editorship of and contributions to *Anarchy* during the preceding decade. His opening words – alluding to Ignazio Silone’s marvellous novel, *The Seed beneath the Snow*, translated in 1943 and which he remembered reading on the train back to Orkney after a leave in London – have been much quoted:

The argument of this book is that an anarchist society, a society which organizes itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state and its bureaucracy, capitalism and its waste, privilege and its injustices, nationalism and its suicidal loyalties, religious differences and their superstitious separatism.

His kind of anarchism, ‘far from being a speculative vision of a future society ... is a description of a mode of human organization, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society’.<sup>19</sup>

Acceptance of this central insight is not only extraordinarily liberating intellectually but has strictly realistic and practical consequences: ‘...once you begin to look at human society from an anarchist point of view you discover that the alternatives are already there, in the interstices of the dominant power structure. If you want to build a free society, the parts are all at hand.’<sup>20</sup> It also solves two apparently insoluble problems that have always confronted anarchists (and socialists). The first is, if anarchism (or socialism) is so highly desirable as

<sup>19</sup> Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Here we have an attractive, pragmatic, advanced New Leftist programme, libertarian in its emphasis on self-management and decentralization, and virtually identical to an outline published in the *New Left Review* a quarter of a century before (and quoted above in chapter 1); but it is entirely clear that he continued to believe in working through a party – he had joined the Labour Party back in 1962 – and in the retention of the State, albeit democratized.<sup>91</sup> So Edward Thompson, although he became a libertarian socialist or, in his own description, a ‘libertarian Communist’, cannot be claimed for anarchism. He was an analyst and advocate of ‘the rule of law’, differentiating between law as class power and as ‘the imposing of effective inhibitions upon power and the defence of the citizen from power’s all-intrusive claims’. It is, on the other hand, necessary to enquire with Dorothy Thompson, ‘[C]an one be an antinomian and still agree that the rule of law is necessary for civilization to exist?’<sup>92</sup>

He was also significantly less anarchist, or friendly towards anarchists, than that other libertarian socialist, George Orwell. Interlocking with this is the fact that, whereas almost all anarchists and Trotskyists greatly approve of Orwell, relishing his trenchant anti-Stalinism and unremitting support for the Spanish Revolution, Thompson abhorred him. They never met but Randall Swingler, a particular friend of Thompson from the mid-forties, so disgusted Orwell by his reply at this time to ‘The Prevention of Literature’ that Orwell did all that he could to avoid bumping into him in their local – they both lived in Canonbury Square – and grew to hate him passionately: ‘What a smelly little hypocrite Swingler is! Just like the

<sup>91</sup> E.P. Thompson, ‘Revolution Again! Or Shut Your Ears and Run’, *NLR*, no. 6 (November-December 1960), p. 31; Bess, p. 117; ‘E.P. Thompson: Recovering the Libertarian Tradition’, pp. 21–2.

<sup>92</sup> E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 266; letter from Dorothy Thompson to the writer, 5 September 2004.

rest of them! If he could do it without risking his cowardly little hide, he 'd take the greatest delight in pushing me under a bus.'<sup>93</sup> Thompson wrote on Orwell only once, in 'Outside the Whale' of 1960, and with great distaste.<sup>94</sup> Although he acknowledged 'the stubborn criticism, the assertion of the value of intellectual integrity, which Orwell presented throughout the 1936–46 decade', he considered him a major contributor to what he dubs 'Natopolitan culture', that is, supporting the values of the West against Soviet Marxism during the Cold War. He damns him for what he regards as his 'profound political pessimism', but entirely misses his continuing commitment to a democratic and libertarian socialism.<sup>95</sup> James Hinton rightly draws attention to Thompson's 'astonishing blindness to the things he shared with Orwell: the sense of a valued Englishness of the common people; insistence on the importance of the rule of law to the maintenance of liberty; the search for a progressive Europeanism to counterpose to the Blocs'.

Hinton's suggestion that 'Thompson's loyalty to his own Communist past was interfering with his eyesight' is indubitably correct.<sup>96</sup> Thompson complains that throughout Orwell's 'Inside the Whale', to which he obsessively returns,

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<sup>93</sup> Thompson, *Persons*, p. 236; Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell* (London: Secker & Warburg, 20 vols., 1998), XVIII, p. 443n; George Woodcock, *Letter to the Past: An Autobiography* (Don Mills, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982), pp. 285–6; Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), p. 331. For Swingler, see the exuberant, talented, politically myopic Andy Croft, *Comrade Heart: A Life of Randall Swingler* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), esp. pp. 183–4; also Randall Swingler, *Selected Poems*, ed. Andy Croft (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2000).

<sup>94</sup> E.P. Thompson. 'Outside the Whale', in E.P. Thompson (ed.), *Out of Apathy* (London: Stevens, 1960) [reprinted in Thompson, *Poverty*, in a fuller version, but also with several small deletions].

<sup>95</sup> Thompson, *Poverty*, pp. 13–14. Cf. Richard Taylor, 'George Orwell and the Politics of Decency', in J.A. Jowitt and R.K.S. Taylor (eds.), *George Orwell* (Bradford Centre Occasional Papers No. 3, October 1981), pp. 35–9.

<sup>96</sup> Hinton, p. 234 ni.

It was his editorship of *Anarchy* that released Ward from the obscurity of *Freedom* and Freedom Press and made his name. During the 1960S he began to be asked to write for other journals, not only in the realm of dissident politics, like *Peace News* and *Liberation* (New York), but such titles as the *Twentieth Century* and the recently established *New Society*. From 1978 he became a regular contributor to *New Society*'s full-page 'Stand' column; and when *New Society* was merged, ten years later, with the *New Statesman* he was retained as a columnist of the resultant *New Statesman and Society* with the shorter, but weekly, 'Fringe Benefits', until its abrupt termination by a new editor in 1996. His first books, *Violence* and *Work*, came as late as 1970 and 1972 respectively, but these were intended for teenagers and published by Penguin Education in a series edited by Richard Mabey (whom he had first met when he visited Oxford to speak to the Anarchist Group in 1963). He resigned from the Town and Country Planning Association in 1979, moved to the Suffolk countryside, and became a self-employed author.

Ward's third book, which appeared in 1973, was his first for an adult readership and is his only work on the theory of anarchism, indeed the only one 'directly and specifically about anarchism' until the publication in 2004 of *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction*, which happened to be his final work.<sup>17</sup> *Anarchy in Action* is also the one that has been most translated, currently into seven or possibly eight languages, for it is, as George Woodcock considered, 'one of the most important theoretical works' on anarchism.<sup>18</sup> It came into being almost accidentally since Walter passed on the contract after he found himself unable to produce what was required. Ward had wanted to call it *Anarchy as a Theory of Organization* – the title

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<sup>17</sup> Colin Ward, '“I Think That's a Terrible Thing to Say!” Elderly Anarchist Hack Tells All', *Freedom*, Centenary Edition, October 1986, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism and Anarchists: Essays* (Kingston, Ontario: Quarry Press, 1992), p. 231.



side of the Atlantic the powerfully original essays by Murray Bookchin (initially as 'Lewis Herber') – 'Ecology and Revolutionary Thought' (November 1966), 'Towards a Liberatory Technology' (August 1967) and 'Desire and Need' (October 1967) – later collected in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (London, 1974), had their first European publication in *Anarchy*.

On demobilization from the British Army in 1947 Ward had gone back to work for Caulfield for eighteen months, before moving as a draughtsman to the Architects' Co-Partnership (which had been formed before the war as the Architects' Co-operative Partnership by a group of Communists who had been students together at the Architectural Association School). From 1952 to 1961 he was senior assistant to Shephard & Epstein, whose practice was devoted entirely to schools and municipal housing, and then worked for two years as director of research for Chamberlin, Powell & Bon.<sup>15</sup> A career change came in 1964–5 when he took a one-year course at Garnett College in south-west London to train as a further education teacher and he was in charge of liberal studies at Wandsworth Technical College from 1966; but he returned to architecture and planning in 1971 by becoming education officer for the Town and Country Planning Association (founded by Ebenezer Howard as the Garden City Association) for which he edited *BEE (Bulletin of Environmental Education)*. At Garnett he had met his future wife, then Harriet Unwin, whose mother, Dora Russell, had still been married to Bertrand Russell at the time of her birth, but whose father, as of her younger brother Roddy, was an unreliable American journalist called Griffin Barry.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> For Ward's work in architects' offices, see TA, pp. 62–5.

<sup>16</sup> See Harriet Ward, *A Man of Small Importance: My Father Griffin Barry* (Debenham: Dormouse Books, 2003). Dora Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree*, vol. 3: *Challenge to the Cold War* (London: Virago, 1985), esp. pp. 259–60, writes warmly of Ward. Roddy Barry published a single short story, 'Giancarlo', interestingly in the *New Reasoner*, no. 9 (Summer 1959), pp. 40–9.

'the same tone of wholesale, indiscriminate rejection can be heard whenever Communist ideals or organization come under discussion'. He asserts that 'the disenchanting of 1945-j retired to the positions which Orwell had already prepared':

It was in this essay, more than any other, that the aspirations of a generation were buried; not only was a political movement, which embodied much that was honourable, buried, but so also was the notion of a disinterested dedication to a political cause. Orwell, by indicting the cause as a swindle *and* by ridiculing the motives of those who supported it, unbent the very 'springs of action'. He sowed within the disenchanting generation the seeds of a profound self-distrust.<sup>97</sup>

Thompson's great blind spot was his sentimental loyalty to pre-1956 Communism. However psychologically, emotionally understandable this may be, it becomes risible when all who stayed on in the CPGB, plus the benighted ones who actually joined, after 1956 are resoundingly damned, whereas somehow it was both politically and morally acceptable to have been a Communist at any time before. He was typically to sneer at Althusser for, in 1965, 'already ... writing about Stalin': 'So *where was Althusser in 1956?* Possibly uniquely in his writings, he proceeds: 'In truth, this "already" should make me uncomfortable as well, as it should all penitent kangaroos: if 1956, why not 1953, 1948, etc?' But he brushes this uncomfortable thought aside: 'In 1956 it was, at length, officially "revealed" that Stalinism had, for decades, been swatting men down like flies – Communists and non-Communists alike...' For some on the left 1921 has always seemed the significant terminal point, with

<sup>97</sup> Thompson, *Poverty*, pp. 14, 17–18; Thompson. 'Outside the Whale', p. 164n. The emphasis is Thompson's

the savage suppression of the revolutionary sailors of Kronstadt. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, who had been deported to Bolshevik Russia with the highest of hopes, then fled into Latvia and Goldman was to write a pamphlet exactly titled *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution* as early as 1922. In addition, as Anderson forcefully observes:

*Before* the charmed year of the Twentieth Party Congress, there was a very long tradition of Marxist analysis and discussion of Stalinism, by revolutionary socialists.... Is the *official* announcement then of Stalin's crimes to mark the frontier between venial and mortal responsibility? The suggestion would seem to be that it was understandable to dismiss Trotsky and ignore Serge, but inexcusable not to heed Khrushchev [sic] or Mikoyan.

He continues: '... it is ... possible that in reality Thompson never really believed in the Moscow Trials, suspected the existence of the labour camps, was aware of Stalin's role in the Spanish, Greek or Chinese Revolutions, but kept silent...' Orwell, on the receiving end of the Stalinist purge in Spain, did know about these things and did not keep silent. Orwell's real guilt in Thompson's book – but the ex-Communist was probably too blind to recognize this – was his premature anti-Stalinism, voiced before, not in or after, 1956.<sup>98</sup>

Thompson's sentimental loyalty to Communism – and hence blindness – was shared by other members of the *New Reasoner* group, who also were mainly former Communists. John Saville, for example, denounced the Orwellian perspective of Valentine Cunningham's lengthy introduction to *The*

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<sup>98</sup> Thompson, *Poverty*, p. 324; Anderson, *Arguments*, pp. 117–18. The emphases are Thompson's and Anderson's.

written, nothing even subbed. "Colin almost didn't do anything. He didn't muck it about, didn't really bother to read the proofs. Just shoved them all in. Just let it happen."<sup>13</sup> Ward put the contents together on his kitchen table. Coming out of *Freedom*, he frequently wrote much of the journal himself under a string of pseudonyms – 'John Ellerby', 'Frank Schubert' (these two after the streets where he was currently living), 'Tristram Shandy' – as well as the unsigned items. Even the articles scarcely differed from, and indeed there was significant recycling of, his contributions to *Freedom* back in the 1950s – for example, the admired issue on adventure playgrounds (September 1961) had been preceded by a similar piece in *Freedom* (6 September 1958). Sales never exceeded 2,800 per issue, no advance on *Freedom*'s 2,000–3,000.<sup>14</sup>

The excellence, though, lay in a variety of factors. Ward's anarchism was no longer buried among reports of industrial disputes and comment on contemporary politics, whether national or international. It now stood by itself, supported by like-minded contributors. *Anarchy* exuded vitality, was in touch with the trends of its decade, and appealed to the young. Its preoccupations centred on housing and squatting, progressive education, workers' control (a theme shared with the New Left), and crime and punishment. The leading members of 'the New Criminology' – David Downes, Jock Young (who had been a student distributor of *Anarchy* at the London School of Economics), Laurie Taylor, Stan Cohen and Ian Taylor – all appeared in its pages. Nicolas Walter was a frequent contributor and Ward published his pair of important articles, 'Direct Action and the New Pacifism' and 'Disobedience and the New Pacifism', as well as the influential *About Anarchism* for the entire hundredth number of *Anarchy*. From the other

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<sup>13</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'Utopian Sociology', *New Society*, 2 October 1987, an exceptionally generous evaluation of Ward's work, occasioned by the publication of *A Decade of Anarchy*.

<sup>14</sup> CW, 'After a Hundred Issues', in Ward, *Decade of Anarchy*, p. 276.

went up to Oxford University twelve months afterwards I co-founded the Oxford Anarchist Group and one of the first speakers I invited was Colin Ward (he spoke on ‘Anarchism and the Welfare State’ on 28 October 1963). Among the members were Gene Sharp, Richard Mabey, Hugh Brody, Kate Soper and Carole Pateman. Gene Sharp was different from the rest since he was American, much older (born 1928) and a postgraduate student, who had already published extensively on non-violent direct action – as he has continued to do, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973) being especially noteworthy. Richard Mabey, after working in publishing, where he edited several of Colin Ward’s books, has become an outstanding writer on botany and wildlife, initially with a markedly alternative approach: for example, *Food for Free* and *The Unofficial Countryside*. Hugh Brody is many things, but principally an anthropologist, authority on the Canadian Inuit and advocate of the way of life of hunter-gatherers, as in the acclaimed *The Other Side of Eden*. Kate Soper became a Marxist philosopher, author of *On Human Needs* and member of the editorial committee of the *New Left Review*, but is also one of the translators of Cornelius Castoriadis into English. The work of the political philosopher, Carole Pateman, has been discussed in chapter 12. The Marxist social historian and a former editor of the *Universities and Left Review*, Raphael Samuel, was later to tell me that he had attended some of our meetings. By 1968 Ward himself could say in a radio interview: ‘I think that social attitudes have changed... Anarchism perhaps is becoming almost modish. I think that there is a certain anarchy in the air today...’<sup>12</sup>

Ward’s success was also due to *Anarchy*’s simple excellence. This should not be exaggerated, for there was definite unevenness. ‘The editing, according to an admiring, though not uncritical contributor [Nicolas Walter], was minimal: nothing was re-

<sup>12</sup> Richard Boston, ‘Conversations about Anarchism’, *Anarchy*, no. 85 (March 1968), p. 74.

*Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* as an ‘“old-fashioned” Cold War approach’, implausibly asserting:

... the immense scholarly work on Spain and the Civil War in the past quarter of a century has now taken our analysis and our understanding far beyond Orwell’s interpretation, and it is inadequate and inaccurate to structure the discussion of the history of the civil war years in the terms in which they were discussed before 1950.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly Raymond Williams, neither a New Reasoner nor associated with the *ULR*, but a central figure of the New Left, was moulded politically by the 1930s, and while the author of the characteristically perceptive short study, *Orwell* (1971), and believing Orwell to be ‘brave, generous, frank, and good’ and ‘always an opponent of privilege and power’, acknowledging that he was ‘a man who said that every word he had written was for democratic socialism, and who fought for it in Catalonia as a revolutionary’, could still maintain that the later books were written by ‘an ex-socialist’ and complained that *Animal Farm* was ‘defeatist’.<sup>100</sup>

In contrast, Orwell was an important influence on the other constituent of the first New Left, the *ULR* group, who were of the next generation and tended not to have been through the CPGB; and Thompson even tried to get Swinger to write

<sup>99</sup> John Saville, ‘Valentine Cunningham and the Poetry of the Spanish Civil War’, in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1981*, p. 271. For the vigorous response, see Valentine Cunningham, ‘Saville’s Row with *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse*’, in Martin Eve and David Musson (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1982*, esp. pp. 271–2.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 284; Raymond Williams, *Orwell* (London: Fontana, 1991 edn), p. 126; Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: NLB, 1979), pp. 384, 390–1. See also Williams’s interesting reflections in his introduction to Raymond Williams (ed.), *George Orwell: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice–Hall, 1974), pp. 3–4.

an article on Orwell for the first issue of the *New Left Review* to counter this. So Peter Sedgwick, who in 1963 significantly published his translation of Victor Serge's great *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, was to claim Orwell as an 'International Socialist', that is, a forerunner of the Socialist Workers' Party. And Raphael Samuel and Denis Butt were elated when they saw red-and-black anarchist banners surge to the front of the 1963 Aldermaston March, since they had been avidly reading *Homage to Catalonia*. (Samuel was also to enthuse over Ronald Sampson's talk on Tolstoy, which he had heard when he attended a meeting of the Oxford Anarchist Group with Butt, but it is improbable that any of the New Reasoners would have approved.)<sup>101</sup>

It has been necessary to express at some length this reservation about Thompson's politics; yet it does not detract from the libertarianism of his anti-statism and antino-mianism which grew ever more vigorous and searching. Nor must it be allowed to obscure his overall intellectual stature. He was not only a major historian, but will be increasingly viewed as one of our foremost literary figures and social and cultural critics, who was, among other things, a great historian. Although there is no other strictly comparable writer, there are family resemblances to the other great individualists, William Cobbett and Thomas Carlyle, as well as to William Morris – and, of course, to George Orwell. Thompson is of that order.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Samuel, 'Born-again Socialism', p. 53; Williams, *Orwell*, pp. 84–5; Croft, p. 244; Peter Sedgwick, 'George Orwell: International Socialist?', *International Socialism*, no. 37 (1969) [a second part of this article, although announced, was never published]; David Goodway, 'Raphael Samuel (1934–1996): A Reminiscence', *Labour History Review*, LXII (1997), pp. 121–2.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Thomas William Heyck, 'E.P. Thompson: Moralism as Marxist Historian', in Walter L. Arnstein (ed.), *Recent Historians of Great Britain: Essays on the Post-1945 Generation* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1990), pp. 121–2; Fred Inglis, 'Introduction: Tribute and Memoir', to Thompson, *Collected Poems*, esp. p. 9. See also Hobsbawm, 'Edward Palmer Thompson', esp. p. 530.

its numerical weakness inhibits its intellectual strength. This may not matter when you approach it as individual attitude to life, but in its other role, as a social theory, as one of the possible approaches to the solution of the problems of social life, it is a very serious thing. It is precisely this lack which people have in mind when they complain that there have been no advances in anarchist theory since the days of Kropotkin. Ideas and not armies change the face of the world, and in the sphere of what we ambitiously call the social sciences, too few of the people with ideas couple them with anarchist attitudes.

For the anarchists the problem of the nineteen-sixties is simply that of how to put anarchism back into the intellectual bloodstream, into the field of ideas which are taken seriously.<sup>11</sup>

As editor of *Anarchy* Ward had some success in putting anarchist ideas 'back into the intellectual bloodstream', largely because of propitious political and social changes. The rise of the New Left and the nuclear disarmament movement in the late fifties, culminating in the student radicalism and general libertarianism of the sixties, meant that a new audience receptive to anarchist attitudes came into existence. My own case provides an illustration of the trend. In October 1961, a foundation subscriber to the *New Left Review* (the first number of which had appeared at the beginning of the previous year) and in London again to appear at Bow Street after my arrest during the Committee of 100 sit-down of 17 September, I bought a copy of *Anarchy 8* at Collet's bookshop in Charing Cross Road. I had just turned nineteen and thereafter was hooked, several weeks later beginning to read *Freedom* also. When I

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<sup>11</sup> CW, 'Last Look Round at the 50s', *Freedom*, 26 December 1959.

the anarchists were to become very isolated indeed, Freedom Press being unswervingly hostile to the Labour governments and their nationalization and welfare legislation. Ward recalled Berneri saying towards the end of the forties, 'The paper gets better and better, and fewer and fewer people read it'.<sup>9</sup> The isolation and numerical insignificance of British anarchism obtained throughout the fifties also.

It was to break from the treadmill of weekly production that Ward began to urge the case for a monthly, more reflective *Freedom*; and eventually his fellow editors responded by giving him his head with the monthly *Anarchy* from March 1961, while they continued to bring out *Freedom* for the other three weeks of each month. Ward had actually wanted his monthly to be called *Autonomy: A Journal of Anarchist Ideas*, but this his traditionalist comrades were not prepared to allow (he had already been described as a 'revisionist' and they considered that he was backing away from the talismanic word 'anarchist'), although the subtitle was initially, and now largely redundantly, retained.<sup>10</sup> *Anarchy* ran for 118 issues, culminating in December 1970, with a series of superb covers designed by Rufus Segar (who was responsible for ditching the subtitle from no. 28).

In a review of the 1950s and statement of his personal agenda for the 1960s Ward had observed:

The anarchist movement throughout the world can hardly be said to have increased its influence during the decade... Yet the relevance of anarchist ideas was never so great. Anarchism suffers, as all minority movements suffer, from the fact that

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with CW.

<sup>10</sup> Colin Ward, 'Notes of an Anarchist Columnist', *Raven*, no. 12 (October/December 1990), p. 316; Colin Ward (ed.), *A Decade of Anarchy, 1961–1970: Selections from the Monthly Journal 'Anarchy'* (London: Freedom Press, 1987), pp. 8–9.

## 13. Christopher Pallis

Christopher Pallis was the principal writer, translator and thinker of the Solidarity Group, which was at its most active and exerted greatest influence in Britain during the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. It was a section of the Old Left which broke away to become, it can now be seen, part of the New Left, although it has never been accepted as such – especially since it almost immediately passed beyond any recognizable Marxism to a fully left-libertarian position, while largely holding back from the self-description of 'anarchist'. Pallis, in particular, was always extremely critical of anarchism, denying that he himself was an anarchist, only being comfortable with the appellation of 'libertarian socialist'. Because of the way in which his writing fell between the poles of Marxist humanism and anarchism; because it overwhelmingly appeared in cyclostyled publications, never being reprinted by mainstream publishers; and because of his own pseudonymous existence as 'Martin Grainger' and especially 'Maurice Brinton', Pallis has never received the recognition that the quality of his political output deserves.

Although in the late sixties and early seventies Solidarity's ambition was to inspire by its example a major movement – and indeed, at one time or another, at least twenty-five groups existed in London and elsewhere – in terms of numbers its membership was never appreciable. Its best-known adherent was almost certainly Ken Livingstone, sometime Leader of the GLC (Greater London Council) and former Mayor of London, who in an interview with Tariq Ali recalled that in the late sixties:

For a short period I joined an organization called Solidarity. Is it still going?

*Just about...*

It was *just about* going then! But I didn't play much of a role in its deliberations.<sup>1</sup>

Yet this is to miss the point. Solidarity's significance lay not in its size but in the excellence of its publications. The group was initially called Socialism Reaffirmed and its journal first appeared in October 1960 under the title of *Agitator* (redolent of the Trotskyist origins of most of the group's founding members); but from the sixth issue (May 1961) it became *Solidarity*. It seems significant that both the IWW and the Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement – with their very similar industrial politics – had published journals with the same name. *Solidarity*, with the striking sub-title of *For Workers' Power*, came out every two to four months until 1977 when there was a merger with the *Social Revolution* group, resulting in *Solidarity: For Social Revolution*. Around 1982 the original London group resumed publication of *Solidarity*, eventually adopting the sub-title of *A Journal of Libertarian Socialism*, yet after thirty-one issues of the new series the paper folded in 1992; and the group is now defunct.

In parallel to the journal there were more than sixty impressive pamphlets and four important books. It was through the circulation of the pamphlets in particular that a wider radical readership was aware of the group's ideas; and it was through the excellence of its journal, pamphlets and books in general that *Solidarity* exerted significant influence in the 1960s and 1970s amongst anarchists and libertarian socialists. Stuart Christie, for example, attests: 'What did catch my imagination

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Livingstone and Tariq Ali, 'Why Labour Lost', *New Left Review*, no. 140 (July-August 1983), p. 24.

Alex Comfort and Geoffrey Ostergaard and such sympathizers as Gerald Brenan, the member of the Bloomsbury Group who had become a notable Hispanicist and whose exploration of the origins of the Civil War, *The Spanish Labyrinth* (1943), was a major work of history.

The file of *Freedom* for the late 1940s and early 1950s makes impressive reading. During the 1940s *War Commentary*, followed by *Freedom*, had been fortnightly, but from summer 1951 the paper went weekly. The bulk of the contents had always been written by the editors; and in 1950 Ward had provided some twenty-five items, rising to no fewer than fifty-four in 1951, but the number declined as he began to contribute long articles, frequently spread over four to six issues. From May 1956 until the end of 1960, and now using the heading of 'People and Ideas', he wrote around 165 such columns. Given this daunting, spare time journalistic apprenticeship, it is hardly surprising that his stylistic vice continued to be the excessive employment of lengthly, partially digested quotations.

By the early 1950s characteristic Ward topics had emerged: housing and planning, workers' control and self-organization in industry, the problems of making rural life economically viable, the decolonizing societies. He was alert to what was going on in the wider intellectual world, attempting to point to what was happening outside the confines of anarchism, drawing on the developing sociological literature, and, for example, writing (sympathetically) on Bertolt Brecht (5 August, 1 September 1956) and excitedly highlighting the publication in *Encounter* of Isaiah Berlin's celebrated Third Programme talks, 'A Marvelous Decade', on the Russian intelligentsia between 1838 and 1848 and much later to be collected in *Russian Thinkers* (25 June 1955). But who was reading his articles? *War Commentary* had fared relatively well in wartime on account of the solidarity and intercourse between the small anti-war groups, principally *Peace News*, but also the ILP with its *New Leader*. With the end of the war and Labour's electoral triumph in 1945,

December 1943. After visiting Leech, sentenced for failing to register for firewatching and refusing to pay the fine, while on hunger strike in Barlinnie Prison, Ward, who had no clothes to wear other than his uniform, found himself transferred to Orkney and Shetland for the remainder of the war.<sup>6</sup>

It was in April 1945, as the war drew to a close, that the four editors of *War Commentary* were prosecuted for conspiring to cause disaffection in the armed forces – they were anticipating a revolutionary situation comparable to that in Russia and Germany at the end of the First World War, one of their headlines insisting ‘Hang on to Your Arms!’ – and Ward was among four servicemen subscribers who were called to give evidence for the prosecution. All four testified that they had not been disaffected; but John Hewetson, Vernon Richards and Philip Sansom were each imprisoned for nine months, while Marie Louise Berneri was acquitted on the technicality that she was married to Richards.<sup>7</sup> The following year, still in the army, but now in the south of England, Ward was able to report on the postwar squatters’ movement in nine articles in *Freedom, War Commentary* having reverted to the traditional title; and when he was eventually discharged from the army in the summer of 1947, he was asked to join *Freedom’s* editorial group, of which George Woodcock had also been a member since 1945. This was his first close contact with the people who were to become his ‘closest and dearest friends.’<sup>8</sup> This Freedom Press Group was extremely talented and energetic and, although Woodcock emigrated to Canada in 1949 and Berneri died the same year, was able to call upon contributions from anarchists like Herbert Read (until shunned in 1953 for accepting his knighthood),

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<sup>6</sup> Colin Ward, ‘Local Hero in Netherpton Road’, *Guardian*, 3 August 1988, is a brief memoir of Leech.

<sup>7</sup> Colin Ward, ‘Witness for the Prosecution’, *Wildcat*, no. 1 (September 1974); *TA*, pp. 29–32.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with CW. For Ward’s reminiscences of the Freedom Press Group, see *TA*, pp. 33–42.

... were the shit-stirring, disruptive, action-oriented ... ideas of the Solidarity Group.’<sup>2</sup>

Yet for a few months in the early 1960s *Solidarity* exercised a key role on the national level in shaping the outlook of the most militant section of the nuclear disarmament movement. CND had been launched in 1958, but by autumn 1960 dissatisfaction with its legal methods and constitutional action spawned within it the direct-action Committee of 100. It has been seen in chapter 12 that the Committee’s sit-downs peaked on 17 September 1961 in Trafalgar Square and that the failure two-and-a-half months later of the demonstration of 9 December at the NATO base at Wethersfield, Essex, led to the decentralization of the Committee into thirteen regional Committees. The London Committee of 100 now became the dominant body and the Solidarity group ‘one of the most important influences’ in 1962–3 and after. The most authoritative historian of the nuclear disarmament movement concludes: ‘It was in practice a combination of *Solidarity* and anarchistic activists who constituted the militant hard core of the Committee in this period.’<sup>3</sup>

The long, harsh winter of 1962–3, one of the twentieth century’s worst, saw renewed crisis, now acted out within the London Committee of 100. The radicals, mainly from or close to *Solidarity*, circulated the arrestingly titled discussion document, ‘Beyond Counting Arses’, advocating radical subversive action: ‘We must attempt to hinder the warfare state in every possible way.’<sup>4</sup> The Spies for Peace were essentially this group, locating and entering the Regional Seat of Government (RSG) at Warren Row, Berkshire, and circulating the pamphlet, *Danger!*

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart Christie, *My Granny Made Me an Anarchist: The Christie File: Part 1, 1946–1964* (Hastings: Christiebooks, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2002), p. 133, and Stuart Christie, *Granny Made Me an Anarchist* (London: Scribner, 2004), p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Taylor, *Against the Bomb: The British Peace Movement, 1958–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 249–50.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Beyond Counting Arses’, reprinted in *Solidarity*, II, no. 11 [1963], p. 12.

*Official Secret: RSG-6.* Thereby many of us on the Aldermaston March of Easter 1963 were diverted to explore the sinister surface buildings of the subterranean bunker. The anarchist Nicolas Walter, as has also been explained, was the only member of the Spies for Peace ever to declare himself or herself publicly (of the eight, two were women) – until another did in 2010. For a short time he was very close to Solidarity, attending its group meetings and writing Pamphlet 15, *The RSGs, 1919–1963*, which detailed the historical development of the RSGs.

The distinctiveness of Solidarity's politics was primarily twofold. There was its irreverent, humorous iconoclasm of all Left orthodoxies, the importance and novelty of which cannot be stressed too much, since the self-important ideologues of the far left have little sense of the comic. This was combined with the publication of the writings of 'Paul Cardan':

... we are ourselves and nothing more. We live here and now, not in Petrograd in 1917, nor Barcelona in 1936. We have no gods, not even revolutionary ones. Paraphrasing Marx ('philosophers have only interpreted the world; what is necessary is to change it'), we might say that 'revolutionaries have only interpreted Marx (or Bakunin), what is necessary is to change them'.

We are the products of the degeneration of traditional politics and of the revolt of youth against established society in an advanced industrial country in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The aim of this book is to give both purpose and meaning to this revolt and to merge it with the constant working-class struggle for its own emancipation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Cardan, *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* (London: Solidarity, 1965), p. iii (reprinted in David Goodway (ed.), *For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004) [hereafter FWP], p. 67).

went to work for the architect Sidney Caulfield, a living link with the Arts and Crafts Movement since he had been articulated to John Loughborough Pearson (for whom he had worked on Truro Cathedral), been taught lettering by Edward Johnson and Eric Gill, and also studied under and later worked as a colleague – all at the Central School of Arts and Crafts – of W.R. Lethaby, whom Caulfield revered. Lethaby, a major architectural thinker as well as architect, is one of the nine people whom Ward was to name in 1991 in his *Influences*.<sup>3</sup> Next door to his office, Caulfield – who was brother-in-law to Britain's solitary Futurist painter, C.R.W. Nevinson – let a flat at 28 Emperor's Gate to Miron Grindea, the Romanian editor of the long-running little magazine, *Adam*. It was Grindea who introduced Ward to the work of such writers as Proust, Gide, Thomas Mann, Brecht, Lorca and Canetti.<sup>4</sup>

Ward was conscripted in 1942 and it was then that he came into contact with anarchists. Posted to Glasgow, he received 'a real education' there: on account of the eye-catching deprivation, his use of the excellent Mitchell Library and, as the only British city ever to have had a significant indigenous anarchist movement (in contrast to London's Continental exiles and Jewish immigrants), the dazzling anarchist orators on Glasgow Green with their Sunday-night meetings in a room above the Hangman's Rest in Wilson Street and bookshop in George Street.<sup>5</sup> He was particularly influenced by Frank Leech, a shopkeeper and former miner, who urged him to submit articles to *War Commentary* in London – the first, 'Allied Military Government', on the new order in liberated Europe, appeared in

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<sup>3</sup> Colin Ward, *Influences: Voices of Creative Dissent* (Hartland, Devon: Green Books, 1991), pp. 91–7. For the early career of Caulfield, who had contributed to Hampstead Garden Suburb, see A. Stuart Gray, *Edwardian Architecture: A Biographical Survey* (London: Duckworth, 1985), pp. 24, 137.

<sup>4</sup> See Colin Ward, 'Fringe Benefits', *New Statesman and Society*, 8 December 1995, for an obituary appreciation of Grindea.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with CW.



phy. The young Ward was an unsuccessful pupil and left school at fifteen.<sup>2</sup>

Arnold Ward taught in elementary schools, eventually becoming a headmaster in West Ham, which, although a county borough outside the London County Council, contained the depths of poverty of Canning Town and Silvertown. He was a natural Labour supporter and the family car (a Singer Junior) was much in demand on polling days. To grow up in a strongly Labour Party environment in the 1930s was far from stultifying – whether politically, culturally or morally – as is attested by Colin Ward having both heard Emma Goldman speak in 1938, at the massive May Day rally in Hyde Park, and attended in April 1939 the ‘Festival of Music for the People’ at which Benjamin Britten’s *Ballad of Heroes*, with a libretto by W.H. Auden and Randall Swingler, and conducted by Constant Lambert, saluted the fallen of the International Brigades at the Queen’s Hall. He also recalled the milk tokens, a voluntary surcharge on milk sales, by which the London Co-operative Society raised a levy for Spanish relief.

It was Ward’s experiences during the Second World War that shaped, to a very large extent, his later career. His first job was as a clerk for a builder erecting (entirely fraudulently) air-raid shelters. His next was in the Ilford Borough Engineer’s office, where his eyes were opened to the inequitable treatment of council house tenants, with some having requests for repairs attended to immediately, while others had to wait since they ranked low in an unspoken hierarchy of estates. He then

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<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Raine, *Farewell Happy Fields: Memories of Childhood* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973). Much of the detail in this chapter derives from correspondence and conversations with Ward over twenty-five years, and most particularly from an interview of 29 June 1997 [hereafter ‘Interview with CW’]. The conversations published as Colin Ward and David Goodway, *Talking Anarchy* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2003) [hereafter TA], are the nearest he came to autobiography. There is no published listing of his writings, although at the time of the *Festschrift* he produced an invaluable 21-page typescript ‘Colin Ward Bibliography’.

This is from the introduction to Solidarity’s second book, Cardan’s *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* (1965). In addition to texts by him in the journal, Solidarity also brought out nine pamphlets by Cardan: *Socialism Reaffirmed* (1961?); *The Meaning of Socialism* (no. 6, September 1961); *Socialism or Barbarism* (no. ii, 1962?); *The Crisis of Modern Society* (no. 23, 1966); *From Bolshevism to the Bureaucracy* (no. 24, 1967); *History and Revolution: A Revolutionary Critique of Historical Materialism* (no. 38, 1971); *Workers’ Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society* (no. 40, 1972); *Redefining Revolution* (no. 44, 1974); and *History as Creation* (no. 54, 1978).<sup>6</sup> With the publication of the last, ‘Paul Cardan’ was finally revealed as one of the pseudonyms of Cornelius Castoriadis (‘Pierre Chaulieu’ and ‘Jean-Marc Coudray’ were two others).

Kornelios Kastoriades had been born in 1922 in Istanbul (or Constantinople as it was still called), grown up in Athens, joined the Greek Communist Party as a teenager, but moved to Trotskyism during the Second World War and was involved in the resistance against the German occupation. Under threat of death from both Fascists and Stalinists he escaped to France in 1945 and, as a statistical economist, became a high-ranking official of the OEEC (Organization for European Economic Co-operation), superseded in 1961 by the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development).

In 1949 Castoriadis was a founding editor of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, which ran until 1965. With Situationism *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was to be a prime influence in the events of May 1968: Daniel Cohn-Bendit in particular gladly acknowledged his ‘plagiarism’.<sup>7</sup> Although the future postmodernist,

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<sup>6</sup> A tenth pamphlet, *The Fate of Marxism* (n.d.), published by Solidarity (Clydeside), reprinted a text that had originally appeared in *Solidarity*, IV, no. 3 (August 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Cohn-Bendit and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), pp. 18–19. Palis’s review of this book is reprinted in *FWP*, pp. 103–4.

Jean-François Lyotard, was also a member of the group, the other principal theorist in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was Claude Lefort until he broke in 1958 to form with others *Informations et Liaisons Ouvrières* (later transformed into *Informations et Correspondance Ouvrières*), which was to be another influence on Cohn-Bendit. For Solidarity, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* were ‘our French co-thinkers’.<sup>8</sup>

Castoriadis not only considered that Western capitalism was becoming increasingly authoritarian through a process of bureaucratization which would eventually lead to totalitarianism, and its working classes would be impelled to revolt on account of the intrinsic contradiction of capitalism, their exclusion from participation in the workplace. He also believed that in the Soviet Union the bureaucracy had formed a new ruling class – what was crucial was not who *owned* the means of production, but who *controlled* them. Bureaucratization had occurred first in Russia, inducing and accelerating the movement towards it within capitalism. Russian capitalism was hence a higher form into which Western capitalism was developing.

The proletariat ‘never frees itself completely’, *outside of production*, ‘from the influence of the [capitalist] environment in which it lives’; on the other hand: ‘In *the course of production* the class constantly creates the elements of a new form of social organization and of a new culture.’ So Castoriadis came to advocate a society self-managed by autonomous workers – a prescription that was central to *Solidarity’s* politics – and in France his notion of *autogestion* did come to exercise some considerable appeal in the 1970s.

The Commune of 1871, the Soviets of 1905 and 1917, the Russian factory committees of 1917–1918, the German workers’ councils of 1919 and

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *Solidarity*, II, no. 2 (June 1962), p. 28, and V, no. 12 (July 1969), p. 16.

## 14. Colin Ward

Colin Ward is one of the great radical figures of the past half-century, but his impact has been subterranean. His name is little mentioned by commentators and is scarcely known to the wider, intelligent public, even in his native Britain. A striking indication of his intellectual and institutional marginality is that he did not even possess a regular commercial publisher. In a *Festschrift* intended at least in part to remedy this unsatisfactory state of affairs, the editor, Ken Worpole, ably demonstrated the correspondence between Ward’s concerns and contemporary debates and problems.<sup>1</sup> I suspect that Ward himself would have contended that this linkage can be made because of the commonsensical, realistic, *necessary* nature of anarchism as such (and not just his especial brand), if people could only see that, and its obvious relevance to the needs of the twenty-first century – and with this I would myself agree, it being one of the implicit themes of this book. But equally there can be no gainsaying the very real originality of Ward’s oeuvre.

Colin Ward was born on 14 August 1924 in Wanstead, in suburban Essex, the son of Arnold Ward, a teacher, and Ruby Ward (née West), who had been a shorthand typist. He was educated at the County High School for Boys, Ilford, whose other principal claim to fame is that for thirty-eight years its English teacher was the father of the poet and critic, Kathleen Raine, who was to write venomously and extremely snobbishly of him, the school and Ilford in her first volume of autobiogra-

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Worpole (ed.), *Richer Futures: Fashioning a New Politics* (London: Earthscan, 1999), esp. pp. 174–85.

these occurred. His free-thinking approach is evident in *The Neurology of Gastrointestinal Disease* (1974), a transdisciplinary monograph written with Paul D. Lewis. Towards the end of his career, after completing his work on brainstem death, he became a noteworthy expert witness on legal cases involving complex neurological issues.<sup>65</sup>

There is much reference in Pallis's political writing to 'bureaucracy' and the 'bureaucratic', the division of society between order-givers and order-takers. Following Castoriadis, he had defined bureaucratization in 1965 as 'the organization and control of activity *from the outside*' and a bureaucracy, in 1975, as 'a group seeking to manage *from the outside* the activities of others'.<sup>66</sup> If that is bureaucracy, it is a perennially recurring feature of human societies and equally to be perennially resisted. But by what is it to be replaced? It is in 'The Malaise on the Left' of 1974 that Pallis describes socialism as 'the creation of forms of living that will enable all – free from external constraints or internalized inhibitions – to rise to their full stature, to fulfil themselves as human beings, to enjoy themselves, to relate to one another without treading on anybody'. Two years later he asked, '[C]an one imagine any socialism worth living under without self-managed individuals, collectivities and institutions?'<sup>67</sup> Since the 1970s there have been vast economic, social and political changes throughout the world, but Pallis's vision of a non-hierarchical and free society remains as valid and as necessary as it ever was.

<sup>65</sup> I am obliged to Paul Lewis for this paragraph.

<sup>66</sup> Cardan, *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*, p. ii (*FWP*, p. 66); Maurice Brinton, 'Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', *Critique* (Glasgow), no. 4 (Spring 1975), p. 85 (*FWP*, p.174). (The emphases are Pallis's.) Cf. Cardan, *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Solidarity*, VII, no. 12 (November 1974), p. 10 (*FWP*, p. 168); Mailer, *Portugal*, p. 21 (*FWP*, p. 195).

1920, the Italian factory committees of 1921, the councils set up by the Spanish workers in 1936–37 and the Hungarian workers' councils of 1956 were at one and the same time organs of struggle against the ruling class and its State – *and* new forms of social organization, based on principles radically opposed to those of bourgeois society.

These quotations are taken from Castoriadis's 'Prolétariat et organisation, I', which first appeared in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in 1959, and was translated as 'Working Class Consciousness' in *Solidarity* in 1962.<sup>9</sup> *Solidarity* regarded it as so 'basic [a] statement of our views' that they broke with custom by reprinting it seven years later.<sup>10</sup> '[O]rgans of struggle against the ruling class and its State...new forms of social organization, based on principles radically opposed to those of bourgeois society': this is the kind of potential *Solidarity* conceived the Committee of 100 as having.<sup>11</sup> It should also be apparent that Castoriadis's position in this article is indistinguishable from anarchism.

In 1970 Castoriadis retired from the OECD, becoming a French citizen and then (in 1974) a psychoanalyst. He began to reprint his early political writings and for the first time to write books, now using his real name. Rather than advocating 'socialism', by the end of the seventies he had come instead to use the term 'autonomous society' but *Solidarity*, which had otherwise followed in his theoretical wake, did not do likewise. He died in Paris in 1997.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Solidarity*, II, no. 2 (April 1962), p. 26, and II, no. 3 (May 1962), p. 26 (the emphases are in the original text). See Cornelius Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings* [hereafter *PSW*], ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 3 vols., 1988–93), II, pp. 193–222 (esp. pp. 198, 200). Cf. Cardan, *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>10</sup> *Solidarity*, VII, no. 12 (July 1969), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Taylor, pp. 252–3.

<sup>12</sup> The secondary literature, at least in English, on *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and Castoriadis is limited and unreliable. It got off to a bad start with George

While an American Solidarist called Owen Cahill did some of the earlier Cardan translations, these were always revised by Pallis who in any case wrote all the introductions and translated the bulk of the texts. It was Pallis and Ken Weller who were – and remained – the principal figures in a talented group. Weller was a young London engineer and AEU (Amalgamated Engineering Union) shop steward. It was he who was largely responsible for *Solidarity's* extensive industrial coverage and analysis, for which, in the 1960s, it seemed most likely the group would be principally remembered.

Christopher Agamemnon Pallis – Chris Pallis as he was always known – was an immensely gifted intellectual, whose career was similar to Castoriadis's at several points. He was born in Bombay in 1923 to a distinguished Anglo-Greek family,

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Lichtheim, *Marxism in Modern France* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp. 132n, 183n, witheringly reviewed by Pallis in *Solidarity*, IV, no. 10 (November 1967). The first edition of Dick Howard, *The Marxian Legacy* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1988), chaps. 7 and 8, and pp. 306–33, is even more decisively dismissed by E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 396 n167. There are also Richard Gombin, *The Origins of Modern Leftism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 32–9, 97–105, 112–17; Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 172–3, 202–5; Richard Gombin, *The Radical Tradition: A Study in Modern Revolutionary Thought* (London: Methuen, 1978), pp. 41–3; Alex Callinicos, *Trotskyism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 66–72; and Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 67–9, 128–30, 149–51, 181–3. Much more rewarding are André Liebich, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie: A Radical Critique of Bureaucracy', *Our Generation*, XII, no. 2 (Fall 1977); Alex Richards, 'The Academicization of Castoriadis', *Edinburgh Review*, nos. 78–9 (1988); and above all two primary texts: 'An Interview with C. Castoriadis', *Telos*, no. 23 (Spring 1975), and 'An Interview with Claude Lefort', *Telos*, no. 30 (Winter 1976–7). Obituaries of Castoriadis appeared in the *Guardian*, 31 December 1997; *The Times*, 28 January 1998; *Freedom*, 2 February 1998; *Anarchist Studies*, VI, no. 1 (March 1998), pp. 93–4; *Revolutionary History*, VII, no. 2 (1999), pp. 219–21. See also the assessment by Takis Fotopoulos, 'Castoriadis and the Democratic Tradition', *Democracy and Nature*, no. 10 (1998).

Trotskyists and Maoists, and the corruption and bureaucracy of the social democratic parties and trade unions.

From 1960 Pallis's political articles and translations appeared in great profusion for twenty years, but after 'Suddenly This Summer', published in October/November 1980, they almost entirely ceased.<sup>63</sup> It was on 13 October 1980 that BBCi transmitted a *Panorama* feature, 'Transplants – Are the Donors Really Dead?', angering the medical profession on account of its irresponsibility and resulting in a decline in the number of kidneys donated for transplants. At that time brain death was an issue little studied in Britain, but Pallis was already experienced in diagnosing it and was commissioned by the *British Medical Journal* to write a series of articles on the subject, later collected as *ABC of Brain Stem Death* (1983). In consequence, his concept of and criteria for brainstem death have been internationally adopted and his later entry on 'Death' for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is a masterpiece of historical and medical summary.<sup>64</sup>

Pallis's intellect, command of logic and charismatic enthusiasm made him an outstanding exponent of clinical neurology. Internationally he was probably the best-known English neurological teacher of his time by virtue of his many overseas trainees at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School, who discovered through him that a traditionally esoteric field of medicine could be a simple one in practice. He travelled widely, especially in Asia, always accompanied by Jeanne, studying tropical diseases of the nervous system and the cultures in which

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<sup>63</sup> Indeed there is then only one other article in *Solidarity*, 'Castoriadis' Economics Revisited' of c.1983, definitely written by Pallis. I am reliably informed by one of their authors, Paul Anderson, that 'Making a Fresh Start' and 'About Ourselves i-4', included in *FWP*, pp. 209–15, 219–21, have been misattributed.

<sup>64</sup> C. Pallis and D.H. Harley, *ABC of Brainstem Death* (London: BMJ Publishing, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1996), pp. viii–ix; Caroline Richmond, 'Obituary: Chris Pallis', 16 April 2005, <http://bmj.bmjournals.com>.

There is also the central matter of organization. In his introduction to Murray Bookchin's essay, 'On Spontaneity and Organization', Pallis equates Bookchin's understanding of 'spontaneity' with his own notion of 'autonomy' – as developed in *Solidarity* and *the Neo-Narodniks* – concurring that 'spontaneity does not preclude organization and structure' but that it 'yields non-hierarchical forms of organization'. While it is, of course, a fallacy that anarchism and organization are incompatible, some anarchists have always opposed organization; and it is understandable, highly regrettable though it is, that Bookchin, who after many years contesting anti-organizational and 'life-style' anarchists – and sharing very similar theoretical and political perspectives (as well as background) to Pallis – ceased to call himself an anarchist.<sup>61</sup>

It has already been mentioned that some of Pallis's best writing consists of his first-hand descriptions of major upsurges of popular self-activity. He was present for the opening days of the Belgian General Strike of 1960-i and from the end of the decade comes the widely-read *Paris: May 1968*. It is remarkable that it was through chance that he happened to be already in France for other reasons and hence was able to produce the two pamphlets. On the other hand, he was obliged to take holidays to visit Portugal in 1975 and 1976 in order to write two Portuguese diaries. It was virtually automatic that he should cover *Solidarnosc* in 1980, but he did not visit Poland to do so.<sup>62</sup> The common themes are admiration for the creativity of ordinary people in struggle and contempt for the degeneration, Stalinism and political irrelevance of the Communist Parties, the vanguardist presumption of the

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and *Solidarity*, see 'Listen, Solidarist!' (*Freedom*, 12, 26 September, 24 October 1970), and *Freedom*, 17 April 1971.

<sup>61</sup> Murray Bookchin, *On Spontaneity and Organisation* (London: Solidarity (London), 1975), p. i (*FWP*, p. 133). For '*Solidarity*' and *the Neo-Narodniks*, see *FWP*, pp. i17–31.

<sup>62</sup> For the Portuguese and Polish texts, see *FWP*, pp. 179–86, 205–7.

of whose intellectual achievements he was always immensely proud. His grandfather, Major-General Agamemnon Pallis, was Aide-de-Camp and Head of the Military Household to King Constantine of Greece. Agamemnon Pallis's brother, Alexandros, was a poet and a central figure in the demotic literary movement in Greece – it was his translation of the New Testament into demotic Greek that provoked the bloody Gospel Riots of 1901 in Athens.<sup>13</sup> Alexandros Pallis, who in the 1890s had settled in Liverpool, where he was to become Greek consul, and whose son Marco became a notable Tibetan traveller – he was the author of *Peaks and Lamas* (1948) – and an authority on Buddhism, had previously worked in India for Ralli Brothers, the family firm of merchant bankers.<sup>14</sup> Chris Pallis's father, Alec, was general manager of Ralli Brothers in Bombay and when he for his part decided to retire and return to Europe, he chose to live in Switzerland and in consequence his son received most of his schooling there, becoming fluent in not only English and Greek but also French. It was Pallis's experiences at the Collège Classique et Gymnase, Lausanne, where the pupils included boys of very different class backgrounds, that aroused his sense of social justice and converted him to socialism. In 1940 the family was able to take the last boat from France and became resident in England.

Pallis went up to Balliol College, Oxford, in 1941 to read medicine and instantly joined the Communist Party of Great Britain, but was almost immediately expelled on account of his criticism of its policy on the Second World War. He therefore moved on to Trotskyism and support of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). In May 1945 the RCP contested the (to

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<sup>13</sup> See C.A. Trypanis, *Greek Poetry: From Homer to Seferis* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), pp. 663–4; Philip Carabott, 'Politics, Orthodoxy and the Language Question in Greece: The Gospel Riots of November 1901', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, III (1993).

<sup>14</sup> See also the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry for the botanist and ecologist, Marietta Pallis, Alexandros's daughter.

Trotskyists) mythic Neath by-election and Special Branch reported that Pallis spoke there under the first of his pseudonyms: of apparently 'N. Kastings'.<sup>15</sup> From 1947 (when however the RCP was disintegrating) the pursuit of his medical career led to a complete cessation of political activity for a decade. The previous year, returning from the south of France, he met Jeanne Marty, a working-class university student (her father was a Parisian postal worker), on the train to Paris, they were married in 1947, and were to be inseparable companions until his death in 2005.

His clinical studies were at the Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford, and he afterwards worked as a hospital doctor, first in 1947–50 for the Government Medical Service in Malaya, where his existing interest in tropical medicine shifted to neurology, and later in Cardiff, 1953–7, where he completed his doctorate on 'Anomalies of the Cranio-Vertebral Junction'. He moved to London in 1957 and the following year took up an appointment as consultant in neurology at the Hammersmith Hospital, becoming also a lecturer in the Royal Medical Postgraduate School, University of London. Here he was to work until his retirement in 1982 as Reader and Head of the Department of Neurology.

On arriving in London he had made contact with the group that was to become the SLL in 1959. Under the autocratic leadership of Gerry Healy, this soon began to haemorrhage with the loss of many of its most able members. Reflecting on the bizarreries of the SLL (later renamed the Workers' Revolutionary Party), the New Left historian John Saville comments: 'Trotskyism was anti-Stalinist, of course, but their creeds were dogmatic, inflexible and sectarian to a quite

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<sup>15</sup> National Archives, Kew: Home Office Papers 45/25486. Ted Crawford, to whom I owe this reference, suggests a Special Branch typo and that 'N. Hastings' is much more likely. For the Neath by-election, see Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *War and the International: A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1937–1949* (London: Socialist Platform, 1986), pp. 136–40.

Pallis's politics are fully anarchist: in his analysis of existing society, in his vision of a socialist society, and in the means he advocates in order to get from here to there. On the other hand, he resolutely rejected much of anarchism and, like Castoriadis, refused to describe himself as any sort of anarchist. The affiliation that satisfied him is rather 'libertarian socialism'. A raft of issues filled him with scorn for most varieties of anarchism. Whereas he highlights the need both to take on board new ideas and to supplement emotion with understanding, he commented acidly that 'anarchist abstentionism in both ... areas seem ... to be as old as the hills'. Most anarchists incline to either the insurrectionism of Bakunin or the communism of Kropotkin, but Pallis, reviewing Paul Avrich's *The Russian Anarchists*, has no time for either man, regarding the former as 'muddleheaded' (which is how he was also to describe Proudhon) and an authoritarian conspirator and the latter as a romantic visionary who pined for a pastoral utopia, 'oblivious of the complex forces at work in the modern world'.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, he approves of the anarcho-syndicalist, G.P. Maximoff, and also Ida Mett, the Platformist author of *The Kronstadt Commune*, who represents 'what is best in the revolutionary tradition of "class-struggle" anarchism': 'She thinks in terms of a collective, proletarian solution to the problems of capitalism' as opposed to 'the rejection of the class struggle, the anti-intellectualism, the preoccupation with transcendental morality and with personal salvation that characterize so many of the anarchists of today'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Solidarity*, IV, no. ii (January 1968), pp. 21–2, and IV, no. 12 [March 1968], p. 15 (both reprinted in *FWP*, pp. 86–7, 89); M.B., *Authoritarian Conditioning, Sexual Repression and the Irrational in Politics*, pp. 18–18a (*FWP*, p. 271).

<sup>60</sup> Ida Mett, *The Kronstadt Commune* (London: Solidarity, 1967), p. x (*FWP*, p. 81). For Nicolas Walter's reviews of *The Kronstadt Commune* and its 'eccentric' preface, see *Freedom*, 18 November 1967 ('The *Solidarity* School of Falsification'), and 20 November 1971. For further spats between *Freedom*

much unhappiness.... From his earliest days man is subjected to constant pressures designed to mould his views in relation to work, to culture, to leisure, to thought itself.... *the socialist revolution will have to take all these fields within its compass, and immediately, not in some far distant future.* The revolution must of course start with the overthrow of the exploiting class and with the institution of workers' management of production. But it will immediately have to tackle the reconstruction of social life in *all* its aspects. If it does not, it will surely die.<sup>57</sup>

And in 1970 he introduces in *The Irrational in Politics* the extremely important concept of recuperation, which had originated with the Situationists, explicating it more fully four years later in 'The Malaise on the Left':

Over the last few decades – and in many different areas – established society has itself brought about a number of the things that the revolutionaries of yesterday were demanding. This has happened in relation to economic attitudes, in relation to certain forms of social organization, and in relation to various aspects of the personal and sexual revolutions.

It is legitimate, he says, to refer to this adaptation as 'recuperation' when it actually benefits the established society, contributing to its continuance as an exploiting hierarchy.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> As *We Don't See It*, p. 29 (FWP, p. 161); *Solidarity*, V, no. 6 (December 1968), p. 18 (FWP, pp. 107–8) (Pallis's emphasis).

<sup>58</sup> M.B., *Authoritarian Conditioning, Sexual Repression and the Irrational in Politics*, pp. 25–6 (FWP, pp. 277–8); *Solidarity*, VII, no. 12 (November 1974), p. 3 (FWP, p. 163). Compare also the penultimate paragraph of *Paris: May 1968* (London: Solidarity [1968]), p. 43 (FWP, p. 256).

remarkable degree...'<sup>16</sup> In 1960 Pallis, as a member of the SLL's national committee, took part in the expulsion of a group that contained Ken Weller, but within several months he too had seceded along with the SLL's industrial organizer, Bob Pennington. Pallis was already familiar with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and together with Weller, Pennington, more ex-SLL members and some other dissident socialists formed, on the basis of the French journal's critique of Bolshevism, the libertarian Socialism Reaffirmed group, which was to be renamed Solidarity.

Pallis carried over the pseudonym of 'Martin Grainger' from his SLL activism – and as such in 1961 contributed the diary to a pamphlet on the Belgian General Strike of 1960-i and jointly wrote a long article on the Paris Commune with Philippe Guillaume (of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*).<sup>17</sup> In the summer of 1961, however, he was exposed by the press, the *Daily Mail* revealing the 'Secret of Dr Pallis': 'HE IS "MARTIN GRAINGER", LEADER OF INDUSTRIAL STRIFE MOVEMENT'. If he had not been at the Hammersmith, where there was, unusually for the medical profession, a clutch of left-wing sympathizers, he could well have lost his job.<sup>18</sup> Thereafter, abandoning 'Martin Grainger', all his political writings and translations were either anonymous

<sup>16</sup> John Saville, *Memoirs from the Left* (London: Merlin Press, 2003), p. 114. For the SLL and its origins, see Terry Brotherstone and Geoff Pilling (eds.), *History, Economic History and the Future of Marxism: Essays in Memory of Tom Kemp (1921–1993)* (London: Porcupine Press, 1996), chap. 12, and also pp. 9–10, 359 n4.

<sup>17</sup> Both are included in *FWP*, pp. 21–40, 51–60.

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Mail*, 13 July 1961. See also *ibid.*, 3, 14, 15 July 1961; *Sunday Telegraph*, 2, 9, 16 July 1961. A week after the *Mail*'s naming a robust defence by 'Martin Grainger' of his activities was published in *Tribune* (21 July 1961). (All these items appear in the first (1960–7) of two files of *Solidarity* press clippings, in the possession of Jeanne Pallis – to whom and their son Michael I owe much of the family and personal detail.)

or signed ‘Maurice Brinton’ or ‘M.B.’<sup>19</sup> Unusually, I think, neither ‘Martin Grainger’ nor ‘Maurice Brinton’ was chosen for any particular association, both composites probably being assembled through a random search in the telephone directory. And unlike Cornelius Castoriadis he never had any wish to resort to his real name, the substantial selection of his political writings, *For Workers’ Power*, which was published three months before his death in 2005, was only allowed on the strict understanding that his real name was not revealed. The trauma of 1961 and the endangering of his neurological career had induced a certain paranoia. Although he was again outed in 1974, this time as ‘Maurice Brinton’, by then his political extremism was so well known and his professional position so secure that his post was in no way endangered.<sup>20</sup>

Although Pallis’s writings for *Solidarity* and its associated publications extended over two decades, he did not consider that he personally contributed theoretically, regarding himself as merely the translator and transmitter of Castoriadis’s ideas, as well as an activist who sought their practical application. In what then does Pallis’s achievement consist?

First, he has been assessed (by Richard Taylor) as ‘the most dominant individual’ within *Solidarity* and, by someone even better placed to know, Nicolas Walter, its ‘main leader’ or ‘leading figure’.<sup>21</sup> All this is acknowledged by Ken Weller, regarded by Pallis as not just his closest political friend but his best friend *tout court*, sentiments that are entirely reciprocated.

Secondly, Pallis was the *creative* translator of Castoriadis, thereby introducing him, when he was known as Paul Cardan, to the Anglophone world (and indeed beyond). With the exception of the four items (articles and/or pamphlets) drawn

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<sup>19</sup> The first appearance of ‘Maurice Brinton’ is as author of ‘Danger! Party Hacks at Work’ in *Solidarity*, II, no. 10 (April 1963).

<sup>20</sup> *Solidarity* press clippings, 1968–75.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, p. 250; NW, ‘Obituary: Cornelius Castoriadis’, *Freedom*, 7 February 1998; NW, ‘Cornelius Castoriadis’, *Freedom*, 15 August 1998.

plays a major role in history’, by ‘its very nature’ defying ‘the dictates of predetermination’.<sup>55</sup>

As Pallis was increasingly emancipated from the shackles of Marxism-Leninism – in the form of Trotskyism – and eventually indeed from any form of Marxism, he became correspondingly creative and daring in his writing. While fully revealed during the 1970s, this was becoming apparent by the late 1960s. As early as 1965 he could celebrate ‘The Balkanization of Utopia’:

There is no one road to utopia, no one organization, or prophet, or Party, destined to lead the masses to the Promised Land. There is no one historically determined objective, no single vision of a different and new society, no solitary economic panacea that will do away with the alienation of man from his fellow men and from the products of his own activity.

He even concluded that this is ‘the sole guarantee that “utopia”, if we ever get near to it, will be worth living in’, a pluralist belief remote from Trotskyism or, indeed, ‘class-struggle’ anarchism.<sup>56</sup>

While he continued to believe in 1972 that ‘in modern industrial societies socialist consciousness springs from the real conditions of social life’, he came to emphasize the importance of the non-economic realm of exploitation, as in ‘Capitalism and Socialism’ of 1968:

... a society in which relations between people are based on domination will maintain authoritarian attitudes in relation to sex and to education, attitudes creating deep inhibitions, frustrations and

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<sup>55</sup> Castoriadis, *History as Creation*, pp. 8–9 (*FWP*, pp. 203–4).

<sup>56</sup> *Solidarity*, III, no. 9 (June 1965), pp. 5–6 (*FWP*, pp. 70–1).



gories and relationships which are *not* transcendental ... but which are *themselves* the product of historical development and more particularly of the rise of the bourgeoisie. Among such *historical* (non-transcendental) categories and relationships, [he] stresses two: the notion of the primacy of the economy and the concept of a certain pattern of interaction (determination) between economic ‘infrastructure’ and ideological ‘superstructure’. The retrojection of these categories and patterns on to other areas of history – with a view to constructing a universal and ‘scientific’ theory of history ... can only be achieved ... through a systematic rape of the facts.<sup>53</sup>

Introducing *Redefining Revolution* (a translation of ‘Recommencer la révolution’ of 1963–4) in 1974, Pallis explained: ‘In a chemical reaction there is no element of choice.... The water in the kettle cannot choose not to boil when the kettle is placed on the fire.’ ‘Social development’, however, ‘cannot be brought down to the level of a chemical reaction.... *There is a choice* wherever people are concerned.’<sup>54</sup> Positivism, determinism and Marxism are all replaced by a philosophical and post-modern liber-tarianism: ‘If a “scientific” theory of history can predict history, there is no such thing as genuine choice. If it cannot, then “scientific” interpretations of the past are subject to the same limitations as similar prediction of the future.’ This is from the introduction to the third instalment of ‘Marxism and Revolutionary Theory’, published as *History as Creation* in 1978. What is now central for Pallis (and Castoriadis) is ‘genuine creation’: ‘the act of producing ... affairs’. ‘Such creation

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8 (Pallis’s emphasis).

<sup>54</sup> Paul Cardan, *Redefining Revolution* (London: Solidarity (London) [1974]), p. 1 (*FWP*, p. 199) (Pallis’s emphasis). See *PSW*, III, p. 27.

from ‘Marxism and Revolutionary Theory’, which came to form Part 1 of the major book, *L’Institution imaginaire de la société* (1975),<sup>22</sup> all of Pallis’s translations were utilized in David Ames Curtis’s massive three-volume edition – though covering only 1946–79 – of the *Political and Social Writings*. Curtis goes so far indeed as to dedicate his very substantial and useful *Castoriadis Reader* to ‘Maurice Brinton’.<sup>23</sup> But Pallis both added to and subtracted from Castoriadis’s dense and frequently obscure texts, making them accessible to political militants, not only working-class but middle-class. His translations were, as Walter commented, ‘often improvements on [Paul Cardan’s] originals’.<sup>24</sup> Pallis himself once explained:

Our text is a close (but not always literal) translation of the French original. The milieu in which our pamphlet will be distributed and discussed differs from that of the 1957 article. Throughout, our main concern has been with getting essential concepts over to as wide (and unspecialized) an audience as possible. To a great extent this has influenced our choice of wording and sentence structure. Paragraphs have been shortened. A number of sectional and chapter headings have been added. Some additional footnotes have been inserted (clearly indicated as *Solidarity* footnotes). One or two of the original footnotes have been omitted, and one or two others incorporated

<sup>22</sup> Translated by Kathleen Blamey as Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987). See C. Castoriadis, *History as Creation* (London: Solidarity (London), 1978), p. 2, for the publication details. In addition, there is P. Cardan, ‘Listen, Psychiatrist’, *Solidarity*, VIII, no. 7 (August 1977).

<sup>23</sup> David Ames Curtis (ed.), *The Castoriadis Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. xvi.

<sup>24</sup> NW, ‘Cornelius Castoriadis’, *Freedom*, 15 August 1998.

into the text proper, which has been slightly shortened.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast Curtis dropped Pallis's popularizing elements and reverted to the originals, despite their frequent turgidity.

Thirdly, Pallis writes very well: he is lively, his style is punchy and accessible, and he possesses a wicked sense of humour. Especially noteworthy are his vivid eyewitness reports from upsurges of popular self-activity: the Belgian General Strike of 1960-i, Paris in May 1968, and rural and urban Portugal in 1975 and 1976. He was a merciless reviewer and polemicist. And although in controversy he can seem to get bogged down in finicky detail – as in 'France: The Theoretical Implications', 'Solidarity and the Neo-Narodniks and Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' – he always moves on to such bold and arresting generalization that the effort of following his argument is fully rewarded.<sup>26</sup> A definite limitation, though, is the repetitiveness of Pallis's prose. For example, in three of the articles reprinted in *For Workers' Power* he quotes Spinoza's tag, 'neither to laugh nor to weep, but to understand', and the splendid passage already cited from the introduction to Cardan's *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*, reappears in *As We Don't See It* as

We want no gods, not even those of the marxist [sic] or anarchist pantheons. We live in neither the Petrograd of 1917 nor the Barcelona of 1936. We are *ourselves*: the product of the disintegration of

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<sup>25</sup> 'Our Preface', [Pierre Chaulieu] *Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society* (London: Solidarity (London), 1972), p. 2n.

<sup>26</sup> These three texts are reprinted in *FWP*, pp. 95–101, 117–31 and 169–78 respectively.

another extract from 'Marxism and Revolutionary Theory' – and in which this time Castoriadis ditched historical materialism – as the pamphlet *History and Revolution*. Pallis defended this 'revolutionary critique of historical materialism', declaring: 'I have enjoyed writing this article. Firstly because the discarding of an illusion is like the shedding of a load – one moves about more freely without it. Secondly because to help demystify others, far from being 'barren', is...a fruitful activity in itself.'<sup>50</sup> He explains:

In both *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* and *History and Revolution* Cardan demands that revolutionaries apply to Marxism itself one of the most profound of Marx's insights ... that the dominant ideas of each epoch are the ideas of its ruling class. Marx wrote in a period of full bourgeois ascendancy. It would have been a miracle ... if some bourgeois ideas had not permeated his own writings.<sup>51</sup>

While Pallis continues to believe in the continuing validity of such features of Marxism as 'the class struggle, the concept of surplus value, the theory of alienation, the importance of economic factors in historical development, the need ruthlessly to demystify all ideologies', Marxist economics and the materialist conception of history are in contrast 'suspect'.<sup>52</sup> He concurs with the identification of 'the alien (bourgeois) element' in the Marxist interpretation of history. For Castoriadis

sees it in the attempt by Marx and Engels to apply to the whole of human history certain cate-

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<sup>50</sup> Maurice Brinton, 'On Unhistorical Materialism', *Discussion Bulletin*, no. 1 (Solidarity [1971?]), p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

has possessed an impressive capacity for generating some of the most outstanding modern anarchists and libertarian socialists, notable for not only their fresh thinking but also their theoretical rigour.

There can be no doubt that Pallis's primary intellectual influence is that of Castoriadis and only secondarily their mutual indebtedness, great though it is, to Marx. During 1964–5 Castoriadis published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* 'Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire' in which he broke decisively with Marxism. Pallis translated in 1966 a first instalment of this substantial text as 'The Fate of Marxism', which initially appeared in *Solidarity* and was later reprinted by Solidarity (Clydeside) as a pamphlet of the same title. In 'The Fate of Marxism' Castoriadis argues:

for the last forty years Marxism has become an *ideology* in the full meaning that Marx himself attributed to this word. It has become a system of ideas which relate to reality not in order to clarify it and to transform it, but on the contrary in order to mask it and justify it in the abstract.

He concludes: '[W]e have now reached the stage where a choice confronts us: to remain Marxists or to remain revolutionaries.' Pallis's comment is that this text is 'bound to infuriate those who have never had a new idea of their own', alluding to one of his favourite aphorisms, applied throughout to all sections of the left (not least the anarchists) and attributed in 1969 to the Victorian writer, Walter Bagehot: 'One of the greatest pains to human nature is the pain of a new idea'.<sup>49</sup>

One of Pallis's major strengths is his ability to relish 'the pain of a new idea'; but it was not until 1972 that he published

<sup>49</sup> Paul Cardan, 'The Fate of Marxism', *Solidarity*, IV, no. 3 (August 1966), pp. 15–16, 19 (Cardan's emphasis); M.B., 'Capitalism and Socialism: A Rejoinder', *Solidarity*, V, no. 8 (March 1969), p. 24 (*FWP*, p. 111).

traditional politics, in an advanced capitalist country, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup>

It must be recalled that Pallis was following a crowded and successful career as a medical scientist, all his political writings being the product of his spare time. In this (and other defining ways, such as his concern with sexuality and with the application of scientific method to the socio-political realm) he resembles his anarchist contemporary, Alex Comfort. For Comfort was also, as been seen in chapter ii, a great recycler of previously published material and repeater of well-turned phrases. It needs to be insisted too that Pallis wrote with no thought of eventual republication in such a volume as *For Workers' Power*. If he had been able to edit it himself, it would have been of considerable interest to see how much cutting and rewriting he would have subjected his prose to. All the same, the socialist journalist, Paul Anderson, who was reading *For Workers' Power* when he heard of Pallis's death, avers: 'I had been struck by how exciting I still found his writing. Brinton's style is aphoristic, his approach to received wisdom scornful, his erudition apparent but never intrusive. Very few political writers are thrilling: Brinton was, and still is.' Anderson testifies that Pallis, through both his own writings and his translations of Castoriadis, had a bigger impact on his political outlook than anyone other than his grandfather (a Marxist printer) and Orwell.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, despite his disclaimer, Pallis *was* responsible for original work, in certain areas going beyond Castoriadis. *The Irrational in Politics*, as a booklet originally published in 1970 soon became known in abbreviated title, explores

<sup>27</sup> *As We Don't See It* (London: Solidarity (London) 1972)], p. 20 (reprinted in *FWP*, p. 159) (Pallis's emphasis). For Spinoza's tag, see *FWP*, pp. 66, 187, 268.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Anderson, 'A Socialist for All Seasons', *Tribune*, 25 March 2005 (<http://libsoc.blogspot.com>).

the role of sexual repression and authoritarian conditioning in generating socio-political conformity, being considered by one reviewer as *Solidarity's* best work to date.<sup>29</sup> While derivative of Wilhelm Reich (as Pallis fully acknowledges), he is here probing at that central matter of the proletariat, outside of production, never freeing itself 'completely from the influence of the environment in which it lives'. He is able, very convincingly, to point to the sexual permissiveness of the 1960s as a major breakthrough in the 'undermining of tradition' and terminating a vicious cycle. Whereas 'for Reich any large scale sexual freedom was inconceivable within the framework of capitalism', 'The change in traditional attitudes is both gaining momentum and becoming more explicit in a manner which would have surprised and delighted [him]'.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the pessimism only four years later of his review (in which there is a rare glimpse of his professional expertise) of George Frankl's *The Failure of the Sexual Revolution* needs to be taken into consideration.<sup>31</sup> Although I personally find Pallis's handling of materials and development of his ideas in *The Irrational in Politics* disappointing, he was tackling an issue of undeniably central importance and one moreover that few, if any, contemporary left-wing groups would have considered to be political.<sup>32</sup>

Also dating from 1970 is Pallis's *chef d'oeuvre*, which Castoriadis (who was to anticipate it in his own introduction to the French edition of Kollontai's *The Workers' Opposition*) rightly

<sup>29</sup> *Socialist Leader*, 27 June 1970 (in *Solidarity* press clippings). See also *Anarchy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, no. 1 (February 1971) for an appreciative, though critical, review by Marshall Coleman.

<sup>30</sup> M.B., *Authoritarian Conditioning, Sexual Repression and the Irrational in Politics* (London: Solidarity (North London), 1970), p. 24 (*FWP*, p. 276). For Castoriadis on sexuality and child rearing, see *PSW*, III, pp. 15–16, 56–63.

<sup>31</sup> For this review, see *FWP*, pp. 149–51

<sup>32</sup> I am indebted for this formulation to an old Solidarist, Paul Gordon.

That night the new All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies meets, elects a Bolshevik leadership and in the early hours of November 8 issues the first of its momentous appeals to the workers of Russia and of the whole world. The foundation stone of proletarian power has been laid.<sup>47</sup>

Only three years separates the unthinking piety of this fourth-rate piece from the subversive radicalism of 'Socialism Reaffirmed'. Yet the passage from the parrot-cry orthodoxy of Trotskyism to an innovative libertarianism is not peculiar to Pallis and some of his fellow Solidarists in Britain. In France Castoriadis, Lefort and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* had led the way to libertarian socialism; and Daniel Guerin was later to move to an outright anarchism. In the USA Murray Bookchin, previously a Trotskyist for many years, became an excitingly original anarchist thinker; and Dwight Macdonald had earlier advocated a creative anarcho-pacifism during his editorship of *politics*. Also in the States C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya and their Johnson-Forrest Tendency moved to a distinctive libertarian socialism (as James continued to do after being deported to Britain in 1953). Indeed there were close relations between *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the Johnson-Forrest Tendency for ten years, Castoriadis contributing with James and Grace Lee to *Facing Reality* (1958).<sup>48</sup> So Trotskyism

<sup>47</sup> *Newsletter*, 7 November 1957. See also a long letter from 'Martin Grainger' on Freud in the sister publication, *Labour Review*, III, no. 3 (May-July 1958).

<sup>48</sup> See Cornelius Castoriadis, 'C.L.R. James and the Fate of Marxism' and 'Three Letters', in Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain (eds.), *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); also Kent Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996). Harry Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979), pp. 45–9, 182–3, provides a useful profile of the Johnson-Forrest Tendency.

WHY CLING TO THE LENINIST AND TROTSKY-  
IST MYTHS?

LET THE DEAD BURY THE DEAD

ONE MORE EFFORT TO TOTAL DEMYSTI-  
FICATION ... AND TO BECOMING REAL  
REVOLUTIONARIES<sup>46</sup>

An article he wrote, as ‘Martin Grainger’, for the group which would shortly become the SLL in the issue of its weekly celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution illustrates well the intellectually impoverished automatism that was requisite. ‘How They Took Power in Petrograd’, a breathless chronology ‘from February to October’, begins:

Red flags had appeared on many official buildings in February but in reality little had changed. The socialist Ministers held office by kind permission of the classes they claimed to have overthrown but were frightened of the power and problems suddenly thrust upon them.

Their social traditions, their intellectual incapacity and their meagre theoretical baggage all dictated that they should share this power with the bourgeoisie.

But in so doing they took upon themselves the solution of insoluble tasks, for the interests of the people were irreconcilably opposed to those of the propertied classes. The inner logic of the Revolution soon exposed all those who failed to grasp this essential fact.

The upbeat final paragraph is equally hackneyed:

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<sup>46</sup> *Trotsky Revisited* (London: Solidarity [1972?]) (ellipsis in the original).

assessed as ‘remarkable’.<sup>33</sup> This is *The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control, 1917–1921: The State and Counter-Revolution*, which originally appeared as a 100-page book, tracing the obliteration of the Russian Factory Committees of 1917–18 so that by 1921 Russian factories and trade unions had been subordinated to the new Bolshevik state and the party: ‘In 1917 it had been proclaimed that “every cook should learn to govern the State”’. By 1921 the State was clearly powerful enough to govern every cook!’ Extraordinarily, but significantly, this very necessary task had not previously been attempted and the (anarchist) conclusions properly drawn are:

*The basic question: who manages production after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie? should therefore now become the centre of any serious discussion about socialism. Today the old equation (liquidation of the bourgeoisie = workers’ state) popularized by countless Leninists, Stalinists and Trotskyists is just not good enough.*<sup>34</sup>

In his stimulating *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* the highly regarded Russianist, Edward Acton, reviewing the libertarian interpretation of the Revolution, cites *The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control* more times than any of Berkman, Voline, Arshinov or Maximoff. This is quite a tribute.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> PSW, III, p. 105 n17; Paul Cardan, *From Bolshevism to the Bureaucracy* (London and Glasgow: London Solidarity/Glasgow Solidarity, 1967).

<sup>34</sup> Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control, 1917–1921: The State and Counter-Revolution* (London: Solidarity (North London) [1970]), pp. xiii, 83 (FWP, pp. 302, 376) (emphasis in the original).

<sup>35</sup> Edward Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), pp. 177–81. See also *ibid.*, p. 43. Trotskyism, on the other hand, in the person of Chris Harman, asserted that Pallis ‘distorts the meaning of discussions and conceals facts’, dismissing his book as ‘little help to serious revolutionaries trying to come to terms with how the revolution was eventually lost’ (*International Socialism*, no. 49 (Autumn 1971), pp. 30–1) (in

Pallis is well known in libertarian circles for *Paris: May 1968*, *The Irrational in Politics* and *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, three publications that have been widely read and admired and each has gone through a number of editions. In the case of *The Irrational in Politics*, in the five years after its first appearance it had been translated into French, German, Swedish and Greek and been published in the USA, Canada and Australia.<sup>36</sup> Within little more than three years *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* was translated into French, Dutch, German, Swedish, Spanish, Greek and Japanese.<sup>37</sup> *Paris: May 1968* was not only the first pamphlet (or book) to be published – as early as June 1968 – but remains one of the best participant accounts there is of ‘the events in France’, a reviewer later that year acclaiming it for giving ‘the clearest possible picture of what was actually happening. It managed to somehow capture the very flavour and essence of the inspiring movement taking place. Like no other publication...it carries with it the very smell of tear gas, the very guts of revolution.’<sup>38</sup>

Pallis was a prolific writer, a provisional check-list of his post-Trotskyist political publications coming up with around 110 items, whether articles, pamphlets, book and film reviews, or translations (and in addition there are many anonymous articles that, decades later, it is not possible to assign with certainty

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*Solidarity* press clippings). Pallis’s savage reply was not printed in *International Socialism*, but circulated by him in the leaflet, ‘I.S. and *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control* (London: Solidarity, April 1972). For Nicolas Walter’s support, see *Freedom*, 1 January 1972.

<sup>36</sup> Maurice Brinton, *The Irrational in Politics* (London: Solidarity (London), 1975 edn), pp. 2–3. In ‘On the Solidarity Wavelength’ Pallis surveyed the translations up to the early 1970s of *Solidarity* Pamphlets into Swedish and Japanese (*Solidarity*, VII, 4 (December 1972) and VII, no. 5 [1973]).

<sup>37</sup> *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, no. 178 (1–15 January 1974). For an enthusiastic review of the Spanish edition, see *Frente Libertario*, no. 29 (March 1973). (Both these items are to be found in the files of *Solidarity* press clippings.)

<sup>38</sup> *Guerilla* (Manchester), no. 2 (17 October 1968) (*Solidarity* press clippings).

able in English), and this was later published as a pamphlet, *Kronstadt, 1921*. There followed in 1962 his impressive edition of Alexandra Kollontai’s *The Workers’ Opposition* (Pamphlet 7), reprinted for the first time in English since its original appearance in 1921 in Sylvia Pankhurst’s *Workers’ Dreadnought* as ‘a contribution to the great discussion now taking place concerning “what went wrong”’.<sup>45</sup> Pallis next produced the first English translation of Ida Mett’s *The Kronstadt Commune* (Pamphlet 27). Finally, in 1970, came the outstanding and very original *The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control*, his study of how the Bolsheviks defeated the Revolution in the factories.

This relentless preoccupation with the Russian Revolution – whereas the achievement of the Spanish Revolution is only ever mentioned in passing – may perplex readers only familiar with world politics since the collapse of Communism, but those who recall any part of the period between 1917 and 1989 will attest how central analysis of the apparently ‘actually existing socialism’ of Russia, China and their satellite slave states was not just to Stalinists, Trotskyists and other Marxist-Leninists, but even to anarchists and social democrats. All the same, Pallis’s two decades of Trotskyism and his belief during those years that the Soviet Union was a ‘deformed workers’ state’ clearly moulded his mindset – and range of reference – for many years to come. As late as the early 1970s a publicity leaflet for *The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control* addresses those who were still Trotskyist:

COMRADES,

YOU HAVE (more or less) SEEN THROUGH STALINISM NOW SHED YOUR LAST ILLUSIONS

YOU CAN’T FIGHT BUREAUCRACY BY BUREAUCRATIC METHODS

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<sup>45</sup> Alexandra Kollontai, *The Workers’ Opposition* [London: Solidarity, 1962], p. i.

manipulated – and ultimately deformed – by hordes of power-hungry ‘professional revolutionaries’... These people bring with them attitudes and patterns of behaviour deeply (if not always consciously) moulded by Lenin’s notion that the workers, left to themselves, ‘can only develop a trade union consciousness’. Their current organizational practices and their prescriptions for the future are bureaucratic to the core. Their preoccupation with leadership destroys initiative. Their concern for the correct line discourages experiment. Their obsession with the past is a blight on the future. They create around themselves a wasteland of cynicism and disgust, of smashed hopes and disillusion, that buttresses the deepest dogma of bourgeois society, namely that ordinary people are incapable of solving their own problems, by themselves and for themselves.

His prediction was that ‘in future upheavals the traditional revolutionaries will prove “part of the problem, not part of the solution”’. In contrast, revolutions in the past could either be defeated by those whose privileges they sought to destroy – as with the Paris Commune, Germany in 1918–19, Spain and Hungary – or ‘they could be destroyed from within, through bureaucratic degeneration (as happened to the Russian Revolution of 1917)’.<sup>44</sup>

It is with the latter – the degeneration of the Russian Revolution – that Pallis is obsessed in his writing (and when I first encountered him back in 1963, inviting him to speak to the Oxford Anarchist Group, this was the topic he chose). In 1961 he introduced for *Solidarity* the section on Kronstadt from Victor Serge’s *Memoirs of Revolutionary* (a major work not then avail-

<sup>44</sup> Phil Mailer, *Portugal: The Impossible Revolution* (London: Solidarity (London), 1977), p. 14 (*FWP*, p. 1<sup>90</sup>).

as well as fugitive leaflets).<sup>39</sup> Many of these would not be entirely his work. *Solidarity* editorials, such statements as *As We See It* and *As We Don’t See It*, and introductions would all be circulated within the group for criticism and rewriting: for *Solidarity* not merely advocated libertarian ultra-democracy but actually practised it. This was a major reason for Pallis wishing to maintain his pseudonym and, in a very real sense, his anonymity, regarding himself as merely the communicator of the group’s collective position and analysis.

In 1960 Pallis abandoned the SLL and rejected Trotskyism, proceeding to draft the leaflet, ‘Socialism Reaffirmed’, dated October 1960. That this document should be fully libertarian may seem extraordinary until it is recalled that he was already familiar with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*; and indeed at around this time an article by Castoriadis from *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, no. i, was published with the identical title, *Socialism Reaffirmed*, as the new group’s first pamphlet.<sup>40</sup> In the leaflet ‘the fundamental contradiction of contemporary society’ is identified as ‘its division into those who own, manage decide and direct, and the majority who...have to toil and are forced to comply with decisions they have not themselves taken’. What the working class requires is ‘a revolutionary organization, not as its self-appointed leadership but as an instrument of its struggle’. This organization ‘should anticipate the socialist future of society rather than mirror its capitalist past’, the three criteria being that ‘local organs have the fullest autonomy’, direct democracy is practised wherever possible, and ‘all central bodies having power of decision involving others should be constituted by *delegates*, these being *elected* by those they represent and *revo-*

<sup>39</sup> I am, though, much indebted to assistance from Ken Weller on this as well as other matters.

<sup>40</sup> I was unable to locate this pamphlet until provided with a copy by Bob Potter – even Pallis did not retain one in his files – but the text is included in Castoriadis, *PSW*, I, pp. 76–106 (although Curtis is incorrect to assert that the English translation was by Bob Pennington).

cable by them, *at any time*.<sup>41</sup> These points, as well as others in the leaflet, were to be reiterated in the years that followed, reappearing constantly.

In 'Socialism Reaffirmed' Pallis quotes for the first time one of his favourite dicta of Marx's: 'The emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves'. He also counters Lenin's insistence, to which he was continually to return, that 'the workers can only develop a trade union consciousness', contending that the working class is 'capable of rising to the greatest heights of revolutionary consciousness, and challenging the very basis of all exploiting regimes' by pointing to its achievements in the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the Spanish Revolution and the Hungarian Revolution, a catalogue that he was to repeat and to extend.<sup>42</sup>

Another major theme which Pallis touches on in 'Socialism Reaffirmed' is not only that working-class trade-union and political organizations have now degenerated, expressing 'non-proletarian social interests', but that this degeneration has 'a subjective basis in the imposition of capitalist methods of thinking and organization into the ranks of the labour movement'. This he developed the following year in 'Revolutionary Organization':

Exploiting society consciously encourages the development of a mass psychology to the effect that the ideas or wishes of ordinary people are unimportant and that all important decisions must be taken by people specially trained and specially equipped to do so....All the ruling groups in modern society encourage the belief that decision taking and management are functions beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. All means

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<sup>41</sup> *FWP*, pp. 18–19 (Pallis's emphasis).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

are used to foster this idea. Not only do formal education, the press, the radio, television and the church perpetuate this myth, but even the parties of the so-called opposition accept it and, in so doing, lend it strength. All the political parties of the 'left' ... oppose the present order only by offering 'better' leaders, more 'experienced' and more capable of solving the problems of society than those who mismanage the world today.

And so:

The Labour Party, Communist Party and the various Trotskyite and Leninist sects all extol the virtues of professional politicians or revolutionaries. All practise a rigid division within their own organizations of leaders and led. All fundamentally believe that socialism will be instituted from above and through their own particular agency.

Each of them sees socialism as nothing more than the conquest of political power, and the transformation, by decree, of economic institutions. The instruments of socialism, in their eyes, are nationalization, state control and the 'plan'.<sup>43</sup>

Fifteen years later, introducing Phil Mailer's *Portugal: The Impossible Revolution*, Pallis reflected gloomily on

the risk of genuinely radical upheavals being deviated into state capitalist channels. It is the danger that any new creation (in the realm of ideas, relationships or institutions) will immediately be pounced upon, penetrated, colonized,

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18; Martin Grainger, 'Revolutionary Organization', *Agitator*, I, no. 4 [March 1961], p. 2, and I, no. 5 [April 1961], p. 1 (*FWP*, pp. 41–2, 44).



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ation of the National Health Service. Ward commented from his own specialism on the initially working-class self-help building societies stripping themselves of the final vestiges of mutuality; and this degeneration has occurred alongside a tradition of municipal housing that was adamantly opposed to the principle of dweller control. Here we are presented with a rich, never more relevant, analysis of the disaster of modern British social policy with pointers to the way ahead if we are to stand any chance of reinstating the self-organization and mutual aid that have been lost. He restated his argument in *Social Policy: An Anarchist Response*, the lectures he gave in 1996 as Visiting Professor of Housing and Social Policy at the London School of Economics and which summarize several of his most important themes.<sup>52</sup>

Down to his death in February 2010, Colin Ward saw anarchism's best prospects in the immediate future as lying within the environmental and ecological movement, and the concluding chapter of his final book significantly is on 'Green Aspirations and Anarchist Futures'.<sup>53</sup> One of his greatest regrets remained that so few anarchists follow his example and apply their principles to what they themselves know best. In his case that was the terrain of housing, architecture and planning; but where, he wanted to know, are the anarchist experts on, and applications to, for example, medicine, the health service, agriculture and economics?

<sup>52</sup> Colin Ward, *Social Policy: An Anarchist Response* (London: London School of Economics, 1996) and (London: Freedom Press, corrected edn, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> Ward, *Anarchism*, chap. 10.

## 15. Conclusion

Mass, working-class anarchism had flourished throughout Europe and the Americas from the 1860s down to the First World War, and then principally in the Hispanic world until the calamitous defeat of the Spanish Revolution, more by Stalinist counter-revolution than by the ultimate triumph of Francoism. Thereafter only isolated pockets seem – the historical record is as yet extremely unclear – to have survived as, for example, in Cuba until that movement was hounded into extinction after the Revolution of 1959.<sup>1</sup>

It has been seen that in Britain pure anarchism – unlike the broader libertar-ianism during the second decade of the twentieth century of syndicalism, industrial unionism, the Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement, and Guild Socialism – had never achieved any better than a minuscule following (other than among the Yiddish speakers of London's East End and possibly on Clydeside). *Freedom*, founded by Kropotkin and others in 1886, was defunct by 1927 and had not been replaced, let alone supplemented, by any other journal. It was the stimulus of the Spanish Revolution and emergency of the Civil War that caused the young Vernon Richards in 1936 to found *Spain and the World*, leading to his reformation of a Freedom Press Group with some energetic and talented, new young anarchists, and the reappearance of *Freedom* after 1945. During the Second World War anarchism had fared, in an embattled way, reasonably well owing to the solidarity between the small anti-war groups; but with the end of the war, Labour's elec-

<sup>1</sup> Frank Fernández, *Cuban Anarchism: The History of a Movement* (Tucson, AZ: See Sharp Press, 2001), esp. chap. 5.

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toral triumph and its programme of nationalization and welfare legislation, the anarchists became exceptionally isolated. Marie Louise Berneri, as has been seen in the previous chapter, observed of *Freedom* towards the end of the 1940s: 'The paper gets better and better, and fewer and fewer people read it.' The political and intellectual isolation of British anarchism, together with its lack of numerical support continued throughout the 1950s, leading Ward to comment that 'the problem of the nineteen-sixties is simply that of how to put anarchism back into the intellectual bloodstream, into the field of ideas which are taken seriously'.<sup>2</sup>

It was at just this time, though, that the tide began to turn for the anarchists and they were, on account of *Freedom* Press having enabled Ward to launch his monthly *Anarchy* in 1961, well placed to take advantage of a fundamentally new situation. The Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War was formed in 1957, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958 and the Committee of 100 in 1960; and a significant minority of participants in the new movement were led to deduce libertarian conclusions, particularly as a consequence of their experience of engagement in non-violent direct action. The first New Left had been mobilizing since the crisis of 1956 in the Communist Party of Great Britain; and in 1960 the *New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review* amalgamated to become the *New Left Review*. As the decade progressed, its student radicalism and permissiveness, especially sexual, created both a general libertarianism and a new audience receptive to anarchist ideas. Raphael Samuel, a central figure in the New Left, was much later to observe: 'I have been struck with how much of the cultural revolution of the 1960S was actually prefigured in [Anarchy], which was running in easy tandem with a larger New Left.' He considered that the 1960s were 'a singular exception' to Britain's 'neglect of anarchism' and were 'generally

<sup>2</sup> CW, 'Last Look Round at the 50s', *Freedom*, 26 December 1959.

recognized at the time, as they have been since, as a moment when libertarianism, or “permissiveness”, shaped the hidden agenda of national politics’. Ward himself could very reasonably claim in 1968: ‘Anarchism perhaps is becoming almost modish. I think that there is a certain anarchy in the air today...’<sup>3</sup>

The preoccupations of the cultural radicals of the sixties meshed readily with many traditional anarchist concerns, perhaps most markedly in the case of sexuality and education. Chris Pallis explored in *The Irrational in Politics* (1970) the role of sexual repression and authoritarian conditioning in generating socio-political conformity. Addressing the central matter, as posited by Cornelius Castoriadis, of the proletariat outside of production never freeing itself ‘completely from the influence of the environment in which it lives’, he was able to extend the analysis of Wilhelm Reich – whose oeuvre was rediscovered during the sixties – and greeted sexual permissiveness as a fundamental breakthrough in the ‘undermining of tradition’ and termination of a vicious cycle.<sup>4</sup> Aldous Huxley had throughout his career exhibited a persistent fascination with sex, although his fiction is pervaded with disgust for the physical act. Yet he concluded his career triumphantly in 1962 with *Island* and the creation of the utopia of Pala, in which sexuality is not merely free and guiltless but lovemaking is – entirely typically of the sixties – a form of enlightenment and contempla-

<sup>3</sup> Robin Archer et al. (eds.), *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 148; Raphael Samuel, ‘Utopian Sociology’, *New Society*, 2 October 1987; Richard Boston, ‘Conversations about Anarchism’, *Anarchy*, no. 85 (March 1968), p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> *Solidarity*, II, no. 3 (May 1962), p. 26; M[aurice] B[rinton], *Authoritarian Conditioning, Sexual Repression and the Irrational in Politics* (London: Solidarity (North London), 1970) (reprinted in David Goodway (ed.), *For Workers’ Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004) [hereafter FWP], p. 24). Ward made *Anarchy*, no. 105 (November 1969), a special Reich issue.

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tion: 'When you do *maithuna*, profane love is sacred love'.<sup>5</sup> But it is Alex Comfort who best exemplifies the correspondence between anarchist and sixties attitudes concerning the need for an uninhibited and joyful sexuality. When he revised his *Sexual Behaviour in Society* (1950) as *Sex in Society* in 1963, it now attracted considerable attention, fuelled by a provocative TV appearance.<sup>6</sup> He went on to translate *The Koka Shastra* from the Sanskrit, like Huxley finding in the East a socially central approach to sex, free of Western hang-ups. Comfort's own best-selling manuals, *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking* and *More Joy: A Lovemaking Companion to The Joy of Sex*, then followed in the early 1970s. Also to be located in the sixties are the origins of the movement for homosexual liberation, two of whose most important precursors were Edward Carpenter, responsible for an impressive body of writings on sexual reform, and Oscar Wilde, who together with him had challenged late-Victorian society with an uncompromising gay lifestyle.

Another perennial focus of anarchists has been education, from the eighteenth century and Godwin's essays in *The Enquirer*, through Stirner (himself a schoolteacher and author of an essay on 'The False Principle of Education') and Tolstoy in the nineteenth, to Herbert Read and Paul Goodman in the twentieth century, and there has been much experimentation with libertarian schools. Education is one of the major themes running throughout the writings of Colin Ward, who retrained as a teacher in middle age, became education officer for the Town and Country Planning Association, and collected ten lectures delivered to various audiences as *Talking Schools*, but has also written *The Child in the City* and *The Child in the Country*, acknowledging Mary Wollstonecraft and, above all, Godwin as

<sup>5</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Island* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 78 (Huxley's emphasis).

<sup>6</sup> *Daily Herald*, 22 July 1963. See also *Anarchy*, no.33 (November 1963), pp. 329, 333–4, 340.

his educational influences.<sup>7</sup> Schooling is so important for anarchists because, if there is to be a free, libertarian society, there will not only need to be a break with contemporary authoritarianism but, equally, there will have to be free, libertarian people to live in it. Unless the latter already exist how can the anarchist society of the future be expected to function? Samuel was struck by ‘the liberated child of the adventure playground and the free school... the child who in anarchist thought occupies a symbolic place somewhat equivalent to that of the worker for socialists and communists’.<sup>8</sup> I have already argued that Read’s original contribution to anarchist thought was as an educational theorist, for he goes much farther than anybody else by identifying the school as the primary arena for anarchist action. For several decades his ideas exerted considerable influence in Britain as a result of his *Education through Art* and through the Society for Education through Art.

This is the appropriate place to bring in a significant libertarian thinker so far only mentioned in passing. Everyone agrees that A.S. Neill was an anarchist – even the very picky Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer, normally eager to denounce any innovative anarchist thinking as ‘liberal’ – although admittedly he did not reject the national State, only (so to speak) the State in a school. He himself always denied being an anarchist: ‘I have often been called an anarchist running an anarchist school. This puzzles me because a school with self-government, making its own laws, does not fit into the definition of anarchism.’<sup>9</sup> He published this statement when he was ninety-years-old, but he had still not discovered that the anarchist objection is to the ruling of man by man – or human by hu-

<sup>7</sup> Colin Ward, *Influences: Voices of Creative Dissent* (Hartland, Devon: Green Books, 1991), chap. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer, *The Floodgates of Anarchy* (London: Sphere Books, 1972), pp. 156–7; A.S. Neill, ‘Neill!Neill! Orange Peel!’ *A Personal View of Ninety Years* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), p. 201.

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man – and self-government is exactly what many, even most, of them are seeking. Neill was a Scottish 'dominie' who had become a Freudian; much later he was drawn close to Reich, with whom he studied. Central to his thought is the belief that human problems, for adults and children alike, are caused by the repression of a natural sexuality: 'I believe that it is moral instruction that makes the child bad. I find that when I smash the moral instruction a bad boy has received he automatically becomes a good boy.' He had opened a private school in 1924 at a house called 'Summerhill' in Lyme Regis and three years later this was moved to Leiston, on the Suffolk coast, and where it continues to exist. There was self-government since the day-to-day running of the school was decided by meetings involving equally staff and pupils; and the children were also allowed to spend their time how they liked, including whether to attend lessons. Polemicizing against William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* in, significantly, Ward's *Anarchy* Neill was to maintain toward the end of his life: 'I say, and I think my work has proved it, that the absence of adult authority leads to kindness, charity, tolerance.' He believed every school should be 'a free school, with self-government and self-determination of the individual child, that is, I visualize a nation of Summerhills'.<sup>10</sup> His great achievement has been assessed thus:

More than anyone else, he swung teachers' opinion in England from its old reliance on authority and the cane to a hesitant recognition that a child's first need is love, and, with love, respect for the free growth of his personality; free, that is, from

<sup>10</sup> Joel Spring, *A Primer of Libertarian Education* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1973), pp. 102, 105; A.S. Neill, 'Savagery Starts at Home', *Anarchy*, no. 59 (January 1966), p. 25.

the arbitrary compulsion of elders, and disciplined instead by social experience.<sup>11</sup>

His life's work was summarized in *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, a selection from four of his books, which was published appropriately in 1960 in the USA and two years later in Britain, and was to find many readers over the course of the decade.<sup>12</sup>

The anarchist revival of the sixties, which extended throughout Western Europe and North America, climaxed with the remarkable events in France, where in May 1968 student revolutionaries fought the riot police, took over the Sorbonne, controlled the Latin Quarter, and precipitated the occupations of factories by their workers as well as a general strike, *événements* described in a memorable eyewitness account and later forcefully analyzed by Chris Pallis. The origins of this anarchic upsurge can be traced to the University of Nanterre, on the outskirts of Paris, and its Movement of 22 March, whose leading figure, a 23-year-old Franco-German anarchist, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, became the articulate spokesperson of the wider movement. In his review of the English translation of the wittily titled *Le Gauchisme – remède à la maladie senile du communisme*, the book Cohn-Bendit and his brother Gabriel had flung together by the end of the year, Pallis commented happily on the incorporation of 'great chunks' of his notes for

<sup>11</sup> Robin Pedley, *The Comprehensive School*, cited by Jonathan Croall, *Neill of Summerhill: The Permanent Rebel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 392.

<sup>12</sup> It appeared in the UK as *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education*. For anarchist analyses of Neill, see Spring, chap. 4; Michael P. Smith, *The Libertarians and Education* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 98–105; John Shotton, *No Master High or Low: Libertarian Education and Schooling in Britain, 1890–1990* (Bristol: Libertarian Education, 1993), part 2, chaps. 1, 2. Ray Hemmings, *Fifty Years of Freedom: A Study of the Development of the Ideas of A.S. Neill* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), and Croall are also highly recommended.

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## ***Works by and about the principal writers discussed***

### **William Morris**

***Works (including interviews)***

the Solidarity edition of Kollontai's *The Workers' Opposition* in their discussion of the nature of Bolshevism.<sup>13</sup> But then the French 'co-thinkers' of Solidarity were *Socialisme ou barbarie*; and one of the things May 1968 was to reveal to the world was the existence of two new and very original libertarian ideologies (although each, entirely typically, but against the evidence, denying they were anarchist). Both advocating self-management, these were the analyses of *Socialisme ou barbarie* (despite it having ceased publication in 1965), whose principal theorist, Cornelius Castoriadis, was shortly to dispense with his pseudonyms, and of the Situationist International: Situationism. The twelve issues of *Internationale Situationniste* were brought out between 1958 and 1969, while in 1967 the group's two major theoretical works had appeared: Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes generations* (to be translated as *The Revolution of Everyday Life*). The Situationists' concept of 'the spectacle' and their dissection of consumerism – in modern capitalism the consumption is essentially of commodities that are spectacles – have to be central to an understanding of the product, media and celebrity obsessed societies of the early twenty-first century.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Solidarity*, V, no. 9 (April 1969), pp. 19–20 (reprinted in *FWP*, p. 103). In contrast, the English translation of the Cohn-Bendits' book has, in Pallis's words, the 'quite meaningless' title of *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative*.

<sup>14</sup> For accessible accounts of Situationism, see Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (London: Aporia Press and Unpopular Books, 1988), and, especially, Peter Wollen, 'The Situationist International', *New Left Review*, no. 174 (March–April 1989). Two useful anthologies are Christopher Gray (ed.), *Leaving the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International* (London: Free Fall Publications, 1974), and Ken Knabb (ed.), *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981). There is also a good biography of Debord: Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001); as well as Andy Merrifield, *Guy Debord* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).

France had formerly had a major anarchist movement and hence it is scarcely surprising that libertarian ideas should continue to exert an appeal, even if only temporary. Across the Channel, in the anarchist backwater of Britain, there was also a significant development at this time, although naturally of a much lesser order than the dramatic French events. The Freedom Press Group, previously very much on its own, began to be confronted by a rival locus of anarchism through a series of initiatives by Albert Meltzer, once a valued collaborator on *Freedom* but by now a bitter opponent, and Stuart Christie, recently released from a Spanish gaol for his involvement in an attempt on Franco's life. In 1967 they launched the Anarchist Black Cross as an international aid organization for imprisoned militants and its bulletin became from 1970 a new anarchist journal, *Black Flag*. Christie has published books and pamphlets under a series of imprints, notably Cienfuegos Press and currently Christiebooks; and Meltzer's final venture was to assist in the establishment of a national anarchist archive, the Kate Sharp-ley Library. Both autobiographers, they also collaborated on a theoretical work, *The Floodgates of Anarchy* (1970). Their total achievement has been impressive, yet they have romanticized anarchist violence, imagined the existence of a significant historic anarchist working-class movement in the British Isles and altogether indulged in much fantasy.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Obituaries of Albert Meltzer appeared in *Guardian*, 8 May 1996 (by Christie); *Independent*, 10 May 1996; *Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 1996; *The Times*, 15 May 1996. See also Vernon Richards, 'Instead of an Obituary', *Freedom*, 18 May 1996. Meltzer's two volumes of unreliable memoirs are *The Anarchists in London, 1935–1955* (Sanday, Orkney: Cienfuegos Press, 1975), and *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels: Sixty Years of Commonplace Life and Anarchist Agitation* (Edinburgh and San Francisco: AK Press, 1996). Christie similarly published a first effort at autobiography, *The Christie File* (Sanday, Orkney: Cienfuegos Press, 1970), which recently underwent considerable expansion (Hastings: Christiebooks, 3 vols., 2002–4). This has now been reduced to a single volume again: Stuart Christie, *Granny Made Me an Anarchist* (London: Scribner, 2004). For a listing of the titles produced by the Meltzer-Christie imprints (as

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 Brotherton Library, University of Leeds: Read Library  
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 People's History Museum, Manchester: Communist Party Archive  
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 University of Reading: Routledge Archive

and a related study of the Victorian author Richard Jefferies.<sup>107</sup> He conjoins two of his lifelong passions (the third is natural history or ecology) in a pamphlet, *Anthropology and Anarchism: Their Elective Affinity*, arguing not only that anthropology is ‘the social science discipline that has put a focal emphasis on those kinds of society that have been seen as exemplars of anarchy, a society without a state’, but that it has ‘much to learn from the anarchist tradition’, emphasizing that ‘two post-structuralist scholars – Foucault and Deleuze – who have now become academic icons, implicitly drew on this political tradition’.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1993); Brian Morris, *Kropotkin: The Politics of Community* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004); Brian Morris, *Ecology and Anarchism: Essays and Reviews on Contemporary Thought* (Malvern Wells: Images Publishing, 1996); Brian Morris, *Richard Jefferies and the Ecological Vision* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2006).

<sup>108</sup> Brian Morris, *Anthropology and Anarchism: Their Elective Affinity* (London: Goldsmiths College, 2005).

When it appeared in 1962 in the USA and the following year as a Pelican original in Britain, George Woodcock concluded his splendid *Anarchism* with considerable eloquence:

I have brought this history of anarchism to an end in the year 1939. The date is chosen deliberately; it marks the real death in Spain of the anarchist movement which Bakunin founded two generations before. Today there are still thousands of anarchists scattered thinly over many countries of the world. There are still anarchist groups and anarchist periodicals, anarchist schools and anarchist communities. But they form only the ghost of the historical anarchist movement, a ghost that inspires neither fear among governments nor hope among peoples nor even interest among newspapermen.

Clearly, as a movement, anarchism has failed. In almost a century of effort it has not even approached the fulfilment of its great aim to destroy the state and build Jerusalem in its ruins. During the past forty years the influence it once established has dwindled, by defeat after defeat and by the slow draining of hope, almost to nothing. Nor is there any reasonable likelihood of a renaissance of anarchism as we have known it since the foundation of the First International in 1864...<sup>16</sup>

These comments were immediately greeted with criticism, even derision, for – as Woodcock was to admit in 1973 – in the

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well as much else), see John Patten, *Islands of Anarchy: Simian, Cienfuegos and Refract 1969–1987: An Annotated Bibliography* (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 443.

decade after 1960–1, when book had been written, ‘the ideas of anarchism have emerged again, rejuvenated, to stimulate the young in age and spirit and to disturb the establishments of the right and the left’.<sup>17</sup> Yet his first thoughts had been correct and he was to stand by them: ‘The anarchists of the 1960s were not the historic anarchist movement resurrected; they were something quite different – a series of new manifestations of the idea.’<sup>18</sup> For the new anarchists of the sixties were students or peace activists or some such; their movement was not composed of artisans or labourers or peasants. To take a notable example, whereas in France *Socialisme ou barbarie* and Castoriadis did come out of the workers’ movement and Trotskyism, the origins of Situationism in contrast lay in the artistic avant-gardism of Cobra and the Lettrist International, splinters ultimately derived from Surrealism, and far removed from the matrix of Proudhon’s thought a century earlier.

It has been seen that the ‘idea of anarchism’ long predated the third quarter of the nineteenth century and it is this idea which has survived the demise of the historic movement. Kropotkin believed that ‘throughout the history of our civilization, two traditions, two opposing tendencies have confronted each other: the Roman and the Popular traditions; the imperial and the federalist; the authoritarian and the libertarian’.<sup>19</sup> While the federalist and libertarian tendency or tradition has been particularly pronounced in the societies of Europe and the Americas, it is certainly not unique to them. Equally there is no reason for thinking that conflict between the

<sup>17</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975 edn), p. 452. For criticism see, for example, Nicolas Walter, ‘The Anarchist Past 1’, *Anarchy*, no. 28 (June 1963), pp. 164–5 (reprinted in Nicolas Walter, *The Anarchist Past and Other Essays*, ed. David Goodway (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2007), pp. 27–9.

<sup>18</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role* (1897; London: Freedom Press, 1969), p. 55.

cate ‘Children of Eve’, an unfinished, never published novel, of these years to Ward.<sup>105</sup>

After war service in the Royal Navy George Melly (1926–2007) worked for the Belgian surrealist E.L.T. Mesens in his London Gallery, thereby acquiring an extensive knowledge of art, but for fifteen years he earned his living as a jazz singer. Then, in 1964, he was invited to become the *Observer*’s first pop music critic and these columns led to the pioneering *Revolt into Style* (1970), in which he analyzed the new popular culture. At the *Observer* he had moved on to become television critic and later film critic. Besides books on surrealism he produced a series of notable autobiographies, working backwards from his early jazz career through the war to childhood: *Scouse Mouse* (1984), *Rum, Bum and Concertina* (1977) and *Owning Up* (1965). All that he wrote – or did – was infused with his subversion and lifelong anarchism, singing (for example) at the Anarchist Ball which was to hook Colin Maclnnes.<sup>106</sup>

Brian Morris (b. 1936) is Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at Goldsmiths College, London, and writes prolifically on botany, ecology, ethnobiology and religion as well as anthropology. Leaving school at fifteen, he worked as a foundryman, seaman and tea-planter in Malawi (on whose anthropology he is now an authority) before taking degrees as a mature student at the University of Sussex and London School of Economics, undertaking fieldwork in Southern India for his doctorate. He has also written extensively on anarchism and published books on Bakunin and Kropotkin, a collection of his political articles

<sup>105</sup> Tony Gould, *Inside Outsider: The Life and Times of Colin Maclnnes* (London: Chatto & Windus – The Hogarth Press, 1983), pp. 167–8, 175; N[icolas] W[alter], ‘Colin Maclnnes’, *Freedom*, 15 May 1976. Tony Gould (ed.), *Absolute Maclnnes: The Best of Colin Maclnnes* (London: Allison & Busby, 1985), is a useful anthology.

<sup>106</sup> For long and detailed obituaries, see *The Times*, 6 July 2007, and (by Julian Mitchell) *Guardian*, 6 July 2007; and also Richards, *Part-Time Photographer’s Portrait Gallery*, p. 48.

Asphyxiation, Decapitation and Electrocution', was published by Freedom Press in 1948, a copy being given to each MP and almost certainly contributing significantly to the campaign against capital punishment.<sup>104</sup>

Although Colin Maclnnes (1914–76) spent the bulk of his childhood in Australia, he was the grandson of J.W. Mackail, Morris's biographer, and the great-grandson of Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones – his mother, with whom his relations were dire, was the popular novelist, Angela Thirkell. He returned to Europe in the 1930s and made his home in London. As a homosexual with, to compound the difficulty, a taste for black men, he naturally acquired an outsider's view of post-war England and a familiarity with its new immigrant communities. It was his trilogy of London novels that brought him critical acclaim as well as commercial success: *City of Spades* (1957), *Absolute Beginners* (1959) and *Mr Love and Justice* (1960).

Maclnnes began to take an interest in anarchism in 1961. Some time previously Colin Ward had contacted him, asking if he realized he was an 'unconscious anarchist' and inviting him to write for *Freedom*. After attending the Anarchist Ball celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the paper, Maclnnes offered to write for both it and *Anarchy*, but he also argued the anarchist case in such periodicals as *Queen*, the *New Statesman* and *New Society*. His biographer believes he was only ever an anarchist sympathizer, remaining 'essentially a liberal, or even Tory radical' – or in one word, I would add, a 'libertarian'. Nicolas Walter believed he 'probably did more than any other writer in this country outside the formal anarchist movement to turn the general libertarian revival into a specifically anarchist direction during the early 1960s'. Maclnnes was to dedi-

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<sup>104</sup> Charles Duff, *No Angel's Wing* (London: Cobbett Press, 1947), is an autobiography. See also Vernon Richards, *A Part-Time Photographer's Portrait Gallery* (London: Freedom Press, 1999), pp. 64, 66; VR, 'A History of the Hanging Industry', *Freedom*, 9 May 1998.

authoritarian and libertarian tendencies will ever cease; rather it is inherent to the human condition and its socio-political arrangements.

Sociologists were baffled by the new radical movements of the 1970s and 1980s since they bore little or no relation to those formerly produced by industrial societies. But by now the labour movements – the trade unions, socialist parties and co-ops formed by manual workers – of Western Europe and North America were, following historic international anarchism, entering into decline. In Britain the percentage of manual occupations in the total occupied population had been falling since the beginning of the twentieth century; by its end the erosion was so advanced that they had become a minority and, moreover, the traditional working-class community had virtually disappeared. On the other hand, there were three principal 'new social movements': the peace movement, dating back to the end of the 1950s; the women's movement, or second wave of feminism; and the entirely new environmental movement, or Greens. Largely hidden from outside view, a new wave co-operative movement grew impressively from the late seventies.<sup>20</sup> In addition there were ad hoc movements, such as road protestors and the Greenham Common Women, the latter combining anti-war with feminist activity. The sociologists may have been perplexed, but it all made sense to the anarchists who emphasized that otherwise possibly disparate forms of protests were characterized and united by libertarian features: opposition to hierarchy, organization from the bottom upwards, direct democracy, spontaneity, etc.

The 1970s also saw the full emergence of two powerful new anarchist thinkers in the USA. Noam Chomsky, born in 1928, had been decisively influenced by anarchist writings, notably

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<sup>20</sup> For an excellent treatment, see Tom Cahill, 'Co-operatives and Anarchism: A Contemporary Perspective', in David Goodway (ed.), *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1989).

those of Rudolf Rocker, when a schoolboy, but it was not until the Vietnam War that he entered political activism. Sometimes explicitly anarchist, always libertarian, he has confined himself, other than in interviews, almost exclusively to either his professional field of linguistics or a perpetual critique of his country's foreign policy and an assault on the arrogance of its imperial power. There is, though, a remarkable early essay on the historiography of the Spanish Civil War, a topic taking him back to the genesis of his politics.<sup>21</sup> Although Chomsky was of importance to the peace movement, it was Murray Bookchin who fused his thought with another of the 'new social movements', the Greens. It was the intellectual daring of a little-known group of ex-Trotskyists, publishing *Contemporary Issues*, of which he was a member for many years, that enabled him to develop into the most original anarchist thinker since Kropotkin. He advocates a new revolutionary theory and practice, consciously utopian but based on a comprehension of ecology and current technology; a rejection of socialist delusions about the working class, which he has perceptively recognized to be in an advanced state of decomposition in the West; and an appreciation that the potentiality of abundance at last offers the material basis for anarchism. The philosophical basis is Hegelian, the spirit insurrectionary, even Bakuninist, the theoretical rigour Marxist, and the vision related to that of Kropotkin and Morris. In a torrent of books and articles – especially noteworthy are the dazzling essays of *Post-Scarcity*

<sup>21</sup> Noam Chomsky, 'Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship', in Conor Cruise O'Brien and William Dean Vanech (eds.), *Power and Consciousness* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), reprinted in Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969). See also Noam Chomsky, 'Preface' to Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1989); 'Interview' in James Peck (ed.), *The Chomsky Reader* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1987); Noam Chomsky, *Radical Priorities*, ed. C.P. Otero (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1981). Paul Marshall, 'Noam Chomsky's Anarchism', *Our Generation*, XX, nos. 1 and 2 (Fall 1990 / Spring 1991), is a useful discussion of Chomsky's politics.

Crocker, *The Peckham Experiment: A Study in the Living Structure of Society* (1943) – the best on the subject – he concluded:

...for many of us the experience of Peckham was a unique laboratory of anarchy, it was a study of the living structure of society, exploring principles of organization applicable not only to health but to every aspect of social welfare, to housing and above all to the organization of work.<sup>102</sup>

Charles Duff (1894–1966) was a linguist and the author of many texts on languages. Among his translations was B. Traven's *The Rebellion of the Hanged* from the German in 1952. Deeply engaged with the Hispanic world – while an official in the Foreign Office from 1919 to 1936 he was primarily concerned with the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America – he edited *Voice of Spain* in support of the Spanish Republic and after its fall a cyclostyled *Spanish News Letter*.

His sympathy for anarchism is manifest in his introduction to a pamphlet to which the exiled anarchist journalist José García Pradas contributed: 'There is something about the nature of the Spaniard... which is attracted towards Anarchism: his intense individualism, his love of independence and freedom, his dislike of being bossed, his preference for spiritual to material values, his fundamental "good neighbourliness", his lack of the careerist's ambition, his sense of the natural equality of men, and his great idealism'.<sup>103</sup> The third edition of his intentionally gruesome *A Handbook on Hanging*, being 'a short Introduction to the fine art of Execution, and containing much useful information on Neck-breaking, Throttling, Strangling,

<sup>102</sup> See, in general, David Goodway, 'Anarchism and the Welfare State: The Peckham Health Centre', at <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/archive/policy-paper-55.html> (May 2007).

<sup>103</sup> Charles Duff, Mauri Codina, Arturo Barea, Edith Moore, García Pradas and W. Carrillo, *Freedom for Spain!* (London: International Publishing Company (for Socialist Vanguard Group), 1945), p. 4.

tionary, nature. Williamson proclaimed: 'I am not an anarchist, nor do I believe in anarchy – not even the Kropotkin type'.<sup>99</sup>

In truth, Williamson seems like A.S. Neill to have been an anarchist in both theory and practice, while denying he was one. Frances Donaldson (whose husband Jack was to manage the social floors in the new Centre until they were running smoothly) said of his remarkable disposition:

...his lack of paternalism... as far as this is humanly possible, was complete. He was not interested in how people should behave, or in how they might be made to behave, but only in how they did behave in any given circumstance... this made for a kind of democracy in the Centre which I doubt has ever been seen anywhere else. ... He had a rooted objection to the leader in society, regarding him as someone who pushed around the human material he wished to study in spontaneous action, and who exerted the force of his personality to drive more ordinary people out of the true of their natural behaviour into activities unsuited to them and which they half-consciously disliked.<sup>100</sup>

So while the 'health overhauls' enabled individuals to learn what they might be suffering from, the doctors did not direct them what to do, allowing them to make informed, autonomous choices. Williamson told the London Anarchist Group: 'I was the only person with authority... and I used it to stop anyone exerting any authority!'<sup>101</sup>

When Ward addressed a meeting in 1985 to mark the re-issue of the book Pearce wrote in collaboration with Lucy M.

<sup>99</sup> G. Scott Williamson, 'Autarchy at Peckham', *Freedom*, 25 August 1951.

<sup>100</sup> Frances Donaldson, *Child of the Twenties* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959), pp. 159–60.

<sup>101</sup> *Freedom*, 23 March 1946.

*Anarchism* (1971) and *Toward an Ecological Society* (1981), as well as *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982) and *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (1990 and 1995) – he has successively called for 'social ecology', 'libertarian municipalism', as he was increasingly inspired by the libertarian tradition of New England and the American Revolution, and most recently 'communalism'.<sup>22</sup>

In Britain Peter Marshall, a lesser, but still important and also prolific, writer, began to publish in 1984 with the appearance of his doctoral thesis as *William Godwin*. A surprisingly sympathetic study of the Cuban Revolution, *Cuba Libre: Breaking the Chains?*, followed three years later. The 767-page *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (1992) is an impressive achievement, effectively replacing Woodcock's masterly *Anarchism*, while the 513-page *Nature's Web: An Exploration of Ecological Thinking* appeared, remarkably, in the same year. Two useful Freedom Press titles were his selection of *The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin* (1986) and – breaking the bounds of *Demanding the Impossible* for which it had been intended – *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* (1988). Marshall now specializes in travel books and works of popular history, frequently combining the two genres and always writing as a committed anarchist. To date his principal contribution to theory has been *Riding the Wind: A New Philosophy for a New Era* (1998), in which, in contradistinction to deep or even social ecology, he argues for 'liberation ecology'.

Two other significant anarchist writers also emerged in Britain during the 1980s: the controversial Scottish novelist

<sup>22</sup> Janet Biehl (ed.), *The Murray Bookchin Reader* (London: Cassell, 1997), is an excellent introduction to his work. See also John Clark (ed.), *Renewing the Earth: The Promise of Social Ecology: A Celebration of the Work of Murray Bookchin* (London: Green Print, 1990); Andrew Light (ed.), *Social Ecology after Bookchin* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998); and Damian F. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Pluto Press, 2008). Marcel van der Linden, 'The Prehistory of Post-Scarcity Anarchism: Josef Weber and the Movement for a Democracy of Content (1947–1964)', *Anarchist Studies*, IX (2001), provides a fascinating glimpse of Bookchin's intellectual background.

James Kelman and the philosopher Alan Carter. Kelman shot to prominence after *Not While the Giro and Other Stories* (1983) to become one of the most highly regarded of the younger British writers of fiction; and at his best he is indeed original, powerful, compelling. *A Disaffection* – shortlisted for the Booker and winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1989 – 337 pages in the paperback edition, covers seven days of the chronic, probably terminal, depression of a Glaswegian schoolteacher, yet remarkably it makes almost exhilarating reading. Five years later *How Late It Was, How Late* actually won the Booker Prize, occasioning outrage on account of its ‘foul-mouthed’ language. Kelman has been anxious in interviews to make clear his anarchism: ‘It would be nice if this was said, as far as politics are concerned, that my sympathies are ... libertarian socialist, anarchist...’; and elsewhere his position was quoted as ‘decentralized, anarchist, anti-parliamentarian’.<sup>23</sup> Carter announced his politics with ‘Outline of an Anarchist Theory of History’, a paper of 1985, although by the time of its publication his Oxford doctorate had appeared as *Marx: A Radical Critique* (1988) followed by *The Philosophical Foundations of Property Rights* (1989). His third book, *A Radical Green Political Theory*, advocating an ‘egalitarian, decentralist and pacifist society’, is a major contribution to political theory; and his intellectual stature was recognized in 2005 with his appointment to the Chair of Moral Philosophy, once held by Adam Smith, in Kelman’s home city of Glasgow.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Kirsty McNeill, ‘Interview with James Kelman’, *Chapman*, no. 57 (Summer 1989), p. 1; *The Times*, 26 April 1991. See also James Kelman, *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political* (Stirling: AK Press, 1992); James Kelman, *And the Judges Said...: Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2002); H. Gustav Klaus, *James Kelman* (Northcote House: Horndon, Tavistock, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Alan Carter, ‘Outline of an Anarchist Theory of History’, in David Goodway (ed.), *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1989); Alan Carter, *A Radical Green Political Theory* (London; Rout-

Family: not on the individual. (3) It is based exclusively on a ‘locality’: it has no open door. (4) Its basis is contributory...not free. (5) It is based on autonomous administration, and so does not conform to the lines of administration laid down by the Ministry.<sup>97</sup>

The Peckham Health Centre was therefore not for treatment but the promotion of health; and the condition for membership was a periodic medical examination, the ‘health overhaul’. Peckham had been chosen as a reasonably prosperous area and Pearse and Williamson had expected to find reasonably healthy people. In their manifesto of 1931, *The Case for Action: A Survey of Everyday Life under Modern Industrial Conditions, with Special Reference to the Question of Health*, they reported instead on the ill-health of their membership.

In 1938 they published an interim report on the Centre in its new building as *Biologists in Search of Material*. They had no doubt that as biologists studying the human organism they had to deal ‘with free agents’, for ‘any imposed action or activity becomes a study of authority, discipline or instruction... not the study of free agents plus their self-created environment’. Possibly foolhardily, they spoke warmly of ‘a sort of anarchy’, believing that ‘a very strict “anarchy”... will permit the emergence of order through spontaneous action...’<sup>98</sup> But although Williamson spoke to the London Anarchist Group on several occasions during the 1940s he objected vehemently to *Freedom’s* coverage of the announcement of the winding-up of the Centre (articles for which Colin Ward was primarily responsible), and which pointed to its anarchist, indeed revolu-

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<sup>97</sup> G. Scott Williamson and Innes H. Pearse, *The Passing of Peckham*, ig51 (London: The Associates of Peckham, 1951), p. 8.

<sup>98</sup> G. Scott Williamson and Innes H. Pearse, *Biologists in Search of Material: An Interim Report on the Work of the Pioneer Health Centre, Peckham* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), pp. 40–1.



today than it was before the First World War that a dose of anarchism would perhaps serve us well.

His conclusion was:

The historical merit of anarchism is its persistent stress on power as a separate source of oppression and its mistrust of state machinery. Anarchists are unable to offer us any stateless happiness but they put us on our guard. Their ideology may be, and probably is, pre-industrial, but there is nothing wrong with thinking not only of the miseries but of some of the lost virtues of pre-industrial life; after all there are no net gains in Progress.<sup>96</sup>

## Additional anarchist or left-libertarian writers

George Scott Williamson (1885–1953) and Innes Hope Pearse (1890–1979) were the doctors and self-styled ‘Peckham biologists’ who founded the Pioneer Health Centre at Peckham in South London in 1926. This was reopened in 1935 in an imposing modernist building designed by Owen Williams, shut for the duration of the war and then had a final flourishing until its permanent closure in 1951 after it failed to be admitted to the National Health Service. Williamson and Pearse (who married as late as 1950) listed its perceived ‘administrative irregularities’ as fivefold:

- (1) It is concerned exclusively with the study and cultivation of Health: not with the treatment of disease.
- (2) It is based exclusively on the integrated

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<sup>96</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, ‘For Brotherhood or for Destruction’, at [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/the\\_tls/article6733275.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/the_tls/article6733275.ece).

The last ten years have seen the continued rise of environmentalism – and as both a critique of consumerist society and a social movement it seems to offer the greatest potential for radical change – and also the new anti-globalization or anti-capitalism movement. The latter has demonstrated impressive creativity and élan; and People’s Global Action, set up in 1998, originated two years earlier in a gathering attended by representatives from fifty countries held in Chiapas, where on 1 January 1994 an authentically popular and libertarian uprising by the Zapatistas in defence of the Mexican Indian communities had taken place. But at a series of international summits or meetings of the key organizations that determine the global economic order – of, notably, the World Trade Organization at Seattle in 1999 and the G8 at Genoa in 2001 – minorities of self-professed anarchists have gone on the rampage, fighting with the police, smashing shop windows and destroying cars, and captured the attention not just of the civil authorities but of the world’s press, radio and television. To this extent the anarchists have announced their return as a significant social presence – once again they are inspiring fear among governments and police chiefs – and have forced themselves on the attention of the populace at large.<sup>25</sup>

All these movements need to recognize the extent to which they are anarchist, not only to learn from the mistakes and achievements of the past, but also so as not to waste time and effort by reinventing, by retheorizing, what is already existent. Some observers suggest that it would be better to jettison the bogey term ‘anarchism’ (and Alan Carter has employed, as will have been noticed, ‘radical’ instead of ‘anarchist’ as descriptive

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ledge, 1999), p. xiv. See also Alan Carter, ‘Analytical Anarchism: Some Conceptual Foundations’, *Political Theory*, XXVIII (2000).

<sup>25</sup> David Graeber, ‘The New Anarchists’, *New Left Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, no. 13 (January-February 2002); Seán M. Sheehan, *Anarchism* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), pp. 7–13, 149–60. See also John Sellers, ‘Raising a Ruckus’, *New Left Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, no. 10 (July-August 2001), esp. pp. 83–4.

of his position). But to replace ‘anarchism’ with ‘libertarianism’ and its derivatives would merely increase the confusion, especially now that right-libertarianism has appropriated them for anarcho-capitalism and laissez-faire minimal statism. ‘Anarchism’ has the great advantage of being the only political philosophy that not only entirely rejects the State and all government, in favour of voluntary associations organized from the bottom upwards and federating, but also representative politics and parliamentarianism. The latter is a very necessary corrective in a period when the media are obsessively concerned with political ‘celebrities’ and their doings. As a consequence ours is an epoch whose illusion would seem to be that of the efficacy of parliamentary politics and politicians in the attainment of sought ends. It needs to be learned that, far from being the appropriate means to achieve change, they constitute instead a major impediment, possibly the principal obstacle, to success.

Twenty years after the demise of Guild Socialism, G.D.H. Cole, grappling with the problems of ‘democracy face to face with hugeness’ and ‘the failure of parliamentary democracy’, considered that it had at one time been in the ‘vital associative life’ of ‘Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies, Friendly Societies, and a host of voluntary associations of every sort and kind’ that ‘the true spirit of democracy’ was embodied. Associative or associational democracy, of which Cole was a major forebear, emerged during the 1990s as an important current in democratic theory; and, for example, Alastair J. Reid, has emphasized the centrality of the contribution of trade unions as democratic organizations to British ‘liberty, democracy and diversity’.<sup>26</sup> But while the maximum social pluralism is essen-

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<sup>26</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *Essays in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 92–3; Alastair J. Reid, ‘Trade Unions: A Foundation of Political Pluralism?’ (<http://www.historyandpolicy.org>), May 2002. See also Alastair J. Reid, *United We Stand: A History of Britain’s Trade Unions* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), esp. chaps. 1, 16; and, in general, April Carter, ‘Associative Democracy’, in April Carter and Geoffrey Stokes (eds.), *Democratic Theory Today*:

the road and into another squatted building. Removal from London and specifically from the insecurity of Brixton occurred in 1991 after which the library was located in Northamptonshire for eight years. The next move was transatlantic and transcontinental for the books and archive of the KSL are today housed in North California, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. To publicise the library and raise funds, a publishing programme was also launched, the KSL becoming one of the most worthwhile contemporary anarchist imprints.<sup>94</sup>

Peter Marshall produced in 2008 a second edition of his widely read and appreciated *Demanding the Impossible* with a useful 36-page ‘Epilogue’.<sup>95</sup>

In an exceptionally well-informed and perceptive *TLS* review of David Miller’s *Anarchism* (1984), the Polish political philosopher, Leszek Kolakowski, began by recalling:

The first article I ever published, at the age of twenty, was... about Kropotkin’s ethics. Being... omniscient, like all adolescent Marxists... I treated the patriarch of the anarchist movement with patronizing superiority as a naive well-wisher utterly ignorant of the realities of life. ... I would now change my assessment to some extent, yet not entirely. Anarchism as a political programme is naive, but it is a kind of naivety of which perhaps we need a helping, at least in order to consider how we could have less, rather than more of the state, even if we admit that it is impossible to get rid of it altogether. And, of course, the burden of the state (in democratic countries, let alone communist serfdom) is so much heavier

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<sup>94</sup> See David Goodway, ‘The Kate Sharpley Library’, *Anarchist Studies*, XVI (2008), pp. 91–5.

<sup>95</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland, CA. PM Press, 2010).

and housing and planning, with particular attention paid to *The Allotment* and *Arcadia for All* – as well as *Reflected in Water*.<sup>92</sup>

## Chapter 15: Conclusion

Judith Suissa in a contribution to the philosophy of education, *Anarchism and Education*, distinguishes between a libertarian school such as A.S. Neill's Summerhill and genuinely anarchist schools. She is persuasive in emphasizing Neill's concern with a non-political individuality, appreciating freedom for its own sake, in contrast to anarchists who think socially and regard freedom as integral to a co-operative and egalitarian society.<sup>93</sup>

It appears probable that the most durable and permanently influential creation of the anarchist current of which the central figures have been Albert Meltzer and Stuart Christie is already and will continue to be the Kate Sharpley Library (KSL), the national anarchist archive in the foundation and evolution of which Meltzer was a prominent contributor – and the history of which I now know considerably more than I did in 2006. When the Brixton anarchists set up their 'Anarchist Centre' at 121 Railton Road in 1979 it was also decided to start a library, divided into lending and reference sections after the donations of both expensive and rare books. Some years previously Meltzer had established contact in nearby Lewisham with Kate Sharpley, who had been an anarchist and anti-war activist at the time of the First World War, and it was seen to be singularly appropriate to name the library after a working-class woman who had been previously unknown. A police raid on the squat at 121 precipitated the KSL's being moved in 1984, but only across

<sup>92</sup> *Personally Speaking: Colin Ward in Conversation with Roger Deakin* (Verbatim: Dibb Directions, 2009).

<sup>93</sup> Judith Suissa, *Anarchism and Education: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010) – first published in London by Routledge in 2010.

tial, participation in 'vital associative life' must not be at the expense of diverting energies from the need to democratize and decentralize political institutions and to dissolve the structures of power. Necessary though it is that there are flourishing sports clubs, choral societies, churches and the like, they must not distract from the central problem of our time: the imperative to counter irresponsible politicians, bankers and industrialists and the delinquent acts of their states and corporations.

Another necessity is for anarchists – and indeed everybody else – to eschew the use of violence, the weapon of the weak as well as the brutal. The anarchists are in very real danger of repeating, at the very beginning of the twenty-first century, the catastrophe at the end of the nineteenth when anarchism became synonymous with terrorism and bomb-throwing, and for which they were to pay an extremely heavy price. If a new stereotype of anarchists as mindless wreckers now results, ordinary, peaceable people, anarchism's natural constituency, and who need to take the easy step of concluding that anarchism is the necessary and feasible solution to their everyday problems, the way in which they can re-establish the control over their lives that they so desire, will again be deterred from giving serious consideration to anarchism, possibly for generations to come.

Anarchists have always stressed the centrality of the control of the means of production as much as the matter of their ownership. This insight is of especial relevance today when socialism has been removed from the political agenda for the foreseeable future mainly owing to Communist despotism, but also because of the inadequacies of public ownership as implemented by social democracy and, overall, a dislike of interference by the State. The most important – as well as most

*Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002). Cole's Guild Socialist *Social Theory* was amply sampled by a central theorist of associative democracy: Paul Q. Hirst (ed.), *The Pluralist Theory of the State: Selected Writings of G.D.H. Cole, J.N. Figgis, and H.J. Laski* (London: Routledge, 1989).

popular – thing is for individuals to be able to take command of their everyday circumstances and determine the course of their lives, almost certainly collectively: to institute personal and communal autonomy, so far as they are possible, and to exercise individual responsibility. But the average person has always yearned for their own house or smallholding or business or whatever. I have therefore surprised myself by coming to believe that, within the anarchist tradition, it is the American individualists and French mutualists, who saw nothing undesirable in the existence of modest amounts of property, who probably have the most going for their ideas in the twenty-first century. Of the major anarchist thinkers of the past, it is therefore Proudhon, rather than Bakunin, who is likely to be of greatest relevance in future.

The studies of this book have two purposes. In part, I offer them as a serious, scholarly contribution to the cultural history of Britain. But they are also intended as an intervention in current politics by demonstrating that there has been a significant indigenous anarchist tradition, predominantly literary, and that it is at its most impressive when at its broadest as a left-libertarian current. The writers I have discussed are commended not only to self-conscious anarchists, but to the youthful and not so youthful, to radicals who are groping to establish the identity of their politics. The choice is no longer, as for Marx, between socialism and barbarism. The much starker alternatives now are: anarchism or annihilation. I conceive the work and ideas of my eight principal subjects in particular as seeds beneath the snow in the harsh winter of the present. These seeds need to germinate, to put forth shoots and buds, eventually to flower, if there is to be any chance of a decent life for humans in the future.

In the case of Wilde's 'words and writings' there is, as John Barlas put it, 'under an appearance of sportive levity

as a 'pioneer of mutualism', was posted by White on the Fabian Society blog.<sup>88</sup>

An undated pamphlet, *The Crisis of Socialism*, reprinted a *Freedom* article in which Ward argued that the contemporary crisis was not of anarchism – 'a tiny network of propagandists around the world... whose general conclusions are far more relevant today than when they were first formulated in the last century' – but of socialism: 'Every human society is in fact a plural society in which large areas of activity are not in conformity with the officially imposed or declared values. ... If socialist movements recover their impetus and their popular support... it will [be] through their becoming *more* pluralist, *more* tolerant of divergence and dissent'.<sup>89</sup>

A Colin Ward reader with an admirably fresh selection by Chris Wilbert and Damian White of extracts from the full range of his writings will be published in 2011.<sup>90</sup> In a warm assessment and memoir, his editor at the *New Statesman and Society*, Boyd Tonkin, concluded that 'we need a handy volume of the *Selected Colin Ward* in every bookshop, or on every screen.' Wilbert's and White's is such a volume, but whether it will be able to break beyond the anarchist ghetto is another matter.<sup>91</sup>

A two-and-a-half-hour-long DVD of an interview of Ward in 2003 by the late Roger Deakin was issued in 2009. This is a very rich record of a conversation touching on most aspects of Ward's career, but with in-depth coverage of the anarchism

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<sup>88</sup> <http://www.nextleft.org/2010/02/colin-ward-pioneer-of-mutualism.html>. See also Stuart White, 'The Incremental Anarchist: Colin Ward, 1924–2010', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 161 (May/June 2010).

<sup>89</sup> Colin Ward, *The Crisis of Socialism* (San Francisco: Acrata Press, n.d.), pp. 4–5. This is the text of Ward's contribution to the Venice Anarchist Conference of September 1984, 'Anarchism and the Crisis of Socialism' (t/s in possession of the writer).

<sup>90</sup> Chris Wilbert and Damian White (eds.), *Autonomy, Solidarity, Possibility: The Colin Ward Reader* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011).

<sup>91</sup> Boyd Tonkin, 'The Good Life of a Gentle Anarchist', *Independent*, 19 February 2010.

and *Guardian* respectively.<sup>83</sup> There have also been valuable appreciations by two of his collaborators: Stan Cohen, the criminologist who was a contributor to *Anarchy*, and Dennis Hardy, co-author of *Arcadia for All* and *Goodnight Campers*.<sup>84</sup> Hardy is also represented in the illuminating – and frequently touching – compilation of the tributes paid to Ward at his funeral and memorial meeting.<sup>85</sup>

In a superbly researched and argued article, the political theorist Stuart White has explored the way in which Ward developed a pragmatist anarchism engaging with social problems and which is at once genuinely anarchist and ‘intellectually respectable’.<sup>86</sup> White had previously written an equally brilliant (and entirely different) paper identifying Ward as not a ‘deep pluralist’ but an adherent of ‘anarcho-pluralism’. This has not been published but it is to be hoped that will not remain the case.<sup>87</sup> White is currently working on a book with the working title of *Mutualist Tendencies: The Left against the State in Post-War Britain*, to include not only Ward but two other writers I deal with at lesser length: G.D.H. Cole and Geoffrey Ostergaard. One of the earliest obituary appreciations, hailing Ward

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<sup>83</sup> *The Times*, 2 March 2010; *Guardian*, 23 February 2010. See too, *Independent*, 3 March 2010, and *Daily Telegraph*, 30 March 2010, as well as the obituary by the present writer, commissioned by *Anarchist Studies*, XVIII (2010), pp. 122–4, and also used by *Freedom*, 13 March 2010, and *City*, XIV, no. 3 (June 2010), pp. 328–30.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Stan Cohen’s Diary’, *New Humanist*, March–April 2010; Dennis Hardy, ‘Colin Ward: Writer, Social Theorist and Anarchist, 1924–2010’, *City*, XIV, no. 3 (June 2010), pp. 326–8.

<sup>85</sup> Ross Bradshaw, Ben Ward, Harriet Ward and Ken Worpole (eds.), *Remembering Colin Ward, 1924–2010* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2011).

<sup>86</sup> Stuart White, ‘Making Anarchism Respectable? The Social Philosophy of Colin Ward’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, XII, no. 1 (February 2007).

<sup>87</sup> Stuart White, ‘A Relevant Anarchism? The Social Philosophy of Colin Ward’ (typescript in possession of writer).

unheard of profundity of perception and thought’.<sup>27</sup> Powys wrote some of his best work as a declared anarchist; and I (an admirer of Dickens, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Proust) have read no finer novel than his masterpiece, *Porius*. Through the simplification of life together with sexual liberation at Millthorpe Carpenter exemplifies how the piecemeal, voluntary transformation by individuals of their daily lives can effect radical social change. For Read the choice between authoritarianism and a free, libertarian society lies in the schoolroom; and in general the practical realization of his educational philosophy is much needed again so as to liberate our children from their Thatcherite and New Labour subjugation. From Huxley it is the emphases on decentralization, alternative technology and *maithuna*, the yoga of love, which are especially valuable. Comfort’s particular contribution to anarchist thought is twofold: his insistence on disobedience and personal responsibility and his demystification of power holders as actual or potential delinquents. Although Pallis is at his most compelling as an unforgiving opponent of Bolshevism, his salutary rejection of the myth fostered by ‘all the ruling groups in modern society ... that decision-taking and management are functions beyond the comprehension of ordinary people’ is essential to his vision of a self-managed society.<sup>28</sup>

Above all, Ward contends that anarchism is ‘a mode of human organization, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society’, the new society being already existent all around us.<sup>29</sup> And Powys’s life-philosophy, which shares a kinship with Carpenter’s art of everyday living,

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<sup>27</sup> Cited by David Lowe, *John Barlas: Sweet Singer and Socialist* (Cupar: Craigwood House Publishing

<sup>28</sup> ‘Martin Grainger’, ‘Revolutionary Organization’, *Agitator*, I, no. 5 [April 1961], p. 1 (reprinted in *FWP*, p. 44).

<sup>29</sup> Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), p. 11.

is revolutionary in expounding techniques by which everyone can effect self-liberation in the here-and-now: 'Having once aroused in our mind enough faith in our own will-power to create a universe of contemplation and forget everything else, there are few limitations to the happiness we may enjoy'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> John Cowper Powys, *A Philosophy of Solitude* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), p. 215.

they 'still enjoy the support of a number of workers with a healthy class instinct... those workers are very backward politically and the anarchists keep them that way':

The constant refusal of the Anarchists to venture beyond vague slogans of 'No Politics' or to take theory seriously, both contribute their quota to the confusion. This makes anarchism a further blind alley for workers to get lost in.<sup>80</sup>

Pallis's masterpiece, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, 1917–1921*, may now be supplemented with an important study by Simon Pirani of *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–24*.<sup>81</sup>

I refer on p. 307 note 64 to the online *British Medical Journal* obituary of Pallis. Paul Lewis and I wrote the obituary for the *Guardian*. I quote from Paul Anderson's fine appreciation in *Tribune* on pp. 296–7; and a double appreciation by George Shaw and Richard Abernethy was posted on the *Hobgoblin* website. Yet I am not aware of any other obituaries or substantial appreciations, an absence I naturally find inexplicable.<sup>82</sup>

## Chapter 14: Colin Ward

Colin Ward died on 11 February 2010. Authoritative obituaries by David Downes and Ken Worpole appeared in *The Times*

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2. An amended translation of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* text may be found in Cornelius Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings*, ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 3 vols., 1988–93), I, pp. 76–106.

<sup>81</sup> Simon Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–4: Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite* (Abingdon and New York, 2008).

<sup>82</sup> *Guardian*, 24 March 2005; [http://www.thehobgoblin.co.uk/journal/h72005\\_GS\\_RC\\_Pallis.htm](http://www.thehobgoblin.co.uk/journal/h72005_GS_RC_Pallis.htm).

by state property (and by the bureaucracy) the main conflict within society ceases to be the old one between the owners of wealth and those without property and is superseded by the conflict between those who manage and take the decisions and those who merely carry orders in the process of production.

In a footnote Pallis explains of these last, the order-takers:

The French use the word 'executant' for this social category. This word is very difficult to translate into English. It implies a person who executes orders given by another, whether in the field of production, of politics, of administration, in fact in any field of social life. The term implies an absence of creative initiative and a passive compliance to the will of others... in fact, alienation in its most elementary form.<sup>78</sup>

Because 'the objective existence of the bureaucracy as an exploiting stratum makes it obvious that the vanguard [of the working class] can only organize itself on the basis of an anti-bureaucratic ideology, on the basis of programme directed against bureaucracy and its roots and on the basis of a constant struggle against all forms of mystification and exploitation', Castoriadis concurs with all anarchists that 'the main feature of a political organization that has become aware of the need to abolish the distinction in society between people who decide and people who merely execute, is that such an organization should from the outset seek to abolish such a distinction within its own ranks'.<sup>79</sup>

Yet despite his having arrived at their position, anarchists are seen as part of the problem for, whereas in some countries

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3. Ellipsis in the original.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 27–8.

## Afterword

### Chapter 1: Introduction

In a helpful discussion of the anarchist adoption of the word 'libertarian', Iain McKay explains that the first recorded instance was when the French anarchist communist, Joseph Déjacque, published *La Libertaire: Journal du mouvement social*, in New York between 1858 and 1861. The next known use was in 1880 when 'libertarian communism' was employed at a French regional anarchist conference in Le Havre; and during the 1890s the usage spread widely.<sup>1</sup>

There is now an English-language edition of a history of anarchism in Portugal: João Freire's *Freedom Fighters*.<sup>2</sup>

Of the lesser anarchist and libertarian writers whom I mention briefly, H.W. Nevinson has at last become the subject of a biography, yet Angela John has little to say of his libertarianism. It is symptomatic that his good friend Kropotkin, although mentioned in the text, does not make it into the index. On the other hand, John explores Nevinson's passionate relationship with Nannie Dryhurst, a woman who worked on *Freedom* and was the translator of Kropotkin's *The Great French Revolution*.<sup>3</sup> The large, though complicated and difficult, figure of G.K. Chesterton demands extended treatment (and perhaps

<sup>1</sup> Iain McKay, '150 Years of "Libertarian"', *Freedom*, 20 December 2008.

<sup>2</sup> João Freire, *Freedom Fighters: Anarchist Intellectuals, Workers, and Soldiers in Portugal's History* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Angela V. John, *War, Journalism and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century: The Life and Times of Henry W. Nevinson* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 85–102. For Dryhurst, see also H. Oliver, *The International*

one day I shall give it him). Mohandas K. Gandhi's first book *Hind Swaraj*, translated as *Indian Home Rule* (1910), was written at speed partly as a response to Chesterton's criticism that 'the principal weakness of Indian Nationalism seems to be that it is not very Indian and not very national'. Gandhi admired Chesterton as 'one of the great writers' and 'an Englishman of liberal temper'; and his reply was 'an extended defence of the virtues of ancient Indian civilization', as well as of non-violence and religious pluralism.<sup>4</sup>

Chesterton had been criticizing Indian disciples of Herbert Spencer, the suppression of whose *Indian Sociologist* in 1909 led to the first prison sentence of Guy Aldred, who defended them not on ideological grounds but on the principle of freedom of the press. Aldred (1886–1963) was deliberately excluded from the first edition of *Seeds*, although I should probably have mentioned his name. Although he was an extremely courageous militant, subjecting himself to much mistreatment by the state, his prolific writings were almost exclusively self-published, and there are usually excellent reasons for that (with the notable exception of William Blake).<sup>5</sup>

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*Anarchist Movement in Late-Victorian London* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), pp. 45–6, 156.

<sup>4</sup> Ramachandra Guha, 'A Prophet Announces Himself: Mahatma Gandhi's "Hind Swaraj" a Hundred Years On', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 September 2009; letter from Anthony Parel, *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 October 2009.

<sup>5</sup> It is significant that the first-rate article by Nicolas Walter, 'Guy A. Aldred (1886–1963), *Raven*, no 1 (n.d.) (reprinted in Nicolas Walter, *Damned Fools in Utopia and Other Writings on Anarchism and War Resistance*, ed. David Goodway (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), pp. 241–56), does not discuss Aldred's publications. See also Nicolas Walter, *The Anarchist Past and Other Essays*, ed. David Goodway (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2007), pp. 201–2. On the other hand, Ruth Kinna takes seriously Aldred's attempt to fuse Marx and Bakunin in 'Towards a Synthesis of Anarchism and Marxism', an unpublished conference paper (for a copy of which I am indebted to the author).

British Library, the LSE Library, the Bodleian – are also lacking it. The old Solidarist Bob Potter, although not a member of the original group, does have one and has scanned his copy for me. *Socialism Reaffirmed* was printed without any explanation or attribution. Castoriadis was however the author and the 28-page pamphlet was the translation of an article, 'Socialisme ou barbarie', which had appeared in the first issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in 1949. It is an impressive early formulation of Castoriadis's analyses of the degeneration of both the Soviet Union and the international workers' movement and of the nature of contemporary society, both 'Communist' and capitalist, and the real surprise is that Solidarity never reprinted such a useful conspectus of his views. The pamphlet begins eloquently:

A hundred and ten years have elapsed since the *Communist Manifesto* was written and forty years since the Russian October seemed to herald the dawn of a new era. Today the revolutionary movement which has witnessed such great victories and suffered such serious defeats seems somehow to have disappeared. Like a river approaching the sea it has broken up into rivulets and run into swamps and marshes and finally dried up on the sands.

Never has there been more talk of 'Marxism', of 'Socialism', of the working class, and never has real Marxism been so distorted, Socialism so abused and the working class so often sold out by those claiming to represent it.<sup>77</sup>

Castoriadis maintains that within capitalism

As traditional forms of property (and the bourgeoisie of the classical period) were pushed aside

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<sup>77</sup> [Paul Cardan] *Socialism Reaffirmed* (London: Agitator, n.d.), p. i.



A well-funded project at Nottingham Trent University has yet to report on the Blake family's East Midlands background.<sup>74</sup>

How would Thompson have reacted to these remarkable discoveries? Of one thing he was already certain: that in all of Blake's poetry there is none of the necro-phily and sexual fixation with the wounds of Christ which characterize Moravian hymns. Catherine Blake herself wrote that at a love feast Jesus 'was pleased to make me Suck his wounds...'<sup>75</sup>

John Rodden in his book on Orwell's reputation accounts compellingly for Raymond Williams's ambivalence and drastic changes in assessment – from 'George Orwell', an article in *Essays in Criticism* of 1955, in which he was described as 'one who was kindly, brave, frank and good, and whom we should long remember...', through the three works from which I cite: *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (1958), *Orwell* (1971) and *Politics and Letters* (1979) – relating them to Williams's position within the British left, especially the New Left.<sup>76</sup>

## Chapter 13: Christopher Pallis

Until very recently I had been unable to locate a copy of the first Solidarity Pamphlet, *Socialism Reaffirmed*, published, most probably in 1961, while the group was still called Socialism Reaffirmed. The pamphlet is missing from Pallis's own archive and English libraries with significant Solidarity holdings – the

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<sup>74</sup> Marsha Keith Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried: William Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision* (London: Century, 2006), pp. 13, 126; 'Blake Research', 21 February 2005, at [http://www.ntu.ac.uk/hum/news\\_events/news\\_archive/2004-2007/67614.html](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/hum/news_events/news_archive/2004-2007/67614.html).

<sup>75</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1980), pp. 406–8; E.P. Thompson, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994 edn), p. 57; Schuchard, p. 44.

<sup>76</sup> Rodden, *Politics of Literary Reputation*, pp. 188–200; Rodden, *George Orwell*, pp. 188–200. The quotation is from p. 189 of both editions.

## Chapter 2: Anarchism and libertarian socialism in Britain: William Morris and the background, 1880–1920

Andrew Whitehead has commented on the strength of anarchist sentiment within the Social Democratic Federation, especially its Clerkenwell branch, throughout the 1880s and into the 1890s.<sup>6</sup>

In his obituary appreciation of Morris, Kropotkin remarked *of News from Nowhere*:

As [Morris] combined in himself the broad view of the thinker with a wonderful personification of the good practical sense of *collective* thought (the mood of thought of the masses [which?] they occasionally, in revolutionary times, set free to work) – his ideal society is undoubtedly the one which is most free of all our State and monastic traditions; the most imbued with the feelings of equality and humanitarian love; the most spontaneously growing out of a spirit of free understanding.

He commented further:

Two tendencies struggle in present society. On the one side, the tradition of the centralized State of Imperial Rome and of the Church, built upon the same plan – the tradition of slavery, submission, oppression, military and canonic discipline; and, on the other side, the tradition of *the masses* who endeavoured to build up their society outside the State – the tradition of the customary law, as opposed to Roman law; of the free guilds and

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Whitehead, 'Red London: Radicals and Socialists in Late-Victorian Clerkenwell', *Socialist History*, no. 18 (2000), pp. 24–6.

fraternities; of the free cities revolted against the bishop and the king; of the artisans and peasants revolted against Church and Empire. Morris entirely and unreservedly belonged to this second tradition. He was the bearer of that Scandinavian, Celtic, Teutonic, Slavonic spirit which for the last ten years has struggled against the Roman tradition. And this was why he was so little understood by all the unconscious followers of the Church-and-State tradition.<sup>7</sup>

In an important study of Anglo-American progressive political theorists during the early twentieth century, Marc Stears focuses on Harold Laski, G.D.H. Cole and R.H. Tawney in Britain, according the neglected Cole extensive discussion.<sup>8</sup>

From Bertrand Russell's left-libertarian years comes a remarkable letter of 1917 to the *Manchester Guardian*, replying to a columnist who had argued that 'the conscientious objector accepts the protection of those who are willing to fight and that he will accept protection from the police and from penal laws, and pay taxes which support "not only the gaol but the scaffold"'. Russell retorts that the conscientious objector only 'accepts' that protection because there is no way of avoiding it. He has not asked for it and does not believe it necessary. For my own part, nothing would induce me to prosecute a thief, and if there are any burglars among your readers they are

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Kropotkin, 'In Memory of William Morris', *Freedom*, November 1896 (reprinted in Peter Faulkner (ed.), *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 400).

<sup>8</sup> Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State: Ideologies of Reform in the United States and Britain, 1909–1926* (2002; Oxford: Oxford University Press, paperback edn, 2006), esp. chaps. 3, 5, 6.

It is odd that nothing new of significance appears to have been published about Edward Thompson. An essay by Stefan Collini is largely well-informed (with the exception of his understanding of university adult education), yet lacks the exciting penetration of his best writing.<sup>72</sup> But Scott Hamilton, a New Zealander who has completed a PhD in sociology on Thompson, and been posting much of interest on his blog, now has a book coming out which promises to be a major study.<sup>73</sup>

Thompson believed it possible in his posthumous *Witness against the Beast* (1993) that William Blake had received a Muggletonian upbringing. Since he understood that Blake's mother, Catherine, had first been married to Thomas Hermitage, he considered Catherine Blake and George Hermitage, the author of two Muggletonian songs, may have been related. I conclude on p. 283 that the supposition Blake had had a Muggletonian upbringing 'appears entirely plausible and would go far to explain the apparently idiosyncratic nature of Blake's mindset'. In 1992, however, it was established not only that Catherine Blake's maiden name was Wright but that her first husband was Thomas Armitage, not Hermitage. This further enabled a resourceful American researcher, Marsha Keith Schuchard, to discover that Catherine and Thomas Armitage were members of the Moravian Congregation of the Lamb, meeting in Fetter Lane, London. Catherine Blake, previously thought to have been a Londoner, had been born in the Nottinghamshire village of Walkeringham, where there was a Moravian congregation.

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'First' New Left: Life and Times', in Robin Archer *et al* (eds.), *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On* (London: Verso, 1989) p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> Collini, chap. 13. But see also Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 163–5, 171–5.

<sup>73</sup> <http://readingthemap.blogspot.com>; Scott Hamilton, *The Crisis of Theory: E.P. Thompson, the New Left and Postwar British Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2011).

*Damned Fools in Utopia*, drawing largely on his writings from the 1960s and including *Nonviolent Resistance: Men against War*, the pamphlet of 1963, which contains much of great relevance to this chapter.<sup>68</sup> *Damned Fools in Utopia* also reprints ‘The Spies for Peace and After’; and Walter has now been joined by Mike Lesser as the only two Spies for Peace to reveal themselves.<sup>69</sup> Sam Carroll quotes in an article from her interviews with four (anonymous) Spies for Peace, supplementing at several points Walter’s account.<sup>70</sup>

Stuart Hall, the first editor of the *New Left Review* (and previously one of the editors of the *Universities and Left Review*, which came out of Oxford), has written a short memoir and analysis of the origins and early years of the journal. Of especial interest to readers of this book will be his highlighting of the importance of G.D.H. Cole, ‘an austere and courageous veteran of the independent left, who was... still teaching politics at Oxford’, to the New Left:

Although he was a distinguished historian of European socialism and a student of Marxism, Cole’s socialism was rooted in the co-operative and ‘workers’ control’ traditions of Guild Socialism. His critique of bureaucratic ‘Morrisonian’-style nationalization was enormously influential in shaping the attitude of many socialists of my generation towards statist socialism.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Nicolas Walter, *The Anarchist Past and Other Essays*, ed. David Goodway (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2007); Nicolas Walter, *Damned Fools in Utopia and Other Writings on Anarchism and War Resistance*, ed. David Goodway (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> *Sunday Times*, 21 March 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Sam Carroll, ‘Danger! Official Secret: The Spies for Peace: Discretion and Disclosure in the Committee of 100’, *History Workshop Journal*, no. 69 (Spring 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Life and Times of the First New Left’, *New Left Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, no. 61 (January-February 2010), p. 178. See also Stuart Hall, ‘The

welcome to take note of this announcement; but I shall be very much surprised if I lose as much through them as I have lost through the operation of the law.<sup>9</sup>

### Chapter 3: Edward Carpenter

In the 1960s an Indian student, D.K. Barua completed a doctorate in English Literature at the University of Sheffield on Carpenter and published a couple of articles on him. Twenty-five years later the thesis was published in India, but I did not know of this until coming across *Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929: An Apostle of Freedom* in Cambridge University Library.<sup>10</sup> This fine study has been effectively unknown, certainly outside India, with (for example) the Brotherton Library at Leeds University and the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, with their important holdings of Carpenter materials in the Mattison and Sixsmith Collections respectively, not possessing copies. Barua stresses Carpenter’s anarchism – he has a chapter on ‘The Anarchist Humanist’ – something which Sheila Rowbotham, in her otherwise most impressive *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love*, unexpectedly does not, never focussing on the nature of his politics as I attempt to do in my chapter. Rowbotham’s widely reviewed and acclaimed biography brings to a triumphant conclusion the work she began on Carpenter as a doctoral student, also in the 1960S, and may well prove decisive in reawakening interest in him.<sup>11</sup>

On p. 42 (note 26) above I express surprise that Rowbotham in ‘Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life’ (in *Socialism*

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<sup>9</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 19 March 1917, reprinted in *Guardian*, 19 March 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Dilip Kumar Barua, *Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929: An Apostle of Freedom* (Burdwan: The University of Burdwan, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London and New York: Verso, 2008).

*and the New Life*) ‘misses the relationship with Fearnough’. I was therefore even more astonished to find her biography still made no mention of it – other than *Seeds* being referred to for ‘the possibility of a physical relationship’.<sup>12</sup> I had not considered I was claiming anything controversial, merely following what Tsuzuki had implied in his groundbreaking work on Carpenter and in which he quotes from a letter of 1 July 1880 to Whitman:

I do enjoy this outdoor life and digging potatoes – and never mean to abandon either again! I am living with a man – the best friend I ever had or could think to have – an iron worker, scythe riveter, and his little family. He often says ‘I wish Walt Whitman would come over here’.<sup>13</sup>

Rowbotham and I privately concur that the expression ‘to live with someone’ would not have had the same connotations in 1880 that it does a century and a quarter later. And possibly there was not a physical relationship – for as Carpenter was to inform J.A. Symonds and Havelock Ellis: ‘My chief desire in love is bodily nearness or contact... the specially sexual... seems a secondary matter’.<sup>14</sup> Yet for me (and for Tsuzuki) the joy expressed in the letter is manifest; and it was at just this time that Carpenter not only began to engage in outdoor labour but also found the sexual fulfilment his life had so lacked before. Rowbotham does not rule out the possibility of a relationship between the two men – it is just that clinching documentary proof does not exist – but I continue to believe Carpenter was in love with Albert Fearnough.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 62, 463 n65.

<sup>13</sup> Eng MS i170/i/i/6/2 (C.F. Sixsmith Walt Whitman Collection), John Rylands University Library of Manchester (printed in Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 38).

<sup>14</sup> See pp. 41–2 above.

their art secretly. I can envisage the punishment of poetry as an activity in itself. Read has shown us which way events are moving. The indissoluble alliance between art and anarchism, anarchism and the artistic attitude to society was virtually his own discovery. It may prove to be the ruling principle of the coming history of all European art.<sup>65</sup>

Who were ‘the younger writers’ whom Comfort invokes? The interested reader should consult Kenneth Rexroth’s anthology, *The New British Poets*, in which Comfort’s input was so extensive that he was effectively co-editor.<sup>66</sup>

An important, comparatively late article on anarchism, ‘Latterday Anarchism’, dates from 1973 and his time at the Center for Study of Democratic Institutions:

The basic difference between anarchists and most liberals is that liberals generally adhere to the belief that man being what he is, we cannot risk dispensing with strong centralized authority; while anarchists believe, with strong evidence, that man being what he is, and central authority being exercised by men, we cannot afford not to dispense with it.<sup>67</sup>

## Chapter 12: Nuclear disarmament, the New Left -and the case of E.P. Thompson

I have edited a selection of Nicolas Walter’s historical articles as *The Anarchist Past*, but it is the companion volume,

<sup>65</sup> *Poetry Quarterly*, V, no. 2 (Summer 1943), p. 76.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Rexroth (ed.), *The New British Poets: An Anthology* (n.p.: New Directions, n.d.).

<sup>67</sup> Alex Comfort, ‘Latterday Anarchism’, *Center Magazine*, VI, no. 5 (September/October 1973), p. 4.

cultural background. This is one of the activities which, for me, make up social psychiatry.<sup>64</sup>

Comfort included three works by Herbert Read – *To Hell with Culture*, *The Politics of the Unpolitical* and *Education through Art* – in the bibliography of *Art and Social Responsibility*, but my assumption that he had been influenced by Read was dismissed abruptly: he had not, he told me, much as he admired Read as a writer and respected him as a friend. This makes his review of *The Politics of the Unpolitical*, which I quote in full, are all the more striking:

Read's essays are the key to everything which the younger writers of this war expect, practise and believe. He, as nobody else, has an insight into the significance of the times and into the place of the artist in them, which will survive analysis on paper. Others of us know what we want and what we believe, but can bring it to no more explicit form than poetry, which deals with associations too fragile to state outright in prose. Most of his best essays of the last few years are here, including 'To Hell with Culture'. I do not think it possible to overestimate Read's personal influence through his writings on the development of poetry since 1938 [when he published *Poetry and Anarchism*]. He has stood in much the same relation to the younger writers as Godwin did to the earlier romantics. In 'The Politics of the Unpolitical' he has coined a phrase which will play a great part in the struggle between anarchism and authoritarianism which will follow the war. Poets will have to learn to exist in the structure of an authoritarian state as dissentients, hiding their dissent and practising

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 11 January 1951.

The range of Carpenter's socialist sympathies, but almost certainly by implication his fundamental libertarianism, is indicated in his obituary of Morris, written for none other than *Freedom*:

There is no doubt that, in the early days of the Socialist League, Morris had a hope, and a strong hope, that the little branches of the League, spreading and growing over the land, would before long reach hands to each other and form a network of free communal life over the whole country. That dream was not realized; but the impulse of growth which he gave has nevertheless been one of the most potent, most generous and humanly beautiful, of all the many impulses which have gone to make up that very complex and far-reaching movement which we call by the name of modern Socialism.<sup>15</sup>

## Chapter 4: Oscar Wilde

Wilde must currently be one of the most popular subjects for books and articles, ranging from academic obscurity to sensationalist potboilers with a handful of useful publications between the extremes. On the other hand, the concerns of this volume do not interest most other writers on Wilde, none of whom moreover seem yet to be aware of it, let alone to have read it. I am hopeful this neglect will shortly cease since I revised the chapter for inclusion during 2010 in a special issue on 'The Soul of Man: Oscar Wilde and Socialism' of *The Oscholars*, an electronic journal devoted to scholarship 'concerning Oscar Wilde and His Worlds'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Edward Carpenter, 'William Morris', *Freedom*, December 1896 (reprinted in Faulkner, p. 403).

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.oscholars.com/TO/Specials/Soul/ToC.htm>

A promisingly titled essay, 'Salomé as Bombshell, or How Oscar Wilde Became an Anarchist', by Erin Williams Hyman, merely outlines the anarchist politics of French symbolism, centring on the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre where *Salomé* was first performed, but fails to push beyond this, concluding limply that 'there remains some question as to the sincerity of Wilde's self-proclaimed anarchism'.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Laurence Davis considers the term 'anarchist' 'applies relatively uncontroversially' to Wilde and that 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' is an 'exceptionally intelligent and engaging essay', in which he, like Morris, 'unambiguously rejects authoritarian socialism' in favour of an 'anarchist or libertarian' variant.<sup>18</sup>

Steven Halliwell's greatly overdue study of John Barlas is now announced as co-authored with Philip Cohen and, he assures me, should appear in 2011.<sup>19</sup> John Barnes has meanwhile published his excellent biography of Barlas's socialist friend, H.H. Champion.<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Wright in his attractive, stimulating *Oscar's Books*, is original in surveying Wilde's reading and library. Regrettably he has next to nothing on the writers I name as putative influences on Wilde's political ideas, but does describe Walter Besant (whose novel *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* Tom Bell remembered Wilde talking about) as 'one of Wilde's *bêtes noires*... who exemplified for him all that was anti-intellectual, sentimental and inartistic about middle-class English fiction' –

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<sup>17</sup> In Joseph Bristow (ed.), *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), p. 108.

<sup>18</sup> Laurence Davis, 'Everyone an Artist: Art, Labour, Anarchy, and Utopia', in Laurence Davis and Ruth Kinna (eds.), *Anarchism and Utopianism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 74, 82, 86, 93 n4.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Cohen and Steven Halliwell, *John Evelyn Barlas: Poetry, Anarchism and Mental Illness in Late Victorian Britain* (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, forthcoming 2011).

<sup>20</sup> John Barnes, *Socialist Champion: Portrait of the Gentleman as Crusader* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2006).

and intergroup conflict, but it would modify our means of dealing with them, just as the prevalent character-structure and the *mores* of different cultures determine whether murder, suicide, divorce, acquiescence or barter are appropriate responses to sexual jealousy. It is perfectly possible to conceive a society in which acquisitiveness or power seeking were regarded with the same distaste by the individual as a public appearance without clothes would have been by a Victorian matron – a response which does not depend on the presence of a legal system to enforce it. The result of such a 'conversion' would not be to clean up the political system, but to abolish politics altogether, in so far as the word means a competition for coercive authority between individuals and groups.

Finally, he brings together his dual advocacy of disobedience and of social psychiatry:

Resistance to war and the preparation of war seems to me a valid psychiatric objective in itself, both as an antidote to the present paranoid atmosphere of suspicion, and as the self-assertion of normal individuals against pathological policies. If the roots of concentration-camps and atom bombs lie today in patterns of existing cultures, the immediate risk of their acceptance and use lies in the parent-child relationships which a handful of statesmen experienced about forty years ago, and the chance of abolishing them in the degree of responsible disobedience which we can stimulate in the peoples of all countries, whatever their

people and that...no unwanted children were born.<sup>61</sup>

Robert Goff, in 'The Joy of Aging: Alex Comfort and the Popularization of Gerontology', refreshingly celebrates Comfort as a pioneering gerontologist, geron-tological popularizer and politically radical scientist, appreciating the connections between his anarchism and scientific work.<sup>62</sup>

From long letters to the *Listener* in December 1950 and January 1951, responding to 'The Marxist View of Liberty', a radio talk by the Communist mathematician, Hyman Levy (and in 1956 to be a contributor to the *Reasoner* and later the *New Reasoner*), come significant late instalments of Comfort's socio-political thought. He concluded his first letter by asserting:

To the modern psychiatrist, who recognizes that the liberal concept of free institutions was far more thoroughly overturned by Freud and Malinowsky [*sic*] than by Marx and Engels, Kropotkin's warnings to the bolsheviks of 1918 have acquired added point. All societies in which power-centred forces and individuals exist are sick. The remedies of that sickness lie in educational, sexual and psychiatric reorientation rather than in changes of political structure which reflect rather than influence the course of public mental health.<sup>63</sup>

In the second he ruminates:

The pattern of a society free from compulsive types of behaviour would not end interpersonal

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<sup>61</sup> Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception, 1800–1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 287, 348.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Goff, 'The Joy of Aging: Alex Comfort and the Popularization of Gerontology', in Heike Hartung and Roberta Maierhofer (eds.), *Narratives of Life: Mediating Age* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009).

<sup>63</sup> *Listener*, 21 December 1950.

on the strength of the remarks Wilde made about him in his letters which I list on p. 90 note 112.<sup>21</sup>

## Chapter 5: John Cowper Powys I: His life-philosophy and individualist anarchism

The first full-length biography of John Cowper Powys, Morine Krissdóttir's *Descents of Memory*, has at last appeared. While criticized by most admirers of Powys for its lack of empathy, this is nevertheless a major work, indispensable for his life and the fiction, although little concerned with the 'philosophical' books which are the subject of this chapter.<sup>22</sup>

Two more volumes of correspondence, both long delayed in the press, *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Dorothy Richardson*, edited by Janet Fouli, a valuable record of his friendship with an esteemed fellow writer, and my own *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman*, particularly important for chapter 6, were published together in 2008.<sup>23</sup> I was also responsible for an edition of the last of Powys's works, *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant*, to be republished.<sup>24</sup> The original

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Wright, *Oscar's Books* (2008; London: Vintage Books edn, 2009), p. 247.

<sup>22</sup> Morine Krissdóttir's *Descents of Memory: The Life of John Cowper Powys* (New York, Woodstock and London: Overlook Duckworth, 2007). See reviews by Michael Kowalewski, Susan Rands and Tony Atmore, *Powys Society Newsletter*, no. 63 (March 2008), and also Krissdóttir's reply, *ibid.*, no. 64 (July 2008); and by Michael Ballin, John Hodgson and Charles Lock, *Powys Journal*, XVIII (2008).

<sup>23</sup> Janet Fouli (ed.), *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Dorothy Richardson* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2008); David Goodway (ed.), *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> John Cowper Powys, *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant and Other Essays*, ed. David Goodway (Bath: The Powys Society, 2006).

booklet of 1928 had collected five items, but only the unconvincing title essay was reissued by the Village Press in 1974.

Although I have never believed and certainly never written that Powys was ‘Stirnerist’ or a ‘follower of Stirner’, an unwelcome outcome of my writings on Powys’s anarchist individualism has been claims of this kind<sup>25</sup> – in contrast to my careful formulation that Powys’s thought ‘converged with Stirner’s egoism and the individualism of other anarchists, but without being intellectually indebted to them’ (p. 121 above). I have attempted to scotch the misinterpretation of my views in a brief article.<sup>26</sup>

The likelihood that Nietzsche was influenced by Stirner has been reopened in a most interesting article by Bernd A. Laska. Laska has discovered that Edward Mushacke, the father of one of Nietzsche’s fellow students and with whose family Nietzsche spent a fortnight in 1865, had been (according to Stirner’s biographer, John Henry Mackay) a member of the ‘inner circle’ of the Berlin Young Hegelians and ‘a good friend’ of Stirner.<sup>27</sup>

Declan Kibberd’s promisingly titled *Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Living*, only mentions Joycean epiphanies in passing – for it is concerned exclusively with *Ulysses* – but demonstrates implicitly how close to Powys’s many of Joyce’s preoccupations were. Kibberd emphasizes that the purpose of *Ulysses* was ‘to celebrate the common man and woman’ as well as ‘the reality of ordinary people’s daily rounds’. Joyce, he says, ‘believed that by recording the minutiae of a single

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, John Dunn, ‘The Missing Women and John Cowper Powys’s Political Philosophy’, *Powys Journal*, XIX (2009), pp. 58, 61.

<sup>26</sup> David Goodway, ‘John Cowper Powys, Anarchism and Max Stirner’, *Powys Society Newsletter*, no. 66 (March 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Bernd A. Laska, ‘Nietzsches initiale Krise: Die Stirner-Nietzsche-Frage in neuem Licht’, *Germanic Notes and Reviews*, XXXIII, no. 2 (Fall/Herbst 2002), available (in English) at <http://www.lsr-projekt.de/poly/ennietzsche.html>.

system to survive, if not indefinitely, at least for a long time. Who knows?<sup>59</sup>

## Chapter 11: Alex Comfort

For almost everyone the name of Alex Comfort has come to mean *The Joy of Sex* and nothing more. This is most definitely the case with Pagan Kennedy who, once contemplating a biography, has instead written ‘The Dangerous Joy of Dr Sex: The Story of Alex Comfort, in 17 Positions’.<sup>60</sup> There are some insights, however uncomfortable they may make Comfort’s few admirers feel; but this is a nasty piece, with little appreciation of the rest of his career and output, especially the poetry and fiction of the 1940s and the gerontology. Fortunately it is another American writer, Eric Laursen, who seems set to become Comfort’s first biographer.

The soberly academic Hera Cook, who points out that he had an entry in *Who’s Who* from the age of 24, believes

Comfort made a greater contribution to the creation of a new discourse on heterosexual sexual mores than anyone... had done since [D.H.] Lawrence. The crucial difference was that Comfort did not believe, as Lawrence had done, that enduring love in the form of a monogamous heterosexual union legitimized sex. Rather... sex was a physical pleasure like eating. People should indulge as much as they wished providing only that they were considerate of the feelings of other

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 467–8.

<sup>60</sup> In Pagan Kennedy, *The Dangerous Joy of Dr Sex and Other True Stories* (Washington, DC: Santa Fe Writers Project, 2008).



In 1959, at the time of the publication of *Brave New World Revisited* and when *Island* was being written, Huxley informed a correspondent just as gloomily yet not entirely without hope:

The problem is this: How far can individuals or small groups of individuals, who have opened themselves to the Good and feel impelled to work for an order of things that shall make the Good more accessible to [more] people, prevail against a system – Technology in every field of human activity, industrial, organizational, economic, political, psychological, mind-manipulative – which develops autonomously according to the laws of its own nature, and not at all according to the laws of human nature? This system now affects and regiments practically everybody, so that individuals find themselves pitted against vast numbers as well as the interrelated techniques in every field – techniques whose purpose is simply to increase efficiency by substituting calculation for spontaneity, centralized control for liberty, concentration on means for their own sake and not on ends outside the system, much less ends outside the material order.

If it remains in its present state of development the system will destroy itself or be destroyed by a rebellion of outraged humanity. But it will not remain in its present state; for the technicians are now devoting more and more of their energy to the techniques of man – the technique of mind-manipulation, the technique of inducing individuals to accept and even love their servitude. The development of such techniques may permit the

day, he could release those elements of the marvellous latent in ordinary living, so that the familiar might astonish'.<sup>28</sup>

## Chapter 6: The Spanish Revolution and Civil War -and the case of George Orwell

As already mentioned, my edition of *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman*, especially relevant for the first half of this chapter and for chapter 7, has now appeared. Potential readers of the correspondence should be warned that its introduction and afterword were substantially drawn upon for chapters 6 and 7 of the current book, for I had expected them to be published many years earlier.

Orwell is one of the most read and commented upon of the great English writers in the early-twenty-first century. Among many other books there is now a *Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, the editor of which, John Rodden, had previously published in 1989 the well-regarded *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of 'St George' Orwell*, now available in a significantly expanded edition with, unhelpfully, a different title, but again with a substantial section scrutinizing Orwell's anarchist affinities – through the medium of George Woodcock's writings.<sup>29</sup> A lively Trotskyist collection edited by Paul Flewers, *George Orwell: Enigmatic Socialist*, usefully reprints Peter Sedgwick's uncompleted article, 'George Orwell: International Socialist?' (to which I draw attention on

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<sup>28</sup> Declan Kibberd, *Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Living* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 7, 10–11.

<sup>29</sup> John Rodden (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); John Rodden, *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of 'St George' Orwell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 153–70; John Rodden, *George Orwell: The Politics of Literary Reputation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), pp. 152–70.

p. 287), yet is myopically obsessed with the POUM and Trotskyists – at the expense of the anarchists.<sup>30</sup>

Peter Davison has supplemented his magnificent edition of *The Complete Works of George Orwell* with *The Lost Orwell* and *George Orwell: A Life in Letters*.<sup>31</sup> Two previously unknown letters printed in the latter in which Orwell reflects on his political development are of exceptional importance. Several months after the publication of *Animal Farm* in 1945, Michael Sayers, with whom he and Rayner Heppenstall had shared a flat in Kentish Town in 1935, re-established contact after ten years. Orwell explained on 11 December:

I don't think I could fairly be described as Russo-phobe. I am against all dictatorships and I think the Russian myth has done frightful harm to the leftwing movement in Britain and elsewhere, and that it is above all necessary to make people see the Russian regime for what it is (ie. what I think it is). But I thought all this as early as 1932 or thereabouts and always said so fairly freely.<sup>32</sup>

In 1947 he opened up to an improbable confidant, Richard Usborne, editor of the *Strand* magazine, and shortly to write *Clubland Heroes*:

As to politics, I was only intermittently interested in the subject until about 1935, though I think I can say I was always more or less 'left'. In *Wigan*

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Flowers (ed.), *George Orwell: Enigmatic Socialist* (London: Socialist Platform, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Peter Davison (ed.), *The Lost Orwell: Being a Supplement to 'The Complete Works of George Orwell'* (London: Timewell Press, 2006); Peter Davison (ed.), *George Orwell: A Life in Letters* (London: Harvill Secker, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Davison, *George Orwell*, p. 275. Davison does not include Orwell's previous letter to Sayers (of 29 November 1945) in his selection but it is reproduced in D.J. Taylor, 'The Road to Being Orwell', *The Times*, 17 April 2010.

groups, self-government all round to the limits of general social efficiency; and finally the job of practicing and preaching non-violence... as an essential condition of domestic and international peace.<sup>57</sup>

Yet as early as October 1938 he was gloomily telling his old friend Naomi Mitchison that he was

extremely doubtful of the possibility of achieving anything by means of large-scale movements. To my mind the most promising economic-social experiments being made at present are experiments along the lines of those conducted by Borsodi and others for the purpose of improving the techniques of subsistence living. Democracy and personal liberty are possible only where a considerable proportion of the population are economically independent, where neither plutocrats nor the state can bring economic pressure to bear on them. True, in a society where the crust of custom has collapsed, neither plutocrats nor above all the state will hesitate to bring naked military pressure to bear; so that even this experiment seems probably foredoomed to failure. Still, it must be tried, if only because it offers some hope of providing little islands of existence for isolated communities of refugees from the general cataclysm. For the rest one must fall back on the cultivation of the art of inner liberty. There is nothing else.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Selected Letters*, ed. James Sexton (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), pp. 342–3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 358–9.

explanation – by which I take it that they mean his own collections of essays – together with, ‘a generous selection of shorter reviews and brief occasional pieces’, including the entire contents of David Bradshaw’s pioneering *The Hidden Huxley* (with the single exception of ‘Is Cruelty out of Date?’, the text of a broadcast discussion). In addition, though, short books are considered to be essays – such as *Science, Liberty, and Peace*, *The Doors of Perception, Heaven and Hell* and *Brave New World Revisited* – as well as, inexplicably, the full-length *Ends and Means*, yet not the pacifist pamphlet, *What Are You Going To Do About It?*<sup>55</sup>

The title of the *Selected Letters* is a misnomer since, running to 497 pages and with no overlap, it is supplementary to the thousand pages of *Letters of Aldous Huxley* of 1969, edited by Grover Smith, and hence effectively is a ‘*More Collected Letters*’. In addition, unlike Smith’s excellent edition, it has been very poorly edited.<sup>56</sup>

In a letter of July 1937 to A.E. Morgan, first chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority, Huxley wrote optimistically, shortly after completing *Ends and Means*:

The function of the community of devoted individuals is to do the urgently necessary jobs that neither government nor individuals in the ordinary way of business will undertake... of introducing self-government into industry, agriculture and business; the job of distributing the wealth created by industry in an equitable way; the job of creating a small working model of a better future society in which there shall be cooperation, unlimited liability within organic

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<sup>55</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Complete Essays*, ed. Robert S. Baker and James Sexton (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 6 vols., 2002).

<sup>56</sup> For some of the problems, see Jeremy Treglown, ‘A One-Sided Affair’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 January 2008.

*Pier* I first tried to thrash out my ideas. I felt, as I still do, that there are huge deficiencies in the whole conception of Socialism, and I was still wondering whether there was any other way out. After having a fairly good look at British industrialism at its worst, ie. in the mining areas, I came to the conclusion that it is a duty to work for Socialism even if one is not emotionally drawn to it, because the continuance of present conditions is simply not tolerable, and no solution except some kind of collectivism is viable, because that is what the mass of the people want. About the same time I became infected with a horror of totalitarianism, which indeed I already had in the form of hostility towards the Catholic Church. I fought for six months (1936–7) in Spain on the side of [the] Government, and had the misfortune to be mixed up in the internal struggle on the Government side, which left me with the conviction that there is not much to choose between Communism and Fascism, though for various reasons I would choose Communism if there were no other choice open. I have been vaguely associated with Trotskyists and Anarchists, and more closely with the left wing of the Labour Party (the Bevan-Foot end of it)...But I have never belonged to a political party, and I believe that even politically I am more valuable if I record what I believe to be true and refuse to toe a party line.<sup>33</sup>

(It was incorrect for Orwell to say that he never a member of a political party, since he had joined the ILP in 1938 for fifteen months (see p. 140 above).)

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<sup>33</sup> Davison, *George Orwell*, pp. xi–xii.

Since writing the first edition of this book I have discovered that Orwell was announced to speak on 20 January 1946 to the London Anarchist Group on ‘Trends in Russia’s Foreign Policy’.<sup>34</sup> *Freedom* did not carry a report on the meeting – although there is no significance in this since that was not the paper’s practice – and Davison makes no mention of it (or a lecture with this title) in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, let alone prints a text. It is possible therefore that the talk never took place but the fact that Orwell was so billed is indicative of his sympathy for and proximity to anarchism.

The foregoing merely reinforces Orwell’s intemperate rejection of Communism and Communists. It is therefore particularly bold of Philip Bounds to argue in his interesting *Orwell and Marxism* that ‘there are some striking parallels between Orwell’s cultural writings and those of the young literary intellectuals who were either members of, or closely associated with, the Communist Party of Great Britain...in the 1930s and 1940s’ – not only such well-known writers as Christopher Caudwell and Edgell Rickword, but also (for example) Ralph Fox, Alick West and Philip Henderson. Bounds insists he is ‘not suggesting that Orwell was any less anti-communist than he is usually regarded as being’, but that it can be argued that ‘he owed a special intellectual debt to the very people on the left to whom he was most opposed politically’.<sup>35</sup>

I include in this chapter a profile of the anarcho-pacifist, D.S. Savage, who died in 2007 at the age of ninety. I neglected to mention the essay on ‘Anarchism’, rejecting rational, utopian anarchism in favour of Christianity and pacifism, which he

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<sup>34</sup> *Freedom*, 12 January 1946.

<sup>35</sup> Philip Bounds, *Orwell and Marxism: The Political and Cultural Thinking of George Orwell* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 2–3.

...there must be decentralization of control to local committees with only certain functions delegated to higher bodies. These – county or national councils – would not be so much governments as planning and co-ordinating committees with limited Powers. In a word: Anarcho-Syndicalism.<sup>52</sup>

After the war Spreckley, now a member of the Liberal Party, converted his caravan-making business into a ‘co-partnership’ firm, Landsman Co-Ownership. It was this firm that was the main force in the creation of Industrial Common Ownership Finance Ltd, a non-profit fund to lend capital on a non-profit basis to other co-ownership initiatives. Although this was certainly not anarcho-syndicalism, it was nonetheless an impressive attempt to realize the programme of *The Way to Peace*.<sup>53</sup>

## Chapter 10: Aldous Huxley

From the 1920s through to the 1970s Huxley and his writings attracted intense interest, but in recent years publications – other than on the perpetually mesmerizing *Brave New World* – have dwindled to insignificance. An unenthusiastic essay by the reliable Stefan Collini is indicative of opinion in the early twenty-first century.<sup>54</sup>

Huxley’s *Complete Essays* have, though, been gathered in six volumes, and a *Selected Letters* published. The former reprint ‘all of Huxley’s published essays’, in the editors’

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<sup>52</sup> David Spreckley, *The Way to Peace* (London: The Forward Movement of the Peace Pledge Union, n.d.). For Spreckley, see Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 230–2, 309–10.

<sup>53</sup> Stuart White, ‘“Revolutionary Liberalism”? The Philosophy and Politics of Ownership in the Post-War Liberal Party’, *British Politics*, IV (2009), p. 170.

<sup>54</sup> Stefan Collini, *Common Reading: Critics, Historians, Publics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), chap. 3.

this galvanized a belief in ‘voluntary organization and regional and local units’.<sup>51</sup>

## Chapter 9: War and pacifism

In *The Way to Peace*, an undated pamphlet by David Spreckley, a full-time worker for the Peace Pledge Union, and published by the Forward Movement, described as ‘a body of revolutionary pacifists working to obtain a new social order out of the present disintegration of society’, it is explained:

We, in the FORWARD MOVEMENT... have to work for a double revolution. On the one hand the revolution of the individual, which we can all make by renouncing the old set of values upon which the present capitalist-nationalist society is run. This entails changing our way of behaviour and our outlook so that we shall then be in a position not only to preach opposition to the present order, but also to live in opposition to it, showing by our example that another method of human behaviour is possible.

At the same time we have to prepare for the other revolution – a mass revolution in which the people as a whole will throw over the old political and economic system and establish the new.

This programme, which proceeded to quote Malatesta, was compatible with that of the current Freedom Press group, but also looked back to Landauer and forward to Colin Ward’s distinctive anarchism. With respect to political organization:

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<sup>51</sup> Michael T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (1999; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 edn), p. 94. See also *ibid.*, pp. 49–53, 130–1.

contributed to the *festschrift* marking George Woodcock’s 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>36</sup>

## Chapter 7: John Cowper Powys II: The impact of Emma Goldman and Spain

The importance of Morine Krissdottir’s biography of Powys, *Descents of Memory*, has already been emphasized. It is essential reading for those concerned with his novels – and his relationship with Phyllis Playter – but Krissdottir has little interest in the politics and only mentions Goldman twice. She comments (not unreasonably): ‘His long friendship with Emma Goldman and his own predilections made him sympathetic to the anarchist cause, but he considered that “they are too good to be true”’. The quotation is from Powys’s letter to Louis Wilkinson of 28 November 1939 which I cite on p. 159.<sup>37</sup>

Concurrently with *Descents of Memory*, Krissdottir also published a new version of *Porius*, of which she was co-editor.<sup>38</sup> At last this great novel, which I describe as Powys’s ‘most anarchist’, is available in a complete, reliable and accessible edition. Some literary scholars, as was to be expected, continue to express reservations yet, given the mutilation of the original text, any reconstruction was certain to attract some controversy.<sup>39</sup>

It was surprising (albeit gratifying) to find A.N. Wilson discussing *Porius* in similar terms to my anarchist analysis in his *After the Victorians* (2005), which I read only after *Seeds* had

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<sup>36</sup> D.S. Savage, ‘Anarchism’, in William H. New (ed.), *A Political Art: Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978).

<sup>37</sup> Krissdottir, p. 355.

<sup>38</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Porius*, ed. Judith Bond and Morine Krissdottir (New York, Woodstock and London: Overlook Duckworth, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> W.J. Keith, ‘The New *Porius*: Plenty to Praise and Only a Little to Query’, *Powys Journal*, XVIII (2008); reviews by Ian Duncan, Richard Maxwell and Charles Lock, *Powys Journal*, XIX (2009).

gone to press. He quotes extensively from what I describe on p. 171 as the ‘anarchist lesson’ Myrrdin Wylt gives the pageboy Neb:

‘Listen, child. Do you think obedience is a good thing?’

‘Am I to say the truth?’

‘Of course.’

And Neb, the son of Digon, boldly shook his impish head. ‘No master, I don’t. It’s what cruel people do to children and animals.’

Neb proceeds to ask what turns a god into a devil and receives the answer which, says Wilson, is ‘really Powys’s *Credo*’:

‘Power, my son. Nobody in the world, nobody beyond the world, can be trusted with power, unless perhaps it be our mother the earth: but I doubt whether even she can. The Golden Age can never come again till governments and rulers and kings and emperors and priests and druids and gods and devils learn to un-make themselves as I did, and leave men and women to themselves! And don’t you be deceived, little one, by this new religion[‘s] [i.e. Christianity’s] talk of “love”. I tell you wherever there is what they call love there is hatred too and a lust for obedience! What the world wants is more common-sense, more kindness, more indulgence, more leaving people alone....’<sup>40</sup>

The anarchist writer this exchange makes me think of is Alex Comfort, but Wilson claims it is Stirnerite: ‘Though

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<sup>40</sup> A.N. Wilson, *After the Victorians: The Decline of Britain in the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), pp. 520–i.

that they were written before Read’s rediscovery of it. As a rejoinder to Antliff I stress the circuitous route that Read followed on his way back to libertarianism. I argue that after he decided he was an anarchist in 1937 he was able to square his developing aesthetic and his new politics very reasonably, but there was nothing foreordained. A natural anarchist aesthetic could, most obviously, have been the surrealism with which he was currently flirting. In addition, some Western Communists responded as warmly to abstract machine art as Read. He had originally written literary criticism, only beginning to publish on contemporary art at the age of 35 in 1929. The one grew in part out of the other, but he had ultimately to abandon a unified aesthetics, applicable to both literature and the visual arts; and, in addition, his visual aesthetic, uneasily advocating both organicism and a geometric machine art, fractured completely when, as an anarchist, he was obliged to allow alongside the latter – in the spirit of the arts-and-crafts theorists and practitioners such as Morris – a private humanistic art.<sup>49</sup>

The text has also been published of a lecture I gave at St Gregory’s Minster, Kirkdale, the church where Read worshipped with his family as a boy and in whose graveyard he is buried. *The Green Child*, his utopian romance, was rooted in this locality, and I explore its intellectual and emotional origins, while continuing to affirm its unlibertarian vision.<sup>50</sup>

Michael T. Saler in *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England* (O999) claims Read as a ‘medieval modernist’ and – probably more helpfully – stresses the centrality of his northernness even when living in London and the south-east and the way

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<sup>49</sup> David Goodway, ‘Herbert Read, Organicism, Abstraction and an Anarchist Aesthetic’, *Anarchist Studies*, XIX (2011) pp. 82–97.

<sup>50</sup> David Goodway, *Herbert Read: Yorkshireman, Anarchist, Modernist* (Kirkdale: Trustees of The Friends of St Gregory’s Minster, 2009), pp. 22–5.

*The Stream and the Source* (1972), in a private letter of 16 April 1993:

Herbert spread himself too far, and many of his books on art now seem shallow and written for the market. Even his anarchist writings, over the years, seem less to the point than those of Paul Goodman and Colin Ward. The real core of Read's achievement, which we should treasure and help to re-emerge, lies in the *Green Child* and his poems, in his autobiographies and his literary criticism. He was a good writer; he was a correct but uninspiring thinker. I believe that once we shed the image of Read as an art critic and as a popularizing philosopher, the sooner his real worth will emerge.<sup>47</sup>

But for a contemporary view of Read by another anarchist writer, see the effusive review by Alex Comfort of *The Politics of the Unpolitical* (1943) quoted below, p. 356.

The chapter in *Re-reading Read* by Allan Antliff, 'Open Form and the Abstract Imperative: Herbert Read and Contemporary Anarchist Art', has also appeared as an article in *Anarchist Studies*, the abstract of which asserts: 'During the 1930s, in a series of articles defending abstraction in art, Herbert Read argued an anarchist society is liberating because the order it generates is founded upon the free creativity of its participants'.<sup>48</sup> Yet in the two articles advocating abstraction cited, 'What is Revolutionary Art?' and 'An Art of Pure Form', there is no mention of anarchism, scarcely surprisingly given

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<sup>47</sup> Jerry Zaslove, 'Herbert Read as Touchstone for Anarcho-Modernism: Aura, Breeding Grounds, Polemic Philosophy', in Michael Paraskos (ed.), *Re-reading Read: New Views on Herbert Read* (London: Freedom Press, 2007), pp. 62–3.

<sup>48</sup> Allan Antliff, 'Open Form and the Abstract Imperative: Herbert Read and Contemporary Anarchist Art', *Anarchist Studies*, XVI (2008), p. 6.

often associated with Nietzsche...John Cowper Powys was really most influenced, philosophically, by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Max Stirner'; and 'Powys is never more Stirnerish [*sic*]' than in Myrrdin Wyllyt's and Neb's conversation<sup>41</sup>. Wilson is not, I am relieved to report, claiming Powys as 'follower of Stirner', merely that his thinking was 'Stirnerish'.

I had thought Powysians would consider I was guilty of gross exaggeration in claiming Powys for left-libertarianism and considering *Porius* his 'most anarchist novel', and so it was with particular interest – as well as pleasure – that I found John Hodgson, then chairman of the Powys Society, in a review of *Seeds* not only agreeing with the first but even arguing that I don't 'go far enough' in my analysis of *Porius*: 'The novel seethes and teems with anarchic life, whether human, superhuman, subhuman, and even vegetable...not only men and women but beasts and plants rebel against "authority from above"'. Hodgson comments that 'Powys's non-anthropocentric natural anarchism is startlingly modern' and also quotes a passage from *Rabelais*, which I'm extremely disappointed to have missed when writing *Seeds*.<sup>42</sup> It shows just how anarchistically Powys was thinking – it's exactly the kind of thing that my final subject, Colin Ward, believes (and myself also): 'We know only too well how the sanctity of religion and the sanctity of the family have come to be closely associated with *authority from above*, while *authority from below* has been perverted to mean authority from the Devil instead of authority from the sound and good instincts of the masses of common men and women'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 520.

<sup>42</sup> Review by John Hodgson, *Powys Journal*, XVII (2007), pp. 148–9.

<sup>43</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Rabelais: His Life, the Story Told by Him, Selections Therefrom Here Newly Translated, and an Interpretation of His Genius and His Religion* (London: John Lane, 1948), p. 362.

W.J. Keith has supplemented an authoritative guide to *Owen Glendower*, one of Powys's greatest novels, which I discuss on pp. 163–5, with another on *A Glastonbury Romance*, discussed on pp. 161–2.<sup>44</sup>

An impressive 'documentary history' of Goldman's years in the United States, projected in four volumes, is in course of publication, yet it is improbable that when the final instalment has appeared anything further about the friendship between Powys and Goldman – and its origins – will be known.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, Barry Pateman of this Emma Goldman Papers project has discovered a US War Department report of a Los Angeles informer, dated 15 May 1918:

John Cowper Powys, a noted English radical is now lecturing here and the radicals are flocking to hear him. He is not pro-German but his lectures will do the cause of Democracy no good because of his attitude toward all governments and the encouragement he gives his hearers as to what changes must come after the war is over; in fact he stimulates them in the belief that a revolution must take place in order to right the many wrongs the people suffer.

Before arriving in Los Angeles, though, Powys had been giving lectures in San Francisco during April supporting the war, praising the French as 'representing the truest form of culture', while lambasting Germany as 'a state-worshipping vulture'. The same month he heard his brother Bertie had been

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<sup>44</sup> W.J. Keith, *Aspects of John Cowper Powys's 'Owen Glendower'* (London: The Powys Society, 2008); W.J. Keith, *A Glastonbury Romance Revisited* (London: The Powys Society, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> To date only the years 1890–1909 are covered: Candace Falk and Barry Pateman (eds.), *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2 vols., 2003–5).

made a prisoner-of-war by the Germans, leading him to comment:

No, no, things are getting a bit too crucial with these spiked helmets so near the Wessex lanes. I cannot, I really cannot, eat ice-creams and drink grape-juice in California while these barbarians overrun the earth.

In consequence he attempted to enlist in the British Army in New York on 29 May -the age of conscription having being raised that month from 41 to 50 – was rejected when a tubercular scar was revealed, sailed in June to England, where he again volunteered and was again refused, and then lectured for the British government's Bureau of War Aims until returning to the United States in the autumn. These are not the actions of a revolutionary agitator.<sup>46</sup>

## Chapter 8: Herbert Read

Although *Re-reading Read: New Views on Herbert Read* (2007), edited by Michael Paraskos, was published by Freedom Press, this is not a political collection – indeed it is the proceedings of a conference in 2004 at Tate Britain whose publication was enabled by ample support from the Henry Moore Foundation. Unlike the contributors to *Herbert Read Reassessed*, the volume I edited in 1998, *Re-reading Reads* are markedly respectful, whereas I believe Read to have been too interesting, important – and uneven – not to be subjected to some rough handling.

Jerry Zaslove quotes a savage downgrading by George Woodcock, author of the admiring, empathetic *Herbert Read*:

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<sup>46</sup> David Goodway, 'John Cowper Powys in Los Angeles, 1918: A Recently Discovered Document', *Powys Society Newsletter*, no. 67 (July 2009), pp. 30–2.



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