Key Words

16

(2018)

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The issue of *Key Words* is dedicated to the memory of Angela Kershaw (1971–2018), an outstanding member of the editorial board for over a decade, whose death was announced while the journal was in production. We are terribly shocked and saddened by the news and send sincere condolences to Angela's family. An obituary will be published in *Key Words* 17 (2019).

Introduction: Williams's Commitment

Ben Harker

> It is still worth saying that 'no commitment', in literary pronouncements, often functions like 'no politics' in conservative political pronouncements. The only bad commitments are on the other side; on our side we are simply writing the truth as we see it, free and honest individuals all.
>
> <div align="right">Raymond Williams[1]</div>

This issue of the journal takes as its theme 'commitment'. Though the word never received an entry in Williams's own *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 'commitment' structured his work (his commitment to socialism was constant) and unified his diverse writing (everything he wrote emerged from and expressed that commitment). In particular, the relationship between political commitment and writing was for him a key concern, and in the late 1970s he turned to the question explicitly in three overlapping essays.[2] Best read as one extended exploration of the same topic, these essays revisit the key episodes in international Marxist debates on literature and commitment: Marx and Engels's scattered remarks on the socialist literature of their day; the Brecht and Lukács debate of the 1930s; Sartre's *What is Literature?* (1948, translated 1950) and Adorno's response to it. But Williams's central intervention shifted scrutiny from the usual frame – the writer's alleged 'subservience to some version of desirable production decided by a party and its ideologists' (79) – to the history of those ideas typically ranged against such alleged subservience, the 'idea of the artist as a free individual' or indeed as the very essence of one (81). To explain this idea's stubborn grip, Williams traced its deep history, showing that it had arisen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and was deeply enmeshed in the romantic movement's simultaneous protest against industrial modernity, Church, state and artistic rules (82). The idea of the artist as sovereign subject, he argued, coincided with and was reinforced by changes in the conditions of writing and publishing which conferred on writers a new professional status and independence, providing from the 1830s 'freedom to go out and compete' in a market of cheaper books and proliferating magazines, periodicals and newspapers. This rapid extension of such networks and the opportunities they afforded, he argued, expressed and affirmed in cultural terms the market's status as 'real social relations', a bourgeois definition of the market as society that precluded 'any other significant social commitments' (82). The historically diverse forms of guidance and restriction exerted over the writer by the market were hard to spot because the 'notion of what people

want that has passed through the market comes back as a strange kind of freedom' (85).

So for Williams, the necessary but insufficient focus of Cold War liberals on writers being oppressed by totalitarian regimes was dialectically related to their own unnameable unfreedom and embeddedness in the market and its restrictions. The flourishing Cold War sub-genre of protest against the incursions of actually existing socialist states onto writers' freedom screened off unfreedom 'where we ourselves are' (85). The problem with the basic terms of a 'profoundly liberal' 'commitment' debate not unrelated to the elevation of modernism into the culture of the twentieth century was that the approved position – the writer taking an individual stance against political or commercial pressure – always occluded this deeper history of cultural commodification and assumed 'a natural state of innocence, free of ideology, from which a writer may or may not choose to move'.[3] Commitment for Williams, if it meant anything, meant consciousness of and engagement with the deeper historical processes at work, or as 'taking social reality, historical reality, the development of social and historical reality, as the centres of attention, and then finding some of the hundred of ways in which all those processes can be written' (79). It was less, then, a question of identifying with party, state or approved cultural mode or genre but a matter of epistemology and method: making a commitment 'far enough to social reality to be conscious of this level of sociality', 'an active consciousness of those social relationships which are in any case there' (87). Commitment in these terms meant precisely a sharp awareness of, and impulse to move beyond, those repressions and evasions that stymied the debate on commitment, an 'alignment' that knowingly read social reality in and through consciousness of the processes of one's formation. For as Williams insisted, each writer was actually shaped by myriad factors, including native language, 'family relationships, a social and physical environment, a mode of education'.[4] Writing conscious of those processes, he suggests, was by definition at odds with dominant cultural assumptions and more likely to meet resistance from centres of cultural privilege or commercial success. Its particular charge came from 'active consciousness of those social relationships which include ourselves and our practices' (87).

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As a socialist, Williams's commitment was always to a different kind of freedom to that provided by the market. His socialism implied that the achievement of freedom was seen to be a structural and political matter involving the transfer of class power and the collective control of the economic surplus. But the form that Williams's socialist commitment took, which in turn framed his

sense of the place of culture and writing in the processes of political change, varied in the course of his life. The shifting form of this commitment is worth revisiting by way of providing context for the essays that follow.

'Much of my political belief is a continuation of a very early formation', Williams told Terry Eagleton in a 1987 interview. 'I can't remember any time when I haven't felt broadly speaking as I do now'.[5] Like 'alignment', 'formation' would remain for Williams a key word, but he rejected the charge that his commitment might be an expression of what Terry Eagleton – playing devil's advocate – called 'the nostalgic memory' of 'an unusually warm and affectionate working-class childhood'.[6] To do so Williams pushed out from personal memory to history, situating his early life within the *longue durée* of struggle on the Welsh borders whose pattern was not only 'defeat, invasion, victimization, oppression' but 'self-generation and regeneration, from what seemed impossible conditions'.[7] Viewed from here, his community represented 'an indestructible yet also changing embodiment of the possibilities of common life' whose historically specific structure of feeling, as he wrote in another context, stressed 'mutual and cooperative, social practice, as distinct from the dominant bourgeois idea of individual practice'.[8] That such communities were themselves structured around a sexual division of labour in which working-class women were doubly oppressed was not one that Williams ever fully confronted, despite his theoretical insistence that analysis should grapple with the ways in which social formations reproduced themselves.[9]

Inattentive though he was to the gender inequalities that undergirded industrial working-class communities, he was convinced that capitalism and the foundational class inequality on which it depended was inherently unjust and that the alternative values he knew from his childhood should productively be generalised across society through a very different social system. This conviction was reinforced by his going up to Cambridge in October 1939. Much of Williams's work would emerge from the clash between those values inherited at home in a submerged population and those encountered in the dominant culture. 'Nobody fortunate to grow up in a good home in a genuinely well-mannered and sensitive community', he later wrote with some sharpness, 'could for a moment envy […] the loud, competitive and deprived people' he encountered at Cambridge.[10]

Politically, his was a Labour Party supporting background. With Europe facing economic crisis, fascism and war, and the betrayals of the General Strike and Ramsay MacDonald's National Government fresh in political memory, the party of the 'new type' represented by the Communist Party of Great Britain seemed to many of his generation the most promising vector for reshaping history, and Williams made his commitment to it. For a bookish young man who already harboured ambitions to be a novelist, the CP's theoretical emphasis on

the economic determination of a society's character was a welcome corrective to a theory of culture whose primary locus was the – usually English – individual genius. Likewise, the party's emphasis on the production of a 'people's' culture grounded in the sensibilities of the subordinate class chimed with his sense – sharpened at Cambridge – that 'my own class and for that matter my own people had little representation in the orthodox cultural world', and had, in fact, much to teach it.[11]

Ultimately, however, it was not conformity to these initially bracing positions but struggle with them that was Williams's making as a thinker. His ultimate commitment, as his late writing counselled, would be to the complexity of social reality. This soon involved challenging the formulae used by Communist doxa to map that reality, and to rethinking the place assigned to culture in its political priorities and strategies. Just as significant to his development as the CP's restricted positions were the bruising second-year undergraduate English tutorials in 1940/1 in which the Conservative Party member and faculty grandee E.M.W. Tillyard courteously but firmly exposed the limitations of the approved modes of cultural analysis in which the card-carrying young activist was then belligerently fluent. One of the most intriguing details presented in Dai Smith's biography of the young Williams tells of an undergraduate essay Williams read to Tillyard on 11 November 1940. The essay reveals that, barely a year after joining the CP, the twenty year-old was already feeling a tension between his own developing sense of the complexities of culture, creativity and consciousness and the party's approved and reductive positions. Williams's essay holds to the basic materialist position that 'economic factors are finally decisive'.[12] But it argues that narrow fixation with an author's biographical class position – standard methodology in much CP literary analysis – was inadequate and often irrelevant to the analysis of literature. Instead, he argued, a materialist criticism synthesising economics, psychology, sociology and linguistics was necessary to analyse what he called the 'the complex relationship between experience and creation'.[13] Williams already knew that an ossifying theoretical Marxism – codified in the notorious 'Short Course' (1939) textbook, largely written by Stalin, in which Communist cadres across the globe were drilled – was insufficient to get to grips with cultural complexity.[14] Even so, the essay was less an exercise in materialist criticism than a preliminary mapping of the critical void in which Williams now found himself.

In this sense, those demoralising sessions with Tillyard anticipated Williams's breakthrough book, *Culture And Society 1780–1950* (1958), whose long genealogy, as Francis Mulhern has argued, stretched far back into the 1940s and for which an even longer timeframe now looks necessary.[15] That *Culture and Society* was an 'oppositional' book that challenged the anti-modern, authoritarian implications of F.R. Leavis's work, from which Williams had by

then learned much, is well-known.[16] But often overlooked is that here Williams thrashed out new positions – to whose development he would commit – by authoritatively and without sectarianism identifying the intellectual errors of the Communist Party largely synonymous with Marxism in Britain up until that point.[17] The key chapter was the twelfth, 'Marxism and Culture', and the central theoretical issue the base-superstructure model – beyond scrutiny in party circles and flattened out for the sake of pedagogical clarity in the 'Short Course' – and its bracketing off of culture as secondary to and determined by the economic 'base' in ways that, for Williams, failed to recognise culture's generative, prefigurative or productive capacity.[18] But crucially, what Williams wrote was provisional: he would repeatedly worry away at these questions, often in response to criticism from the Left that was sometimes comradely, sometimes not.[19] From here, thinking through the relationship between culture and society would form the core of his work and provoke his most enduring theoretical interventions, notably the Gramsci-inflected essay 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' (1973), which introduced a repertoire of analytical concepts integral to what he later called 'cultural materialism', concepts that *Marxism and Literature* (1977) would develop into something like a method.[20]

Though often conceptually difficult, these were never the arcane matters they might sound. Williams's thinking challenged and enlarged what was meant by socialist commitment. It did so by raising still unresolved questions about the relationship between culture, consciousness, class power and the appropriate forms of socialist strategy. For instance, one key pressure-point in the early New Left to which Williams was committed in the late 1950s was whether the collective emphasis should be on the creation of a political movement or party to supersede the CP, seen to be discredited by lingering Stalinism. Or should energies rather be focused on cultural and intellectual work? E.P. Thompson, recently a Communist Party man, was drawn towards the former course; Williams, not a CP member since wartime Cambridge, stressed rather the priority of intellectual and cultural work.[21] Though at one level this was a practical emphasis, given the limited time and resources available, it registered a key difference. For Williams, the Left's ability to grasp the dynamic and active work of culture in shaping society, especially in developed economies, was not a secondary matter to politics as usually conceived but rather a precondition for regrouping and advance. His commitment to this position was sharpened by his conviction that socialists, under the sway for much of the twentieth-century to the distortions of an administrative Fabianism and a bureaucratic Stalinism, which shared more than either would have conceded, had consistently underestimated culture's political importance. More controversially, Williams's emphasis was driven by a never fully-theorised sense that Britain, with what

he termed its ongoing democratic, industrial and cultural 'revolutions', was available for a 'long revolution' to socialism through the extension and deepening of cultural and educational democratisation.[22] This belief he maintained, to the consternation of his now former CP comrades, through the late 1950s and early 1960s in which *The Long Revolution* (1961) and *Communications* (1962) were written and into the period of the Labour administration, with its slender majority, elected in October 1964.[23]

Modern Tragedy (1966), written in 1964, catches Williams on a cusp. On one hand, the text is deeply mindful of revolution's unconscionable twentieth-century history, still denied or repressed by many on the Left. On the other, it acutely feels the moral case for revolution in capitalist societies in which, by definition, 'the incorporation of all its people, as whole human beings, is in practice impossible'.[24] The significant but often overlooked switch-point, as far as Williams's socialist commitment was concerned, was the General Election of March 1966, after which, as he later explained, the Labour government, newly bolstered by the long-awaited parliamentary majority, revealed itself to be committed to the reproduction rather than even gradual dissolution of capitalist society.[25] Williams's always conflicted affiliation to what he called 'two latencies or traditions' on the Left – one 'revolutionary', which emphasised class struggle and direct confrontation with the capitalist state, the other 'reformist', which held that 'a Labour government with a strong majority would be able to overcome the limitations of social-democratic parliamentarianism' – was now settled in favour of the former.[26] 'When you have been pondering a decision for fifteen years', he later added, 'you can finally take it in two days without haste'.[27] Gradually since 1950 and suddenly from 1966 Williams underwent a process of political realignment, despite some of his emerging, more radical positions being muffled in the collaborative work on the two versions of *The May-Day Manifesto* (1967, 1968), with their envisaged ameliorations of parliament. By the early 1970s, his thought enriched by his deep reading of Gramsci's belatedly translated *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (1971), there was a new direction and clarity to Williams's commitment, predicated largely on his deconstruction of the 'revolution' and 'reform' binary that structured much left discourse, and still lingers today. He was critical of the self-styled Leninist or 'revolutionary' strategy focused on 'politics', as conventionally defined – capturing 'state power', 'changing the hegemony by authoritarian redirection and manipulation' – as it involved repression and radically underestimated 'the real process of the human change that has to occur'.[28] He added that such a strategy would never, in any case, work in the long term even if the state were captured as in advanced capitalist societies, with their highly developed strata of culture and civil society, the essential dominance of a particular class was maintained 'not only by property and power' but 'lived culture: that saturation

of habit, of experience, of outlook'.[29] It followed that the 'system of meanings and values which a capitalist society has generated has to be defeated in general and in detail by most sustained kinds of intellectual and educational work', including work on confronting 'layers' of an 'alien formation in ourselves', as he had long maintained.[30] But though necessary and qualitatively distinct from more conventionally conceived political operations, this intellectual and educational work previously designated as that of the 'long revolution' was no longer regarded as itself sufficient, according to Williams's now harder-edged account. Revolution, he now unambiguously argued, was only achieved when 'the central political organs of capitalist society lose their power of predominant social reproduction': more bluntly, 'the condition for the success of the long revolution in any real terms is a short revolution'.[31] In this reckoning, what Gramsci called wars of position – struggle across civil society – and wars of manoeuvre – frontal assault on the state – did not designate alternative approaches but unavoidable stages in a long, indissoluble process of socialist transformation.

As he conceded, huge, crucial questions remained unanswered, even amidst the optimism released by the upsurging industrial militancy of the early to mid 1970s (Williams's political confidence peaked in or around 1975 and is caught in his 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You?' essay of that year). The central question now became the precise nature of the socialist party or organisation capable of coordinating industrial struggle at the point of production – struggle still seen by Williams that year to be 'the most creative activity in our society' – with politics more broadly conceived, central to which was the counter-hegemonic work regarded by Williams as necessary but not sufficient for revolution.[32] Even more difficult questions proliferated as the grounds for optimism receded and the central tenets of that earlier analysis – especially that the economic struggle of the industrial working class was the most 'creative activity in our society' – could no longer be assumed in the face of the exemplary class struggle being executed by a radical fraction of the ruling class committed to the reconstitution of post-war capitalism on neoliberal lines, what Williams called 'Plan X'.[33] By the time he came to write about commitment directly in the late 1970s, the emphasis was necessarily defensive – the countering of the deeply saturated market common sense that formed the lodestar of the New Right – rather than optimistically oriented towards the processes of socialist strategy and advance that had energised his writing a few years earlier. Even before but especially after the miners' strike of 1984–85, the task to which Williams applied himself was not advance but the revitalisation of a socialist movement whose so-called political and industrial 'wings' – the Labour Party, the trade union movement – were now flapping ineffectually if at all, the term 'wings', as he grimly remarked, implying a body

that was increasingly difficult to locate.[34] In his last book, published in 1983, Williams predicted 'either the final incorporation of the labour movement into a capitalist bargaining mechanism' (with socialism reduced to 'a theory or sect') or 'the wide remaking of a social movement which begins from primary human needs'.[35] Even he underestimated neoliberalism and its ideologues, committed to the destruction rather than incorporation of organised labour. He also duly underplayed the difficulties of reinvigorating a movement towards structural critique and socialism from social movements – he mentions feminism, environmentalism, the peace movement and the struggle for human rights – with good grounds to mistrust the Left, new and old, associated with a critique of capitalism insufficiently attentive to the role of gender in the reproduction of social formations and a correspondingly narrow conception of industrial class struggle.[36] It was a mistrust entrenched in a climate not only of industrial and political defeat but of ascendant postmodern thought, versions of which became hegemonic in higher education and beyond.[37]

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Key Words 16 appears at a moment when Plan X neoliberalism – what David Harvey calls a 'class project […] designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power' – is proving incapable of renewing or re-legitimating itself in the wake of the financial crisis of 2007–08.[38] Echoing Marx and Engels's description of the class struggle (sometimes open, sometimes hidden), Williams distinguished between class conflict, the 'absolute and insuperable conflict of interests' inherent in capitalist society, and class struggle, the 'conscious and sustained attempts to alter the social relations which are the basis of class conflict'.[39] The tempo of class struggle is now rising once more, and Williams's core commitment and the various writings that elucidated it over the years assume a new resonance. In particular, 1970s debates about how to imagine a socialist future beyond a model of capitalism that fails to secure consensus feel much closer than they did a decade ago. Williams's writings of that period resonate anew as significant sources for the process of re-imagining a counter-hegemonic socialist politics of the kind described in recent works, notably Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams's I*nventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (2015) and Paul Mason's *Postcapitalism: A Guide to our Futur*e (2015). Closer to home, meanwhile, Williams's sober assessments of the Labour Party and its diverse currents and traditions reward rereading, especially 'Ideas and the Labour Movement' (1981), which linked the so-called halting of the labour movement's 'forward march' in the 1970s with the Left's failure since 1945 to think with appropriate hegemonic range and ambition and to build and support educational and cultural institutions

and networks committed to research, teaching and learning 'based on its values and aspirations'.[40] It is a point that might be heeded by the Labour Party today, whose intellectual and cultural momentum comes mainly from without, and whose sepia-tinted discourse on education remains caught in nostalgia for the compromise formation of social democracy and the spirit of 1945. In the otherwise often laudable 2017 manifesto, *For the Many Not the Few*, for instance, educational policy is framed as 'a national educational service', and the dominant terms stress fitness for employment over critical, cultural and creative empowerment.[41] The two pages devoted to culture, meanwhile, demonstrate no sense of what culture is, and see no contradiction between the invocation of cultural democracy – 'culture for all' – with a market logic in which culture is synonymous with 'creative industries' and the centrepiece of 'industrial strategy'; the proposed £1 billion 'Cultural Capital Fund' is to be modelled, we are reassured, on 'enterprise zones'.[42] The even shorter passage on the media highlights a striking disjunction between the creative use of new forms by activists and an official discourse incapable of formulating radical proposals. Nothing is advocated beyond vague endorsement of the principle of public service broadcasting, unspecified support for the BBC and Channel 4 and an anachronistic attachment to local newspapers. The fixation of the Labour Party with the undeniably 'hostile' media coverage of its leadership consistently displaces real analysis of the relationship between a fragmented media discourse unable to connect events and structures and an incremental process of media marketisation and monopolisation in which the Labour Party has long been deeply implicated.

Williams's 'An Alternative Politics' (1981) meanwhile, written thirty-six years ago, addresses a question on many minds now: 'If a Labour government were to be elected', Williams was asked, 'what would you want the government to do?'[43] That many of his modest proposals seem radical is another measure of New Labour's incorporation. But the more pertinent argument, which the current shadow front bench might heed, cautions a Labour administration imagined to be close to power on two counts: against optimistic, ungrounded projection of economic rejuvenation amidst the systemic crisis of global capitalism; and against underestimation of the ferocity of the resistance to be mounted by a class used only to winning when confronted with anything that resembled structural change. 'What should frighten all of us', wrote Williams chillingly, 'is the prospect of a Labour government, in part elected on a negative vote, trying in a centralised and bureaucratic way to effect radical shifts of power'.[44] Then as now 'alternative strategy' presupposed an 'alternative politics'.[45]

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With questions of 'commitment' to the fore, this issue of *Keywords* mirrors the breadth of Williams's own engagement with the topic. Tony Crowley makes good the absence of an entry on 'commitment' in Williams's *Key Words*, tracking the word's genealogy and gauging its contemporary meanings. Glyn Salton-Cox's essay frames the question of commitment in the terms with which this Introduction began, revisiting a formative scene in discussions on the writer and commitment, Engels's famous 1888 letter to Margaret Harkness, rightly identified by Salton-Cox as 'talismanic both for theories of socialist realism and for George Lukács's insistence on realist typicality over naturalist observation or modernist fragmentation'. Salton-Cox's particular focus is Harkness's oeuvre in the framework of Engels's strictures, and especially the place of the so-called 'lumpenproletariat' in broader socialist discourse. Re-reading Harkness's fiction, he argues, productively 'complicates our understanding of the vexed question of the lumpenproletariat and its relation to literary history'. More particularly he argues that Harkness's knowing deployment of a Zolaesque 'naturalist mode' – for Engels an unsuitable model – 'is a direct response to an ongoing project of representing unorthodox forms of labour within the informal economy'. He concludes by presenting Harkness as a writer who not only provokes us to rethink the category of the 'lumpenproletariat' and the 'retrenchments it calls forth' but strikingly 'anticipates the well-known gendered turn of post-Fordist labour, when the decline in manufacturing jobs and the growth of the service sector led to an ongoing crisis in wage-earning masculinity'. The broader questions he raises about the narrative forms of the committed socialist novel in general, and especially its gender dynamics, are further explored in Phil O'Brien's short essay on Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's recently republished *Helen of Four Gates* (1917), the first of two specially commissioned pieces dealing with ideas of commitment in our Recoveries section.

Two closely-linked contributions address the question of commitment in terms of political trajectories in and through the Communist Party of Great Britain, an organisation so important, in mainly negative ways, to Williams's own trajectory. Don Watson uses Williams's ideas about the complicated and often jarring relationship between life experience and the literary forms available to writers in the second essay in the Recoveries section. Watson's essay revisits six Cold War 'apostasy' autobiographies published between 1948 and 1953 in which former Communists publicly renounced commitments and, in some instances, justified new ones. He persuasively presents these largely forgotten books, some of which enjoyed very wide readership on their original publication, as worth revisiting for the insights they offer into Communist history and the psychology of political commitment.

Madeleine Davis's 'Edward Thompson, MI5 and the *Reasoner* Controversy: Negotiating "Communist Principle" in the Crisis of 1956' develops this emphasis on the multivalency of Communist commitment. Through close analysis of a wide range of archival material, including the recently declassified files kept by the British secret services on Williams's New Left associate Edward Thompson, Davis reinterprets the 1956 crisis and the making of the New Left. Resisting readings that straightforwardly oppose proto-New Left 'moral conscience' to Stalinist 'monolithic bureaucracy', she argues that the *annus mirabilis* of 1956 in fact 'reveals an extremely complex picture of the tensions involved in communist commitment'. Her essay develops what she sees as a productive 'biographical turn' in the study of the communist movement newly attuned to the complexity of 'experience and commitment' and 'the diversity of biographical and other contexts in party history'.

The issue closes with Nick Stevenson's conspectus, 'Raymond Williams and the Possibilities of a "Committed" Marxism', bringing us back to Williams, and echoing and developing elements of this Introduction, especially around Williams' later writing on reform and revolution, state and civil society, the instrumentalisation of culture and the limits of social democracy. Stevenson also extends the assessment, arguing for the relevance of Williams' work today in and across multiple political and intellectual contexts, some welcome, some not, including resurgent nationalisms, ecologically oriented socialism and the alter-globalisation movement. 'The hope remains', Stevenson concludes, 'that a more democratic and ecological version of Marxism', informed by William's thought, will provide a resource for progressive political advance in the years ahead. Precisely these questions will be addressed in the 2019 issue of *Keywords*, which tackles the ways in which the ongoing crisis of global capitalism since 2008 has been experienced, analysed and narrated.

Our 2018 issue marks some changes in the composition of the journal's editorial board. Cathy Clay, who has made an outstanding contribution to the journal over the past ten years, has decided to move on to other ventures. We thank her warmly for her firm commitment and tireless work for the journal. We welcome new members Dr Deborah Mutch (De Montfort University), Dr David Wilkinson (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Dr Nicola Wilson (Reading University). These new colleagues bring to the journal welcome expertise in topics including socialist fiction and socialist periodicals (Mutch), popular music and subcultural studies (Wilkinson), and book and publishing studies and working-class fiction (Wilson). This year also marks changes in the journal's online availability. From now on all back issues will be available free of charge on the Raymond Williams Society website three years after print publication: https://raymondwilliams.co.uk/view-issues/.

Notes

1   Williams, 'Commitment', in *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 256.

2   The most developed of which – and his last word on the matter – was his 1980 Marx Memorial Lecture, published as 'The Writer: Commitment and Alignment' in *Marxism Today*. Williams, 'The Writer: Alignment and Commitment', *Marxism Today* (June 1980): 22–5; reprinted in Robin Gale, ed., *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 77–88. References to this are cited parenthetically in the text. The second was a short essay entitled 'Commitment' later collected in the posthumous *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 256–60. The third is the chapter on 'Alignment and Commitment' in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 199–206.

3   'Commitment', 257; Williams was seldom more savage than against Cyril Connolly's American-funded modernist showcase, *Horizon*. Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: New Left Books,, 1979), 72. His sharpest remarks on the construction of modernism – 'pure ideology' – come in Williams, *Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989), 34.

4   'Commitment', 258.

5   'The Practice of Possibility', Williams in interview with Terry Eagleton (1987), in Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 321.

6   Williams, *Resources*, 321.

7   Williams, *Resources*, 322.

8   Williams, *Resources*, 321; Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), 167.

9   The absence of questions of gender in much Marxist and New Left discourse in the interwar and postwar periods would have consequences in the 1970s, as registered later in the Introduction. Williams argued that these questions were more substantially addressed in his fiction. 'That's no real excuse', he admitted in 1987. 'I ought to have been doing this in my other work too.' 'The Practice of Possibility', *Resources*, 319.

10 Williams, 'My Cambridge', in *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 6.

11 Williams, 'Notes on Marxism in Britain Since 1945', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), 240.

12 Dai Smith, *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2008), 116.

13 Smith, *Raymond Williams*, 116.

14 Edited by a Commission of the CC of the CPSU, *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union/Bolsheviks: Short Course* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939). Williams recalls the book's status in late 1930s Cambridge in *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1979), 41, 48.

15 Williams began working on the book in 1948, was teaching a WEA course with the same title by 1951, published its key contentions as 'The Idea of Culture' in 1952 and delivered the completed manuscript in March 1956. Francis Mulhern, 'Culture and Society, Then and Now', *New Left Review 55* (January–February 2009): 31–45.

16 *Politics and Letters*, 98; Francis Mulhern, *Culture-Metaculture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 68.

17 The book was substantially provoked by the failure of the short-lived journal *Politics and Letters* (1947–48) to engage William's now former Communist comrades in dialogue around cultural questions. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 65–82; Ben Harker, 'Politics and Letters: The "Soviet Literary Controversy" in Britain', *Literature and History* 24.1 (Spring 2015): 41–57.

18 The twelfth chapter in fact scored more hits on the CP than he could possibly have known, focusing on areas of growing controversy deep within the party, especially between party leaders and cultural intellectuals with whom Williams would soon forge connections in the milieu of the so-called 'first' New Left (E.P. Thompson, Victor Kiernan, John Saville and Raphael Samuel, among others). E.P. Thompson, 'Caudwell', *Socialist Register* (1977):

228–76; Ben Harker, 'Jack Lindsay's alienation', *History Workshop* 82, no.1 (Autumn 2016): 83–107.

19 The more searching criticism came from Williams's New Left associates, especially Kiernan and Thompson, and later from his former doctoral student Terry Eagleton, and the editorial collective of *New Left Review*. Victor Kiernan, '*Culture and Society', New Reasoner* 9 (Summer 1959): 74–83; E.P. Thompson, 'The Long Revolution', *New Left Review 9* (May–June 1961): 24–33 and 'The Long Revolution II', *New Left Review* 10 (July–August 1961): 34–39; Terry Eagleton, 'Criticism and Politics: The Work of Raymond Williams', *New Left Review* 95 (January–February 1976) and *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1976), 21–42; Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1979), 97–175. The Communist Party and its remaining intellectuals would struggle to meet Williams's theoretical challenges until well into the 1970s, Arnold Kettle being usually assigned the task. Arnold Kettle, 'How New is the "New Left"?, *Marxism Today* (October 1960): 302–9; Kettle, 'On the "New Left"', *Marxism Today* (June 1961): 191–3; Kettle, 'Culture and Revolution: A Consideration of the Ideas of Raymond Williams', *Marxism Today* (October 1961): 301–7.

20 First published in *New Left Review* 82 (November–December 1973) and reprinted in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), 31–50.

21 What might have happened had the early New Left formed a political party remains one of the great counterfactuals of the twentieth-century British Left. This period discussed in *Politics and Letters*, 362–3.

22 These categories underpin *The Long Revolution* (1961) and are revisited in *Politics and Letters*, 136.

23 Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (1992; London: Hogarth, 1966), 76.

24 See note 23.

25 *Politics and Letters*, 373, 415.

26 *Politics and Letters*, 414.

27 *Politics and Letters*, 415.

28 Williams, 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You?' (1975), in *Resources of Hope*, 75.

29 Williams, 'You're a Marxist Aren't You?', 74.

30 Williams, 'You're a Marxist Aren't You?', 76, 75.

31 *Politics and Letters*, 420–21.

32 Williams, 'You're a Marxist Aren't You?', 75.

33 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 244–71.

34 Williams, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?' (1981), in *Resources of Hope*, 248.

35 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 173.

36 Arguments made compellingly in Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s* (London: Virago, 1984).

37 An authoritative mapping and critique of these trends was offered by Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'The Uses and Abuses of "Civil Society"', *Socialist Register* (1990): 60–84.

38 David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile, 2010), 10.

39 *Politics and Letters*, 412–3.

40 Williams, *Resources*, 145, 60.

41 *For the Many Not the Few: The Labour Party Manifesto* 2017, 33–43.

42 *For the Many Not the Few : The Labour Party Manifesto* 2017, 97.

43 Williams, 'An Alternative Politics' (1981), in *Resources of Hope*, 151.

44 Williams, 'An Alternative Politics', in *Resources of Hope*, 160.

45 Any 'alternative strategy', he continued, would actually 'require a degree of popular understanding and support which is of a quite different order from an inherited and in part negative electoral majority'. Williams, 'An Alternative Politics', 153.

Obituary: Alan Sinfield

David Alderson

Alan Sinfield was a pioneering figure in the fields of English Literature, Cultural Studies and Queer Studies, and a passionate advocate of the cultural materialist tradition he came to embrace in the 1980s. The sheer range of the work he has left to us is prodigious: ranging chronologically from the Early Modern period to the contemporary, it engages with cultural production in its most expansive sense, and if he took a specific interest in Shakespeare it was very much an iconoclastic one. Indeed, Alan made a point of disavowing conventional modes of cultural valuation, and frequently made it his business to interrogate the institutions, norms and ideological presuppositions of critical analysis itself. In the process, he consciously sought to engage audiences beyond the academy through work that was nonetheless characterised by impeccable scholarship.

Alan was born in 1941, and his work was shaped by his experience of postwar Britain: by the aspirations of welfare capitalism towards inclusion, and more so by its failures; by the New Left and countercultural movements in which he participated; and by the Thatcherite attacks on both. His mother, Lucy, faced distressing challenges in bringing up her children on an inadequate combination of war pension, family allowance and casual work, having contracted early-onset Parkinson's disease after the death in action of his pilot father, Ernie, in 1944. 'Lucy's largely thwarted life was and remains for me the perfect figure for the impoverishment and indignity which has continued to afflict disadvantaged people', he once wrote.[1] Alan himself was nonetheless the beneficiary of the improved educational opportunities that had been made possible for children of his generation, and this, in turn, led to his involvement in political movements that were substantially centred on the campus. An increasingly cosmopolitan life made it possible for him to be openly gay. The reversals of the 1980s therefore opened up for him a deeply ambivalent perspective onto the past, and it is not difficult to see how this history should have prompted a career focused on power and resistance, their complexity and contradiction, as well as their various, often surprising, transmutations. Towards the end of his life, he was enthused by Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader of the Labour Party.

Alan was appointed a lecturer in literature at the University of Sussex in 1965, after graduating from UCL (the same institution awarded him a Master's in 1967 and a DLitt in 1987). Sussex was the ideal location for him, given its early commitment to interdisciplinarity. It is no exaggeration to suggest that his presence there at the heart of a diversely radical community of Humanities scholars from the 1980s on, helped to make the it one of the most remarkable

centres of engaged intellectual activity anywhere, attracting large numbers of postgraduate students from around the world. With Jonathan Dollimore, he established the Master's programme in Sexual Dissidence and Social Change, the first of its kind in Britain, in 1991. Alan also made Brighton itself, a city he loved for its casual bohemianism, his base for life. The attic of his four-storey house had an impressive view of the coast, and it was here that he spent his final years, cared for above all by his partner, Vincent Quinn, once Parkinson's disease had made its network of staircases too challenging.

Alan's professional academic career, however, was not initially that of an overt dissident. His first book, *The Language of Tennyson's* In Memoriam (1971) remains an authoritative and celebrated account, influenced predominantly by structural linguistics and new criticism. The academic training that went into it, however, was formative in ways that outlasted his early critical practices: it demonstrates a capacity for informed, nuanced close reading that is a consistent feature of his work. And it is no doubt this that in part explains the sometimes open, sometimes grudging respect he has always won from those whose traditionalism he took such pleasure in challenging – often mischievously, but always with serious intent. (Interestingly, though, the combative spirit of *Political Shakespeare* (1985), which Alan edited with Jonathan Dollimore, elicited a somewhat equivocal endorsement from Raymond Williams in his 'Afterword'.)

Alan returned to Tennyson in a book published in 1986 that frankly acknowledged the distance he had travelled since the earlier one. It opens with an account of the social revaluation of poetry under Victorian bourgeois hegemony that has been widely influential: poetry was incorporated for its conformity to dominant ideals, marginalised through the presumption that it should deal only with primarily private, subjective matters, or simply relegated, dismissed. Other chapters engage critically with poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory. But the book is also one of Alan's first published engagements with representations of what he was to label 'same-sex passion' in order to avoid a misleadingly anachronistic and essentialist terminology of homosexuality: Tennyson's attempt to express his grief for Hallam in *In Memoriam* entailed complex gendered identifications prompted by the intensity of his love, identifications Tennyson himself came to regard as problematic in the context of later nineteenth-century moral disquiet about the potential for specifically sexual relations between men. This was the first direct, detailed and theoretically informed treatment of this topic.

It is worth pointing out, however, that, if this second book was less straightforwardly appreciative of Tennyson, it did not represent some kind of final settling of accounts. As Alan tirelessly argued, meaning and value are

never fixed and may always be refashioned, sometimes by being appropriated. One of the readings at his funeral was from *In Memoriam* (section VII).

It was really, though, a book from the early 1980s, *Literature in Protestant England, 1560–1660*, that decisively established what were to become key features of Alan's later critical practice and outlook, a number of which it is worth remarking on. First, it evinces an awareness that literature and culture 'as we involve ourselves in it, constitutes an invitation to agree that the world is, importantly, thus'.[2] Disagreement, then, was not only a possibility, but often an urgent necessity. Second, there was the emphasis on socially determined contradiction as a constitutive feature of literary texts: 'it's not the critic's job to help literature cohere', he used to say. This was crucial because the more general ideological incoherence that literary texts in many ways rendered more evident held the potential to facilitate dissident perspectives (he would later theorise this in more detail in *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (1992); Macherey was an important influence here). Third, there was the preoccupation with humanism; here, with a Christian humanism that had been misleadingly projected onto the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but elsewhere with humanism more generally as it appealed to universals that he believed were in practice likely to be prescriptive, and thereby limiting and oppressive.

Alan's antihumanism converged with Foucaultian emphases elsewhere widely endorsed in those academic fields to which he contributed – Early Modern and Queer Studies – though he repeatedly corrected those who saw cultural materialism as a minor, dissenting (and British) strain within new historicism. Foucault was also an important influence on his theorisation of subcultures in the final chapter of his magisterial work, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (1989). Here he explicitly critiqued his own earlier views as these had been shaped by what he called 'Left culturalism', the sense ultimately indebted to welfare capitalism that the established culture was a good to which all should have access, a bit like health. '"Man" is a powerful concept, but I cannot regret its loss to the left', he wrote. 'A divided society should have a divided culture: an (apparently) unified culture can only reinforce power relations.'[3] Recognition of this, he felt, must be a crucial aspect of Left renewal in the wake of Thatcherite defeats, not least because the subcultures that made those divisions apparent were already in place (and it is important to note that he regarded the New Left itself as one).

Even so, subcultures needed to be theorised, and in developing a specifically cultural materialist account of them, he avoided any tendencies to romanticise them as the repositories of political authenticity: they were not for him synonymous with the counterculture, for instance, as is the case in much queer theory. Instead they were produced within and across a variety of institutions

that determined both the potential and limits of whatever social, cultural or political life took place within them. It was possible to organise subcultural activity in theatres, universities, bars and clubs, as well as to produce film and television, but these would necessarily be shaped to some degree by their institutionalisation: there could be no *purely* subcultural politics or agenda.

If it was wrong to presume that such movements or groups would necessarily be radical, then it was also important to question the very desirability of an ill-defined radicalism. Alan was consistently distrustful of avant-gardism – aesthetic, queer or Marxist – for its elitism. 'How transgressive do we want to be?', he asked in *Gay and After* (1998), and in an exemplary critique of Leo Bersani's take on Jean Genet as advocating a potentially revolutionary 'anti-relationality' through the alleged impersonality of homosex, he demonstrated instead that Genet's complex identifications and desires were fashioned by a highly specific social experience. In a later work, *On Sexuality and Power* (2004), he went on to argue that power in various respects – and specifically gender, age, class and race – governed desire because sexual relations were not somehow antithetical to socialisation, as is too often supposed. This was not something to be celebrated, but rather to be both self-conscious of and sensitive to as we advocate the kinds of social change that would ultimately transform desire.

If some have understood Alan's suspicion of universals and his commitment to subcultural work as going with the grain of postmodern trends, however, they have not read his work attentively enough. The faith that some came to place in transgression and the mobility of identities in the 1980s was misguided: 'any notion that Postmodernism signals a general dispersal and weakening of power in the social system is extraordinary in the decade of Reagan and Thatcher', he wrote in *Postwar Britain*.[4] In fact, he understood himself to be an organic intellectual of what he called the les/bi/gay movement, a role that enabled him to raise socialist concerns within it, as well as to commend the legitimacy and insightfulness of its thinking and strategies to other socialists. For a time he contributed reviews of academic work to *Gay Times*.

Hence the principled, but democratic, spirit that suffuses all of Alan's writing. Indeed, what I have described as its scholarship is better understood not as a professional bid for authority, but a genuine desire to engage with others. The critic does not speak from a position above or beyond the social world, but is actively engaged in the production of meanings and values within particular constituencies or communities. There is nothing showy about Alan's style: he did not write to impress, but rather to communicate – rationally and emotionally – and the pleasure of reading his work resides in part in the sense of being addressed by a purposeful voice: his last book, again on Shakespeare, was subtitled 'unfinished business in cultural materialism'.

The business remains unfinished in fact and in principle, as Alan would be the first to acknowledge, because 'the dominant may tolerate, repress, or incorporate subordinate formations, but that will be a continuous, urgent, and often strenuous project', he reminds us in that last book.[5] If his work self-consciously testifies to the impossibility of having anything like the final word, it has nonetheless illuminated cultural history to an extent that few have rivalled from whatever perspective. In one sense, his cultural materialism was exceptionally orthodox – committed to Williams's own convictions that hegemony was a dynamic process, and that institutions were formative of cultural production – but he also succeeded in making that tradition more heterogeneous, both in the theoretical resources it might draw on and in its sensitivity to forms of power. Above all – and here it seems appropriate to invoke the Gramscian word he favoured – there is an organic quality to his writing that appears spontaneously to dissolve the commonplace distinctions between personal, professional, social and political. It quite simply is the record of a committed intellectual life.

Notes

1   Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, 3rd edn (London: Continuum, 2004). xi–xv.
2   Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England, 1560–1660* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 5.
3   Sinfield, *Postwar Britain*, 341.
4   Sinfield, *Postwar Britain*, 334.
5   Alan Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 7.

Uncivil Society: Margaret Harkness, Engels and the Lumpenproletariat

Glyn Salton-Cox

Abstract

Taking Engels's famous 1888 letter to Margaret Harkness as its starting point, this article explores the vicissitudes of the concept of the lumpenproletariat for late-nineteenth-century social and literary history. I argue that Harkness's overlooked work complicates both received accounts of the London 'residuum' and the possibilities of typicality for Marxist literary theory. Reading her novels of the late 1880s in conjunction with Marx and Engels's polemics against the lumpenproletariat, I argue that Harkness's socialist-feminist authorship simultaneously registers and amends Engels's famous concept through her depiction of female labour and male indolence in the precarious informal economy of London's East End in the 1880s. Most crucially, Engels's recommendation of Balzac's 'men of the future' is reworked in her corpus as the necessary adequation of a feminised labour force to the demands of a precarious economy reliant on just-in-time production. Harkness's novels open up a more elastic conception of the proleptic possibilities of the typical character, for such exigencies of a mobile labour force are themselves signature oppressions of post-Fordist economies.

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Engels's 1888 letter to Margaret Harkness urging the realistic method of Balzac is one of the most widely anthologised documents of Marxist literary theory. Resurfacing in the 1930s, the letter became talismanic both for theories of socialist realism and for Georg Lukács's insistence on realist typicality over naturalist observation or modernist fragmentation. Initially applauded by orthodox Communists but today more often pilloried for its aesthetic conservatism, this short text is always lurking more or less consciously in the Marxist critical tradition. The caveat that follows Engels's much-cited prescription of Balzacian realism is, however, less often discussed. Having chastised Harkness for her despairing portrayal of a hapless working-class woman in *A City Girl* (1887), Engels qualifies this criticism: 'I must own in your defence, that nowhere in the civilized world are the working people less actively resistant, more passively submitting to fate, more *hébétés* [dazed, bewildered, depressed] than in the East End of London.'[1] Here Engels firmly

excludes the London poor from the committed proletariat – no mere prejudice but a constitutive exclusion. For as Gareth Stedman-Jones has documented, there was only a tiny factory proletariat in London. The development of heavy industry took place in the north and midlands, while the wealthy capital remained in a chronically underdeveloped state. London's workers were sharply bifurcated between artisans and casualised labourers, and were therefore necessarily unassimilable to conceptions of revolutionary action predicated on proletarian consciousness.[2]

And yet, as several of Harkness's novels of the period document, the so-called 'residuum' became particularly salient during the mid-to-late 1880s, as a series of political events brought the London casual labourer to the fore in socialist politics. These years saw a dramatic swing in perceptions of the 'casual'. As depicted in Harkness's 1905 novel *George Eastmont, Wanderer*, the rioting of unemployed labourers in February 1886 was an infamous moment in the failure of the Social Democratic Federation's attempts to organise London's workers. Casualised workers were blamed for the collapse of socialist unity, as their lack of self-control allegedly dragged down the higher class consciousness of the artisans and proletarians. In a characteristic passage, Engels described the unemployed rioters as representing 'the borderline between working class and lumpenproletariat', with 'a sufficient admixture of roughs and 'Arrays to leaven the whole into a mass ready for any "lark" up to a wild riot'.[3] With the success of the 1889 Dockers' Strike, however, Engels and others very quickly shifted positions. Now the lowest strata of the working class had shown their ability for organised protest, Engels was exhilarated, and in a famous letter to the *Labour Elector*, he claimed that 'if the dockers get organized, all other sections will follow'.[4] The dockers were now cast in an almost vanguardist role, but in Engels's conditional clause the old condemnation still lingers, especially when read alongside a contemporaneous letter to Bernstein in which he exclaims 'if *this* stratum can be organized, that is a fact of great import!'[5] There's a cruel irony at work here, for the vacillations of the casually employed are matched by Engels's equally abrupt about turn – another indication that the casual labourer is seen as mere flotsam and jetsam in more ways than one. How, then, to organise the London poor?

Margaret Harkness's career provides a particularly salient vantage point from which to re-examine this problematic.[6] More than a mere footnote to Engels's famous pronouncements, Harkness was an important figure in British socialist politics of the 1880s. Moving to London in 1877 to work as a nurse, she soon switched from nursing to journalism. She quickly established herself as a socialist activist and novelist and became acquainted with a wide cast of late-nineteenth-century socialists including Eleanor Marx, Olive Schreiner and Henry Hyde Champion, introducing her cousin Beatrice Potter (later Webb)

to many of these figures for the first time. Working closely with Champion, Harkness provided support for Keir Hardie's campaign for election in 1888, and for the London Dock Strike in 1889. She became involved with the SDF, but parted ways shortly afterwards, complaining of sectarian in-fighting and impractical theorising; this perhaps signalled, like Champion's departure, a distaste for the revolutionary position briefly held by the SDF at the time. In addition to a body of journalism chronicling casualised labour, she very quickly produced four slum novels under the pen name John Law: *A City Girl* (1887), *Out of Work* (1888) and *In Darkest London* (1889), all set in London's East End, and *A Manchester Shirtmaker* (1890). Moving away from socialism and beginning to display a distinct strain of anti-Semitism, in the early 1890s she turned her attention exclusively to charity work, writing an article in praise of the Salvation Army's General Booth, and even voicing some support for social imperialist plans of forced resettlement in her later novel, *George Eastmont, Wanderer.* [7]

Veering between sympathetic identification, reformist zeal and a strained sense of possible revolutionary potential, Harkness's novels closely chart attempts to represent the London poor, in particular the group she called the 'class below the unskilled labourers: I mean the scum of our population that haunts the slums of our great cities'.[8] This statement encapsulates Harkness's ambivalence towards the surplus population – what does it mean to feel sympathy for 'scum'? The broader importance of this term becomes yet more apparent when we consider the 1888 Moore-Engels translation of *The Communist Manifesto*, which renders the infamous category of the lumpenproletariat as 'the dangerous classes, social scum'; and it seems no coincidence that Harkness's short novel of the following year, *In Darkest London* was to use 'scum' fourteen times. This is not to say that Harkness suddenly discovered a disgust for the disorganised lumpen masses upon reading Marx and Engels, but rather that her works highlight some surprising articulations of the surplus population within socialist theory and praxis.

This essay will argue that Harkness's authorship not only registered the shifts in socialist perceptions of the London residuum, but also complicates our understanding of the vexed question of the lumpenproletariat and its relation to literary history. Engels rarely used the term in his writings in English, nor does the 1888 Moore-Engels translation of the *Collected Works*, and consequently scholarship on the lumpenproletariat hardly mentions Britain. Yet the ragged spectre stalking London can surely be named lumpen. Violently criminal, festering and scabby, East End 'roughs' and their unpredictable mass muscle bear more than a passing resemblance to the most famous depictions of the lumpenproletariat: 'that passive dungheap of the lowest levels of the old society, is flung into action here and there by the proletarian revolution, through by its

whole situation in life it will be readier to sell itself to reactionary intrigues' – whether 'scum', 'dangerous class' or 'lumpenproletariat' as the various versions of the term have it, here is a definite yet heterogeneous menace to the proletarian revolution.[9] Unsurprisingly, Engels and others saw this 'passive mass' as worthless human material for the committed realist novelist, poor copy compared to the awakening proletariat or, for a previous generation, the rising bourgeoisie. Simultaneously echoing and amending the social typology of the lumpenproletariat in a naturalist literary mode, Harkness's persistent attention to the 'scum' of London thus raises the question of the elasticity of Engels's concept of realism, particularly the ability of differing narrative techniques to predict future political developments through the presentation of typical characters.

In what follows I first briefly outline Marx and Engels's concept of the lumpenproletariat, paying particular attention to pressure the concept puts on the troubled relationship between revolutionary agency and economic determinism, and to the ramifications of this pressure for Marxist theories of literary realism. Next, this essay turns to Harkness's first two London novels, focusing on their presentation of the relationship between gender and agency. For Harkness's early novels, the difficulty of separating the scum from the worker is expressed through the question of female labour within the context of mass unemployment, as she counterposes the 'strong minded proletarian spinster' to the worthless male 'loafer'. This important socialist-feminist intervention in the cultural history of the lumpenproletariat must however be qualified by examining the ways in which her split between male indolence and female industry upholds a moralistic insistence on the value of work. I next explore this problematic through a reading of *In Darkest London*, arguing that, under the pressure of the language of the parasite, Harkness is unable to maintain any viable sense of revolutionary or reformist commitment, and her socialism dissolves into racist moralising. In conclusion I then briefly consider how Harkness's depiction of female industry might illuminate aspects of the contemporary neoliberal casualisation and feminisation of labour; in turn, I contend that Harkness's naturalism operates much closer in line with the predictive power of the realist novel celebrated by Engels than might it have seemed at the time.

Locating the Lumpenproletariat

Marx and Engels first coin the term in 1845 to describe the Roman proles at the time of the fall of the Empire: 'Located between the free men and the slaves, the plebeians never raised themselves above the level of a *Lumpenproletariat*, a sub-proletariat. In general, Rome never exceeded the limits of the city.'[10] In

this observation from *The German Ideology*, the plebeian is characterised by an intermediate degree of agency – neither slaves nor entirely free, they are also tightly constrained within the boundaries of the city, a distinctly urban mass. Marx and Engels go on to assert that the fall of Rome was due in large part to its underdeveloped relations of production; the lumpen mob is a telling symptom of this structural failure. Elsewhere in *The German Ideology* they also make clear that the lumpenproletariat has existed in various forms 'in every epoch' and on 'a *mass scale* since the decline of the middle ages', a point further underlined by Engels in *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850).[11]

Following the failure of the 1848 revolutions, Marx and Engels mount increasingly vitriolic attacks on the lumpenproletariat, in particular the *lazzaroni* who sided with the monarchy against the bourgeoisie in Naples, and the Paris lumpenproletariat who, they claim, supported the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.[12] Marx's most famous depiction of the lumpenproletariat then appears in his 1852 polemic *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

> Alongside decayed roués with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, *maquereaus*, pimps, brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars – in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French call *la bohème*.[13]

In this curiously lyrical passage Marx underlines the incommensurability of the differing elements of the lumpenproletariat – not only, like the peasantry failing to constitute a class for themselves (as in his depiction of small-holding peasants as a 'sack of potatoes'), but not even a class in themselves. Racially diverse, by occupation widely divergent, and drawn from all levels of a decaying society, the lumpenproletariat is a mixed bag of the worst possible elements, rather than the 'simple addition of the homologous magnitudes' of the peasantry.[14] Marx's grouping of such disparate elements together within the list form also has a paradoxically homogenising force characteristic of bourgeois depictions of the 'radically "other"', as Dominick LaCapra has observed.[15]

Marx and Engels go on to deploy the term in different contexts and in differing registers, sometimes, as Peter Stallybrass notes, as a racial category to denote 'a nomadic tribe, innately depraved', at others to describe the parasitical finance aristocracy, and even as a term of abuse directed towards the staff of the bourgeois newspaper *Kölnische Zeitung* and other journalists.[16] Despite these variants, the lumpenproletariat largely denotes a criminal 'dangerous

class', choosing to live outside the relations of production, and either pathetically apolitical or bribed to carry out counterrevolutionary violence. The lumpenproletariat is a crucial term for Marx and Engels as they seek to overturn bourgeois conceptions of the proletariat as a criminal, undifferentiated mass; a necessary evil and abject remainder of the development of their theory of class struggle.[17]

The lumpenproletariat is thus positioned awkwardly aslant the dialectics of voluntarism and economic determinism. Never entirely resolved by Marx and Engels, nor by Georg Lukács's theory of the proletariat as the subject-object of history, these dialectics are famously vexed for proletarian politics, forming the most important divergence between the economism of the Second International and the Bolshevik vanguard. The question is even more fraught for the lumpenproletariat, which functions as an acute point of pressure in Marxist theorisations of agency. While Marx castigated the lumpenproletariat for a complete inability to act as a collective subject, he also stressed that the lumpen is distinguished from the rest of the surplus population in that an element of choice is involved in their location outside of the relations of production – a moralistic position that to a certain degree preserves the bourgeois division between the deserving and undeserving poor, but which also invests the lumpen with more agency than the rest of the surplus population and the reserve army of labour.[18] In a more valorising register such as Frantz Fanon's, lumpen subjects are on the one hand necessarily primed for revolution given their outcast position, yet on the other possessed of a uniquely agentive urban radicalism.[19] Nathaniel Mills has recently argued in similar vein that the lumpenproletariat is cast both 'as immiserated products of an oppressive system […] and as free agents who created new possibilities from the margins of both capitalist social formations and traditional revolutionary organizations'.[20] The lumpenproletariat might sometimes make its own history, but neither in circumstances of their own making nor – unlike the proletariat – in those immanent to their subject position within the relations of production.

The question of immanent agency has wide-ranging implications for the place of the lumpenproletariat in Marxist theories of literary realism. To take their most robust and sustained elaboration: for Lukács the historical dynamism of the realist novel stems from the narrative eloquence of the typical character, sleekly reflecting a deep totality of social and political change in their progress through the course of the novel. This necessarily requires a relation of immanence between character development and social world that in turn enables the realist novelist to predict future political developments. But if a formation is always located outside the relations of production, then these possibilities are foreclosed from the start. Lukács's polemics against the 'eccentric' character type in modernism and naturalism can be read as a

rejection of the lumpenproletarian milieus often found in these modes, closely tied up with their epistemological failure to articulate the totality of social experience and thence the shape of social forms to come.[21] The lumpen is, in other words, going nowhere.

This is generally implicit in Lukács, but becomes far more explicit in the Marxist reception of Alfred Döblin's 1929 novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Critics seized on Döblin's portrayal of a feckless lumpenproletarian drifter and petty criminal, Franz Biberkopf, who staggers around Weimar Berlin with very little self-awareness – let alone class consciousness. Instead of a properly political scene of action, Otto Biha argued that Döblin was portraying a 'fantastic underworld', a criticism echoed by other Marxist critics in Germany and beyond.[22] Yet Biberkopf might plausibly be seen as a very typical character indeed, whose drunken, abusive progress through the novel becomes acutely proleptic of the careening of Nazism across the world historical stage. What I'm suggesting here is not so much a rejection of Lukácsian theories of realism as much as a widening of the concept of typicality to include a broader range of texts depicting non-normative subjects encompassing, for instance, a major line of queer writing, as I argue elsewhere.[23] George Ciccariello-Maher's work on the *barrios*, meanwhile, amends Lukács's theory of proletarian class consciousness to suggest that Venezuelan 'lumpen-capitalism' can only be adequately apprehended and resisted by lumpen subjects; although Ciccariello-Maher is not interested in the novel, his popular history of the Venezuelan revolution raises the question of lumpen typicality in a salient fashion.[24] When workers in an informal economy overshadow the factory proletariat – as in late-nineteenth-century London perhaps as much as contemporary Venezuela – then it might be plausibly argued that here are the properly typical characters for the committed novelist. In turn, the narration of these lumpen lives may well then function proleptically for future moments of disorganised labour. As I shall now argue in more detail, Harkness's depictions of female labour and male indolence within the surplus population can be seen in precisely this way: it is her hard-pressed seamstresses and assiduously altruistic female thieves who anticipate the mounting feminisation of labour in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

'That Place Needs a Zola'

Harkness's first novel and the target of Engels's criticism, *A City Girl*, features a young East End seamstress and denizen of a rookery, Nelly, who is courted by a decent working-class ex-soldier, George, but seduced by a middle-class man, Mr Grant. Nelly becomes pregnant by Grant, loses her job and the baby, and finally joylessly marries an equally glum George. She is portrayed as feckless

throughout the narrative, presenting a lack of commitment that is mirrored by Grant, a Radical who disregards any working-class capacity for agency, and George, an unthinking Conservative. The only character endowed with any serious purpose is the 'little Captain', the Salvation Army's Captain Lobe, who reappears in *In Darkest London* as the protagonist. Lobe rescues Nelly from the streets and the violence of her brother, and arranges lodgings and care for her during her pregnancy and her baby's short life. Perhaps unsurprisingly, critics have generally dismissed the novel as a sentimental, paternalistic tale aimed at a middle-class readership.[25]

The novel's literary value is indeed somewhat doubtful, as Harkness struggles to integrate the narrative claims of melodrama with the paradigmatic downward spiral of naturalist fiction. However, the problem with most critical accounts of *A City Girl* is that they lean too heavily on a lack of explicit statements of commitment and moments of activism, when the obvious starting point for a materialist inquiry would be the forms of labour represented in Harkness's text, curiously overlooked by most critics. The cast of the novel is clearly devoid of class consciousness, but Harkness also draws a sharp distinction between Nelly's labour and her brother's idleness. Even when heavily pregnant, Nelly attempts to continue work but is turned away. By contrast, her brother Tom is a 'loafer', his physiognomy marked by depravity: 'he had a head shaped by a bullet, small round eyes, red hair cropped short, and a thick neck' (49). Thereafter known simply as 'the loafer', Tom drinks, grumbles and 'minds the shop', which is a small counter outside the family's threadbare rooms. But it is Nelly's earnings as a seamstress that provide most of their income, and when she is unable to work Tom beats her and throws her out. Tom and Nelly echo and amend Marx's distinction within the surplus population between the 'lumpenproletariat proper' and the unemployed. 'Finally', writes Marx, 'the lowest sediment of the relative surplus population dwells in the sphere of pauperism. Apart from vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes, in short the actual lumpenproletariat, this social stratum consists of three categories.' Marx goes on to list the unemployed who are able to work but can find none, pauper children and orphans, and the disabled and demoralised, 'people who succumb to their incapacity for adaption'.[26] *A City Girl* draws this line in terms of gender, as Nelly becomes incapacitated yet still attempts to work, while her brother lives a merely parasitic existence. Harkness is not only drawing on this distinction between the surplus population and the lumpenproletariat, but also developing Engels's analysis of the relations between class and gender oppression from *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884). If for Engels 'within the family he is the bourgeois, and the wife represents the proletariat', then for Harkness the woman represents the casualised labourer and the man the lumpen proper, the filthy parasite upon precarious female productivity.[27]

This distinction is further developed in Harkness's next novel, *Out of Work*, a text that might also be considered a riposte to Engels's criticism. In her reply to Engels's letter, Harkness agreed that *A City Girl* suffers from 'a want of realism'. She goes on to write that her difficulties 'arise chiefly from want of confidence in my powers […] and also from my sex'.[28] The respectful, admiring tone of the letter is undeniable, but there might also be some pushback here, for Engels recommends Balzac for his depiction of 'the men of the future'. Reading somewhat against the grain, but with a strong warrant from Harkness's forceful personality in print and in her activism, we might suggest that she is slyly implying that Engels's conception of realism is unable to address the question of female labour, whether literary or manual.

On first glance, however, *Out of Work* appears to take Engels's criticisms to heart, as the novel features a number of politically committed characters, including an Anarchist poet, a socialist labourer befriended by the protagonist and several fiery street orators. The events of Bloody Sunday also make a central appearance. The narrator comments on the crowd assembled at Trafalgar Square:

> Was it true that the agitators were "'ungry," or was it false? Did the genuine unemployed come to these daily demonstrations, or were the demonstrators loafers who would not work, vagrants who wanted to play on the sympathies of the public, scum that must be allowed to die like dogs in the streets by order of the Political Economists? (197)

These rhetorical questions make it clear that Harkness's sympathy is with the demonstrators, precisely as they draw a moral distinction between loafers, vagrants and the 'genuine unemployed'. This distinction is then undercut by its alignment with the 'Political Economists' who would seek to cruelly reduce the surplus population, and yet it lingers as the justification for support of the demonstration – a series of musings deeply embedded in contemporary political debates. As Stedman-Jones has elaborated, a particularly crude set of arguments against charity emerged in the 1860s; drawing on vulgarised aspects of political economy, critics maintained that given the working-class's mobility and innate distaste for labour, charity was actively responsible for housing crises as the poor congregated in districts where charity was available and thus drove up rents. However, in the 1880s these arguments were increasingly challenged by a new set of liberal thinkers who argued that the 'legitimate' claims of the working class should be sharply distinguished from the residuum. For Samuel and Henrietta Barnett's 'practicable socialism' – a term influentially proposed in 1888 and also deployed by Alfred Toynbee – the distinction between the respectable poor and the 'loafer' became ever more important

precisely as they sought to counter the inhumane proposals of a bastardised political economy.[29] In other words, in this passage Harkness is caught in the characteristic double-bind of a 'practicable socialism' intensified by the concept of the lumpenproletariat. In order to value the demonstrators, an abject remainder to their steadfast commitment must be produced, a residuum that necessarily becomes the object of charity in order to distinguish the socialist moralist from the callous bourgeois – a charity that in turn undoes the agency of the surplus population as a whole, now the object of ameliorative intervention rather than potentially revolutionary formations.

And indeed, *Out of Work* makes no realist claims to figure the men of the future. As the title of the novel indicates, the narrative follows an unemployed carpenter, Jos, who moves to London in search of work but sinks into alcoholism and apathy following his inability to find work in the capital. Jilted by a lower-middle-class Methodist girl, broken down and without the strength to labour in the workhouse, he travels back to his old village and dies of starvation. The most obvious difference from *A City Girl* is that Harkness reverses the traditional gender structure of melodrama and narrows the class difference involved. More pertinently perhaps, during his travails Jos is patiently aided by a young girl known as 'the Squirrel' who is depicted as utterly ignorant but completely selfless – and supremely adaptable within London's informal economy. Jos is cast out of the reserve army of labour, or '*laissez-faire's* army' (120), as Harkness calls it, and then falls into the category of the 'demoralised' section of the surplus population, 'people who succumb to their incapacity for adaptation' as Marx writes in *Capital*. But the aptly-named Squirrel manages to produce a stream of sixpences by selling matches and flowers, and saves Jos from starvation (at least for a time). Jos 'could not understand how she made so much money' (190), and the reader only learns of how she does relatively late in the narrative, giving her income in the earlier part of the novel a certain mysteriousness. The usual suspicion, prostitution, is nowhere hinted at; rather, the Squirrel steals to provide Jos with sustenance. This is implied when the deputy of their doss house remarks that 'I'd rather trust her 'er than any one I know to steal me a dinner' (113) – an idiomatic usage meaning to rustle up or miraculously produce, but which also carries a striking sense of the trusted thief. Later on, she pays a relatively large fine for Jos, and answers his query as to the source of the cash with the firm reply, 'if I *did* steal it, Jack, it's none of your business' (192; emphasis in original).

From 1848 onwards, Marx and Engels increasingly argued that theft was totally at odds with the revolutionary discipline of the proletariat, a tendency that came to a head with Engels's 1850 recommendation that 'French workers, in every revolution, inscribe on the houses *Mort aux voleurs!* Death to thieves'.[30] However, in his earlier *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), Engels

was more accepting of theft, carefully separating crimes against property from crimes against persons, and even arguing that stealing can be a sign of 'courage and passion' in the face of intolerable conditions.[31] Harkness appears to follow this earlier judgement rather than Marx and Engels's later condemnation. The Squirrel's altruistic theft also anticipates Wilhelm Reich's unorthodox revalorisation of the lumpenproletariat, which held that a human being faced with starvation who chooses to steal rather than to die of hunger displays the rudiments of class consciousness.[32] There is no doubt that the Squirrel displays far more solidarity than Jos, who merely takes her money and spends it on gin, while she 'lends' money not only to him, but also to fellow flower girls and doss-house lodgers, who in turn treat her with kindness. Moreover, when the pair are swept up by the events of Bloody Sunday, she displays an embryonic form of class consciousness. Urging Jos to join the crowd, 'her little heart beat fast', and she 'hissed loudly, not knowing why, but feeling the noise a relief in her intense excitement' (200). Jos is then assaulted by a policeman and unfairly arrested, and his companion gives evidence in court against the police. Finally, when Jos begins his long walk back to his village without notifying her, she hurls herself into the Thames in despairing loneliness.

The bleakly plotted narrative of *Out of Work* leaves behind the melodrama of *A City Girl*; indeed, the novel explicitly mocks melodramatic conventions as they appear in the trashy, escapist reading material of a foolish young woman (26). Instead, in its portrayal of Jos's downward spiral, *Out of Work* develops an insistently naturalist mode. As Bernadette Kirwan and others have stressed, Harkness was writing at the intense beginnings of Zola's Anglophone reception following the 1885 translation of *Germinale*.[33] Harkness explicitly proclaims her Zolerian commitments:

> They had locked him in a cell with three men, who had been run in the previous day for drinking. That place needs a Zola to do it justice. There was one long seat in it, on which sat a besotted drunkard and when Jos was led in the gaoler stumbled over a drunken man who lay on the floor, sick as a dog, from drinking. (204)

Here Harkness triples down on drunkenness in a condensed version of Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877), with its congeries of alcoholics. Jos – whose alcoholism is explicitly marked as hereditary – is literally crammed into a bench with fellow hopeless inebriates, and thus tightly fitted into the paradigmatic naturalist descent; as he 'hopelessly' concludes, 'why not steal? Why not drink?' (205). As we have seen, however, the Squirrel's theft is supported by the narrative as an altruistic act of solidarity. Here, then, is Harkness's riposte to Engels, whose letter had stressed that Zola was a poor model for the socialist novelist; her

full embrace of a naturalist mode is a direct response to an ongoing project of representing unorthodox forms of female labour within the informal economy, 'problems of my sex' that are further developed in her next novel, *In Darkest London*.

'The Scum of Europe'

Written in the shadow of the riots of 1886–8 and before the Dockers' Strike of 1889 has provided more hope in the London poor, *In Darkest London* forms a bridge between Henry Maynard, Marx and Engels in the mid-nineteenth century, on to Jack London in the early twentieth and George Orwell in the interwar period. Harkness's novel offers a bleak vision of the East End poor, utterly bewildered, generally drunk and devoid of active resistance or any sense of purpose. Set against this disintegrating mass are a number of interventionist figures, most prominently Captain Lobe and a 'strong-minded proletarian spinster', Jane Hardy; the novel also features the stock figure of the depressed but committed slum doctor, and a well-meaning bourgeois girl, Ruth. In a return to an attenuated version of the conventional romance plot of *A City Girl*, the narrative progresses somewhat predictably towards Ruth and Lobe's engagement. Ever the stickler, General Booth won't let them marry until Lobe has completed two years' service in Australia, and the novel closes as his ship leaves for the colony.

   In Darkest London contains Harkness's most extended meditations on the male lumpen. In the novel's first glimpse of the Whitechapel Road, 'the most cosmopolitan place in London', the 'loafer' emerges against a list of nationalities and ethnicities, including a 'Hottentot', a 'Jewess', an 'Algerian Merchant', a 'little Italian' and a 'small Russian' – all of whom are depicted as living together in a degree of multicultural amity. 'The East End loafer', however, 'is looked on as scum by his own nation, but he feels himself to be an Englishman, and able to kick the foreigner back to "his own dear native land" if only Government would believe in "English for the English," and give all foreigners "notice."'[34] This passage might initially seem to be an anti-racist gesture, echoing Harkness's defence of the immigrant in *Out of Work* ('we've no right to wish them away' [64]). And yet, the key phrase Harkness then immediately uses to describe the lumpen is 'the parasite, the creature who is content to exist on other people'. This racialises the lumpen by drawing on the usual categorisation of immigrants as parasites, which directly resurfaces later in the novel. The passage continues:

   There are many such creatures among us. We used to put them in the army, but competitive examinations have made that impossible; so now we send

them to land agents, give them family livings, or let them emigrate. Almost every family has a loafer somewhere – a cousin or son who is 'good for nothing'. In the West End they haunt the clubs; in the East End they hang around the public-houses. They are kept by their families, and almost always have some fond female relation upon whom they sponge, until death puts an end to their sponging. (13)

Echoing Marx on the finance aristocracy, here Harkness is eager to point out that, as Jacques Rancière has further stressed, every class has 'its own lumpen', for the 'us' in these lines addresses the putative upper-middle-class reader, and we are told that 'every family has a loafer somewhere'.[35] Once again, the distinction is primarily one of gender, and this broadly classed yet strictly gendered definition of the 'parasite' is further underlined in the novel's depiction of Ruth's guardian, the 'apathetic' and manipulative Mr Pember: 'neither for Ruth nor any one else would he exert himself' (88). Developing Engels's statement that 'the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male', Harkness makes absolutely clear that this structure functions across society, from the surplus population to the upper classes.[36]

However, Harkness's major focus in the novel is with the destitute, drunken lumpenproletariat:

They […] wait outside the market for jobs all day long. Gradually they sink into the scum of London, and become paupers, gaol-birds, and vagrants. It is a pitiable thing to see them deteriorating! First they grow reckless, then they become hopeless, finally they take to drinking. Starvation prevents them from doing mischief at present; but they add to the seething mass of discontent that is even now undermining the whole of society. (55)

There is a certain ambiguity to 'seething mass' and 'undermining' – this could initially be read as an economically determined revolutionary potential, recalling Marx's famous definition of the proletariat as the 'gravediggers of capitalism'. But read back through the hopeless drunkenness that precedes the discontent and it becomes clear that class consciousness is entirely foreclosed, and thus the 'whole of society' emerges as something as worthy of protection, a lost plenitude rather than the target of revolutionary action. In a series of further turns, the passage continues this movement between moments of radical hope that are continually undercut by a cloying moralism that would seek to protect 'society' rather than incite revolution; it concludes, 'for the sake of our children, we say "take warning"' (55). 'Pitiable' is of course a key term in this passage, a central aspect of lumpen representation inherited in part from Engels – particularly, again, from *The Condition of the Working Class*, which Harkness

cites elsewhere in the text. The despairing doctor reads a famous passage about slum conditions from Engels's study, beginning 'every evil conceivable is heaped upon the heads of the poor' (67), a moving passage of sympathetic identification, but when taken in isolation, devoid of all revolutionary hope. For Harkness's East Enders, revolutionary consciousness is occluded from the outset, and social and political commitment is thus transferred to figures of ameliorative intervention and sympathetic identification.

Chief among such figures is the 'earnest' salvationist Captain Lobe. While Harkness has some sardonic words for the Salvation Army, particularly its male members who 'strut about like so many small military peacocks' (194), her portrayal is generally very positive, as in her 1890 article on General Booth. Lobe is the novel's shining moral exemplar, pure of heart, devout of soul and burning with a desire to alleviate the suffering of the poor. His small stature and boyish appearance are stressed throughout the novel, which closes with the observation that 'he isn't a man, but a woman' (224). This striking line should give pause to accounts of Harkness's career that downplay her feminist commitments. For instance, noting her use of a pseudonym suggesting male power and disinterest in suffrage, Deborah Epstein Nord has argued that Harkness prioritised socialist commitment over feminist engagement.[37] However, Lobe's re-gendering surely radicalises Harkness's project throughout her earlier career of rigorously attributing political worth, industry and ethical commitment to women; while she was not an active supporter of suffrage nor explicitly feminist in her activism, Harkness's novels are in fact paradigmatic documents of late-nineteenth-century socialist feminism. This is not, however, to unproblematically valorise Harkness's project. For as Kathi Weeks has argued, feminist scholarship on waged and unwaged labour has at points fallen into two opposing traps that both problematically frame work as a heavily valorised normative category – on the one hand, the championing of unwaged domestic and affective labour, and on the other an insistence on the importance of the entry of women into the workplace.[38]

This becomes clearer still in the labour mistress Jane Hardy, a 'strong minded proletarian spinster', who tends to Ruth and other women in the area yet functions as the gatekeeper to the possibility of their labour. Hardy is gently mocked in the novel, but she is presented as more promising in terms of revolutionary potential than any other character in Harkness's London novels; tellingly, she is the only character referred to as a proletarian. A passionate feminist and socialist, Hardy is repeatedly depicted literally shaking her fist at male capitalists. But despite this glancing moment of parody, she is undoubtedly the most committed character in the novel, and as her name suggests, depicted as full of moral worth. Hardy gives Ruth a tour of her rounds of the slums, arguing that 'men must labour or beg. Women can always earn money' (113).

The immediate context is prostitution, that most lumpen of occupations, which the novel sees as a last resort for the daughters of destitute families. Hardy's concerns are, however, much broader; as the novel later proclaims, Hardy is a 'pioneer of her sex in questions connected with female labour' (221), and her observation that women can always earn money is a genuine insight into the particular conditions of casualised London labour. As the mouthpiece for Harkness's major project in her novels of the period, Hardy is thus clearly heavily valorised, overshadowing her occasionally parodic presentation.

Hardy is unashamedly racist and completely opposed to immigration of 'the scum of Europe' – a foreign menace, driving down wages for English workers and yet paradoxically lazy. In particular, Hardy makes clear that she'd 'never take on a Jewess' (84) for these reasons. As David Glover has argued, Hardy's anti-Semitism is particularly disturbing because it is represented as the result of hard won experience. Moreover, as she is so generally valorised in other senses, it's hard not to see some authorial approval operating here.[39] And indeed, Harkness's later novel *A Manchester Shirtmaker* descends into vicious anti-Semitic polemic as the novel's eponymous anti-hero kills her baby, having been cruelly cheated by a Jewish 'sweater': the novel's central narrative fulcrum is Jewish economic predation. This is placed in contradistinction to a representation of class-conscious female labour in a group of female garment workers who violently drive out the Jew from their workplace.

Vehemently opposed to Jewish immigration to England, Harkness also become invested in the social imperialist project of economically coerced emigration of the surplus population, a triple violence that marks her later career. *George Eastmont: Wanderer* entirely buckles under the strain of representing the class consciousness of the residuum, and repudiates the possibility of revolutionary change through a damning verdict on the undisciplined unemployed masses. Featuring a frankly disgusted gaze upon the 1886 riots, in which the rioters are depicted as utterly idiotic, the novel's shining aristocratic hero, Eastmont, sees resettlement in Australia as the answer to the woes of the London poor. In this novel, Harkness completes her move from socialism to social cleansing, advocating the continued colonisation of indigenous lands as an economically coerced home for the 'scum' of London. Her journey from melodrama to naturalism and finally to a naive picaresque also comes to rest here. The central character, Eastmont, is a bizarrely semi-committed nobleman who jumps quixotically from cause to cause, and yet he is depicted with no sense of the satire of Cervantes that one might reasonably expect and indeed Eastmont is drawn in clearly admiring tones. In Harkness's approving portrayal of Eastmont we see, then, the desertion of the typical for what Lukács would be right in calling the 'eccentric'.

Women of the Future

Taking Harkness's authorship as a whole, it's hard not to conclude, *pace* Engels, that the suicidal thief of her most despairingly naturalist novel might remain Harkness's most important creation. It is of course outside the scope of this present essay to evaluate the place of theft for left politics or naturalist narrative. Rather I would like to underline how *Out of Work* anticipates the well-known gendered turn of post-Fordist labour, when the decline in manufacturing jobs and the growth of the service sector led to an ongoing crisis in wage-earning masculinity. At the same time, the Squirrel's negotiation of the informal economy presages the modes of labour forced upon workers by neoliberalism – she is, for instance, closely adequated to just-in-time production, and constantly shifts her field of operation according to the exigencies of the market. This leads to her abjection rather than figuring a muscular proletarian revolution; yet here there are surely deep reflections of the movements of labour and capital. Sadly typical of London's informal economy in the late-nineteenth century, the Squirrel in turn prefigures the neoliberal divisions of labour and the brittle bonds of heterosexual partnership in the face of poverty – the lumpen is always located outside of normative affective and sexual realms and yet provides some surprising entry points to the dialectics of typicality.

Read diagnostically, Harkness's career also tells a cautionary tale, revealing how the acute pressure brought to bear on the interrelations between race, gender and class by the concept of the lumpenproletariat catalyses, intensifies and further shapes already existing oppressive discourses. The depressing spectacle of supposedly opposed identity categories being played off against one another is all too often the result; Harkness moves with worrying ease from one 'parasitism' to another, all the while insisting upon the virtues of female labour. This also indicates the particular portability of lumpen tropes, an assemblage of violent slurs and ill-defined sociological typologies that can almost seamlessly switch from one object of moralistic disgust to another.

In the face of this woeful legacy, some new conceptual frameworks and vocabularies have recently offered some ways to circumvent the discourse of the lumpen. Michael Denning has offered the notion of 'wageless life' in opposition to the lumpenproletariat, while precarity has become an overarching master-concept for the left humanities; the multitude and the commons have also staked out new ground for further work in these directions.[40] Yet in their very attempt to detoxify poverty, there is the chance that some of these terms may become rather hollow, sometimes functioning purely negatively, at others so broadly as to become contentless. Precarity, for instance, has become so all-encompassing a concept as to lose a great deal of its descriptive acuity and radical charge – a danger from the outset perhaps, as from a certain perspective

it names almost all life under capitalism with the possible exception of the brief Fordist interregnum. In other words, while undoubtedly important, this new conceptual work is insufficient without a robust genealogy of the history it seeks to supervene. We should not attempt to merely purge the concept of the lumpenproletariat from the leftist political imaginary, but rather further explore its vicissitudes in order to not repeat the retrenchments it calls forth. Harkness's despairing women of the future are one important formation from which to begin this inquiry.

Notes

1   Friedrich Engels, Letter to Margaret Harkness, April 1888 in Margaret Harkness, *A City Girl* (1887), ed. Deborah Mutch (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2015), 135. The variants in translation in brackets are from, respectively, this edition, *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader*, eds Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (London: Blackwell, 1996), 41, and *Literature and Art by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Selections from Their Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), 43.

2   Gareth Stedman-Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (London: Verso, 2013), 337–49.

3   Engels, *Times*, 10 February 1886, cited in Stedman-Jones, *Outcast London*, 453.

4   Engels, 'On the London Dock Strike' (1889), in *Marx and Engels: Articles on Britain* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 401.

5   Engels to E. Bernstein, 22 August 1889 in *Marx and Engels on Britain* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 521, emphasis in original.

6   This biographical sketch draws on the following accounts of Harkness's life: Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 183–7, 292–7; Ellen Ross (ed.), *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860–1920* (Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2007), 89–90; Deborah Mutch, 'Introduction' to *A City Girl*, 27–34; and Bernadette Kirwan, 'Introduction to John Law (Margaret Harkness)', in Margaret Harkness, *Out of Work*, ed. Bernadette Kirwan (London: Merlin, 1900), v-xix.

7   John Law (Margaret Harkness), 'Salvation vs. Socialism – In Praise of General Booth', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 October 1890, 1–2.

8   Harkness, 'A Year of My Life', *New Review* 5 (1891): 377, qtd in Kirwan, 'Introduction', xii.

9   Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* in *Marx: Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11.

10 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* in *Marx: Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 153.

11 See Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, Vol. II: *The Politics of Social Classes* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 454–6.

12 This view has been disputed by Jacques Rancière, who argues that Marx's lumpenproletariat is a 'phantasmal image' covering up the fact that great numbers of Paris proletarians made up the *Gardes Mobile*. See *The Philosopher and His Poor,* trans. John Dury et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 96.

13 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 75.

14 Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire*, 124.

15 Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 284.

16 Peter Stallybrass, 'Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat', *Representations*, 31, Special Issue: The Margins of Identity in Nineteenth-Century England (Summer, 1990): 70.

17 See, *inter alia*, Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 387–8, and Stallybrass, 'Marx and Heterogeneity', 82.

18 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 767.

19 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 2001), esp. 103–4.

20 Nathaniel Mills, *Ragged Revolutionaries: The Lumpenproletariat and African American Marxism in Depression-Era Literature* (Amhurst, MA and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017), 35.

21 Georg Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe', in *Writer and Critic*, ed. and trans. Arthur Kahn (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005), 110-148.

22 See Wulf Koepke, *The Critical Reception of Alfred Döblin's Major Novels* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 43.

23 See Glyn Salton-Cox, *Queer Communism and the Ministry of Love: Sexual Revolution in British Writing of the 1930s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

24 See George Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chavez: A People's History of the Venezuelan Revolution* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 220–32.

25 See, *inter alia*, Kevin Swafford, *Class in Late-Victorian Britain: The Narrative Concern with Hierarchy and Its Reproduction* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2007), 45, and Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 97.

26 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 767.

27 Friedrich Engels, *On the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, trans. Alick West (London: Penguin, 2010), 105.

28 Margaret Harkness, Letter to Engels, April 1888, in *A City Girl*, 136.

29 Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 267, 302.

30 Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishers, 1956), 23, also qtd. in Mills, *Ragged Revolutionaries*, 23.

31 Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, trans. Florence Kelley-Wischnewstsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 141, 98.

32 Wilhelm Reich, *What is Class Consciousness?* (1934), in *Sex-Pol: Essays 1929–34*, ed. Lee Baxandale, trans. Anna Bostock et al. (New York: Vintage, 1972), 294.

33 Kirwan, 'Introduction', xii, and Mutch, 'Introduction', 20–21.

34 Harkness, *In Darkest London*, 13.

35 Rancière, *Philosopher and His Poor*, 93.

36 Engels, *Origin of the Family*, 96.

37 Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, 196–7; see also Eileen Sypher, 'The Novels of Margaret Harkness', *Turn-of-the-Century Women* 1 (Winter 1984): 23-25.

38 Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 12–13.

39 David Glover, *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 70.

40 Michael Denning, 'Wageless Life', *New Left Review* 66 (November–December 2010): 79–97.

Edward Thompson, MI5 and the *Reasoner* Controversy: Negotiating 'Communist Principle' in the Crisis of 1956[1]

Madeleine Davis

Abstract

The sixtieth anniversary of the 1956 crisis in international communism provoked a fresh wave of comment on its British dimensions and coincided with the declassification of MI5 files on party historians Edward Thompson and Rodney Hilton. This article approaches the question of communist commitment through a reinterpretation of the *Reasoner* controversy in which Thompson and Hilton were to different degrees involved. First, it uses the MI5 material alongside existing sources to illuminate tactical and political aspects of the engagement between the *Reasoner* editors and the party leadership, placing emphasis on the *Reasoner*'s role as bridgehead of an attempt to reform the party from within rather than as simply a precursor to the New Left. Next, interrogating Thompson's claim to 'communist principle', it compares his developing interpretation of what this meant and required with the views of a selection of other intellectuals. Far from representing a straightforward assertion of moral conscience against monolithic party bureaucracy, the *Reasoner* controversy reveals an extremely complex picture of the tensions and constraints involved in communist commitment.

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> I know very well that the knots tied by Stalinism cannot be untied in a day. But the first step on the road back to Communist principle is that we tell the truth and show confidence in the judgement of the people.[2]

Release in September 2016 of a new tranche of files on 'communists and suspected communists' by the British Security Service (MI5) attracted a modest flurry of publicity. Although the release included files on individuals more central to the Communist Party's British operations, it was Edward Thompson's sharp critique of the CPGB leadership, made some months before his suspension then resignation in November 1956, at the height of the party crisis touched off by the Khrushchev 'revelations' about Stalin's leadership, that attracted most notice. 'It is difficult to argue with his claim', remarked Professor Christopher Andrew, introducing the files for the National

Archives, 'that the leaders of the British Communist Party had "been acting as High Priests, interpreting and justifying the Holy Writ as emanating from Stalin, rather than creative Marxists striving to form an independent analysis of the situation on the basis of their examination of the evidence"'.[3] Andrew did not mention that the vehemence of the critique expressed by Thompson in the intercepted letter he quoted (written to Bert Ramelson, Chair of the Yorkshire District Committee on which Thompson also served) led David Haldane Porter, head of MI5's F branch, to alert John Rennie, chief of the Information Research Department (IRD) to its contents. 'Most interesting. Some good arguments here for the IRD', records Haldane Porter's handwritten note on the file cover sheet, and he duly passed on excerpts, cautioning that the 'secret and delicate means' by which the information had been obtained restricted its use to paraphrase only.[4]

The IRD was a covert unit set up to disseminate anti-communist propaganda through the mainstream media.[5] Recipient of Orwell's famous 'list', its officials knew the value of an intellectual prepared to denounce communism. Their interest in Thompson is a reminder that the Cold War remains an indispensable context for understanding the CPGB's 1956 crisis, both as it was experienced and as it has been interpreted since. If there are always those for whom the latest anniversary provides an opportunity to indulge the 'end of history smugness' that marks much coverage of communism and its British adherents, it is also true that 1956 remains an interpretive battleground for the left.[6] Themes reprised in the latest round of commemoration include the prominence of intellectuals, particularly the party historians' group, in the revolt that saw the CPGB lose some 9,000 members, and the extent to which pre-existing modes of intellectual critique, especially the development of 'cultural Marxism', prepared the ground for dissent.[7] There has also been renewal of a strand of argument pointing to the moral arbitrariness of 1956 as *the* moment when communists located their consciences.[8]

The story of the *Reasoner*, the unauthorised inner-party journal produced by Thompson and John Saville from July-November 1956 as locus for a freer discussion of the implications of the Khrushchev disclosures than the CPGB leadership would allow, is pivotal to these discussions. Usually presented retrospectively as the mouthpiece of a principled moral revolt of party intellectuals and precursor to the early New Left, its role as bridgehead of an attempt to reform the party from within is not always well understood. Thompson, certainly, with his repeated later invocation of 1956 as an historical as well as personal watershed, his insistence on the need regularly to 'beat the boundaries' of 1956, and his eventual, unassailable reputation as exemplary public moralist, himself contributed much to support a reading of the *Reasoner* as repository of party conscience and midwife of 'socialist

humanism'. Thompson and Saville's stance is also often taken as representative of the Communist Party historians' group to which they both belonged, conferring a retrospective unity on that group and marking it as a centre of dissidence in the tumult of the year, by Hobsbawm's account an immediate 'nucleus of vocal opposition to the Party line'.[9] The most persistent challenge to these predominant interpretations has been made from a perspective broadly sympathetic to a Trotskyist reading of Communist history. In 1980 Perry Anderson countered Thompson's anti-Althusserianism in *The Poverty of Theory* ('Where was Althusser in 1956?') pointing to the wide availability of information about the trials and purges, and of Trotskyist analysis of Stalinism well before 1956. Yet only after confirmation *ex-cathedra* did the dissidents of 1956 take action: 'Is the *official* announcement of Stalin's crimes then to mark the frontier between venial and mortal responsibility?', he pointedly asked.[10] The recent welcome republication of the three issues of *The Reasoner* in book form is accompanied by a set of critical essays in broadly similar vein. Recognising their 'exemplary and memorable' role in 1956, John McIlroy and Paul Flewers argue that the *Reasoner* editors nevertheless (and in different ways) achieved only an incomplete break with 'Stalinism' and subsequently failed to provide the Marxist explanation of it that they recognised as a necessity.[11]

This critique is useful, not least for its recognition of some differences in outlook between Thompson and Saville, even at the point of their closest collaboration. It is certainly true too that Stalin's 'knots' (as Thompson said in 1956) would not 'be untied in a day' and his own later presentations would sometimes simplify and abbreviate the attempt. Interrogating the reliability and consistency of first person accounts by Thompson, Hobsbawm and others also prompts useful reflection on the extent to which reliance on retrospective accounts from participants has encouraged an implicit teleology in historical presentations of the crisis, something worthy of fuller reflection.[12] Yet if this strand of argument can help correct overly simplistic readings of the *Reasoner* episode, to the extent that it resolves into a broader argument about the limitations of the later New Left as reparable by fuller and earlier engagement with British Trotskyism, it has its own questionable teleology.[13]

The release of MI5 files on Thompson and Hilton, added to those of prominent party intellectuals already available, provides a fresh set of primary sources and renewed opportunity to consider these issues in their context, while the Thompson material has extra significance given the continued embargo on his papers.[14] These files do though present problems as sources for historians interested in the human subjects of surveillance rather than its techniques and policy contexts. The secret, partial and incomplete nature of the material, retention or redaction of documents, and the difficulty in many cases of cross-checking against other sources limits their usefulness. Although some

triangulation is possible against the CPGB's own archive, awareness among prominent communists of extensive surveillance provoked counter-measures, including selective record keeping, and reinforced a culture of secrecy and mistrust. Thus while the volume of MI5 personal files now available has started to generate a significant literature drawing on both sets of primary sources,[15] investigation of the motives of those involved in the 1956 crisis needs also to draw on a substantial specialist secondary literature. Especially relevant is work emerging from the 'biographical turn' in communist historiography, and work that examines both the CPGB's cultural analysis and the party's internal culture to illuminate the complex and contradictory reality of Zhdanovism's implementation and contestation in the British party.[16]

Within this research context, this article addresses the *Reasoner* controversy not in retrospect but as it unfolded through the months of 1956 amid the larger party crisis, using Thompson's claim to 'communist principle' as a provocation. The first section contextualises the use of the MI5 material and considers what it adds to our sense of the constraints under which British communists operated. The second locates the *Reasoner* episode within the internal politics and culture of the CPGB, using the MI5 material alongside existing sources to illuminate less familiar aspects of a controversy that involved careful manoeuvring on both sides. The final section takes up Thompson's claim to 'communist principle', comparing his view of what this meant and required with that of a selection of other intellectuals also involved in the inner-party debate. This shows significant differences of perspective, even among those who supported publication of the *Reasoner*. The extent to which 'communist principle' entailed the subordination of individual moral conscience and judgement to the perceived interests of the collective was one key issue at stake, but there were also political and tactical dimensions to these differences, as well as different interpretations of party rules and practices. Interestingly, the positions these intellectuals took on this question of 'communist principle' do not map in an obviously predictable way onto decisions about whether to leave or remain within the party, even after events in Hungary polarised opinion. This suggests an exceedingly complex picture of party experience and commitment in which the impact of '1956' was highly differentiated.

Subversion and Surveillance

By 1956 Thompson had been under MI5 surveillance for over a decade. An offhand remark he made about 'fighting fascists at home' on leave during the war in 1943 (a year after he had joined the party) was reported by a Buckinghamshire police officer. By 1956 MI5 had amassed two files on his

activities and those of his wife Dorothy, whom he met in 1945. Their contents are mostly trivial ('Thompson has been seen in Siddal district a lot recently during the daytime, giving the impression that he does not go out to work, owns an Austin 10 two seater car DKX43. People been seen visiting his house in the evenings, some carrying briefcases'),[17] which seems fairly typical of the genre. In a recent study of surveillance of party writers of the 1930s, James Smith evokes the incompetent, philistine and apparently pointless aspects of the British state's monitoring of radical intellectuals, finding little in the files to suggest either subversive activity on the part of those being watched or that those watching grasped the significance of their subjects' intellectual work.[18] Yet we should be wary of dismissing this as a harmless comedy of errors. Smith's wry observation that several of these writers' careers benefited from their communist associations (so long as they were prepared to repudiate them later) raises more troubling questions about the nature of British anti-communism than it answers. Jennifer Luff offers a contrasting perspective. Focusing on the treatment of labour movement communists in the inter-war period, Luff suggests that the anti-communism of the British 'secret state', usually viewed as more benign than US McCarthyism, in its insidiousness and comprehensive penetration of communist networks was in some ways more effective.[19] Though 'open' intellectual party members were handled differently from Luff's subjects, in files on Thompson, Hilton, Randall Swingler, Christopher Hill and others, one nevertheless glimpses more sinister aspects of surveillance amid the trivia. We learn, for instance, that the Thompsons's home in Halifax was broken into and clandestinely searched while they were on holiday; that most, if not all, of these party writers featured on a list of some 3,000 potential subversives to be preventively detained in the event of a breakdown of relations with the USSR; that job offers and invitations to contribute to BBC broadcasts might mysteriously evaporate following a polite intervention from the security services. Thompson's rejection for a post as a civilian lecturer with Army Northern Command in 1949 was one such episode.[20] There is also the fact that the information released is far from complete, and that the procedures for selection of material suitable for public consumption remain opaque.

Responsible use of these records, then, requires some appreciation of their significance within the domestic security regime. A few observations afford some context for the material consulted.[21] First, by the mid-1950s, 'comprehensive and pervasive' monitoring of communists was firmly in place, the success of 1955's Operation Party Piece granting access to full membership records covering both 'open' and covert members.[22] Bugs and telephone taps on the King Street party HQ meant the security services were far better informed than most party members about the views and activities

of the leadership, and MI5 had also benefited from the work of highly placed informers. Second, this surveillance reflected an exceedingly malleable and expansive idea of 'subversion'. If attention to communists before the war had been essentially defensive, the main concerns espionage and sabotage, the Cold War supplemented these with a more offensive propaganda role, more aggressive use of vetting and an expanded role for the IRD. Third, and with specific regard to our group of university dons and writers, comprehensive surveillance of these types was undertaken not to counter any specific perceived threat but mainly in an attempt to map their networks, and more nebulously, to understand the appeal of communism to intellectuals and students the better to counter it.

What impact did this monitoring have for communists like Thompson? Certainly party leaders and many individual members were well aware of being watched and took steps to counter it. The existence of espionage networks on both sides was known, and there had of course been notorious cases. At the same time, most British communists neither engaged in, nor knew much about, the covert side of their own party's activities, and by the 1950s the national and international context for such activities, as well as the Soviet and domestic party policy context, was markedly different from the 1930s. Unless, then, one accedes to the wide and indeterminate notion of subversion employed by the British state, these intellectuals posed no threat to British interests. In fact, by the early 1950s subservience to Moscow was regarded by most intellectuals discussed here as the main obstacle to their party's success in Britain, and MI5 were in a good position to know this. As for 1956, a recent study concludes that though it monitored the unfolding of the internal party crisis, MI5 made little effort to capitalise on it to hasten the party's disintegration, and did not always seem fully to grasp its significance.[23] The impact of British intelligence activity on the crisis seems indirect, and quite possibly undermined the goals of that activity. The practices of the state, the vituperation directed at communists in the mainstream media, (as well as, of course, much of the language and practice of their own party) could hardly fail to reinforce defensive mentalities which, while inimical to many communists' own beliefs and aspirations, were politically (and perhaps psychologically) necessary. Shifting such mentalities was not likely to be easy.[24]

The Party and the *Reasoner*

I never mentioned Lenin's will, or how Joe ruled his nation, and wove my way twixt right and left in every deviation. The Party's line I shall maintain until my dying day sir, and whatsoever king may reign, I never will say Nay sir.[25]

The way the *Reasoner* episode unfolded within the CPGB involved considerations of political tactics as well as political and moral principle, and occurred against a backdrop more complex than standard evocations of the 'shock' of the Khrushchev 'revelations' can convey. 'Stalinism', as Thompson wrote immediately after the Soviet intervention in Hungary in early November, was not 'wrong things' about which 'we could not know' but 'distorted theories and degenerate practices about which we knew something, in which to some degree we shared, and which our leadership supports today'.[26] He and Saville resigned only after Hungary convinced them that the fight to shift the balance of forces and transform the party from within through persuasion and carefully calibrated disobedience was futile. Prior to 1956 they were loyal party members, and though there were instances of both expressing misgivings to the leadership on specifics, they were active in their branches and in party cultural and educational work, and not thought in any way politically unreliable.[27] While there were certainly influences and emphases, mainly deriving from the popular front period, that could nurture a critical and humanist outlook implicitly at odds with party orthodoxy, the possibilities of organised opposition within the party prior to 1956 were limited. Party cultural groups, to a degree always distrusted by the leadership as 'crucibles of factionalism'[28] may have functioned at certain times and to some extent as, in Thompson's words, 'centres of premature revisionism',[29] pressing the boundaries of orthodoxy and (in the case of some members of the writers' and historians' groups) developing a more outward-looking and creative approach to culture.[30] There were, however, well-understood limits, and miscreants were usually forced to recant or marginalised.[31] Jack Lindsay, guilty of perceived deviation in his 1949 *Marxism and Contemporary Science*, admitted 'errors' due to 'petty bourgeois conditioning'; 'I have now published the main lines of my self-criticism.'[32] Thompson's recollection of standing by as the editors of *Our Time*, Randall Swingler and Edgell Rickword, accepted humiliation at the hands of cultural secretary Emile Burns is indicative of this ritualised culture of anti-individualism and 'self-critique', as are Doris Lessing's fictionalised accounts of writers' group meetings in *The Golden Notebook*.[33]

The historians, apparently better organised administratively, seem to have negotiated the demands of self-censorship with less mishap than the writers, but the same 'psychological structure' prevailed.[34] Party intellectuals, though valued and to some extent indulged, were also regarded as especially prone to 'bourgeois deviations' of individualism and 'moral idealism'. The 'spineless intellectual' 'parading his conscience' in 'objective' opposition to the interests of the working class, the renegade recruited to the ranks of the enemy – these were well-worn tropes that left few in doubt that agonies of conscience were a weakness to be negotiated in private. Black humour and bitter in-jokes were

one release. A particularly telling example is Randall Swingler's (private) parody of the tortuous 'self-criticism' of the party:

> what we need today is courageous rethinking. But we must not empty out the acid-bath with the baby. We must have 'new' thinking along the 'old' lines. There are two kinds of truth, relative truth and creative truth. And we stand for creative truth, or making it up as we go along … We have made serious mistakes in the past which must now be corrected. One of the most serious was leaving any poets, artists, musicians and such people alive at all.[35]

There was, however, a gap between what could be said publicly and what could be privately argued between intellectuals and party officials. Letters on MI5 files of the early to mid-1950s show intellectuals associated with both groups expressing a good deal of criticism of party policy and practice, sometimes quite forthright, but this tended to be hedged with protestations of loyalty and admissions of self-doubt. Thompson, for example, criticising as 'disastrous' party efforts to exert more control over literary and cultural coverage in 1952, at the same time referred to himself as 'just being Jeremiah' and hoped to be proved wrong.[36] Hilton, in a 1955 letter to a local official, lambasted the party leadership's subjection to the dictates of the CPSU, the 'appalling sectarianism we indulged in from 1946–50 … when I think of the eminent persons (including present members of the EC) who discovered, on looking back in their memories, that Tito must have been an agent of imperialism during the war, I really wonder if I am standing on my arse or my elbow'. Still, he put these views 'diffidently', confessing himself 'disoriented politically for the above reasons'. There was nothing disoriented in his irate demand 'are we going to do our own thinking, and if so, how are we going to show that we are doing our own thinking?', but habits of euphemism and self-censorship were difficult to break.[37]

Yet change was afoot. The Khrushchev disclosures happened against a backdrop of disorientation in the British party about the meaning and extent of de-Stalinisation. Though reaction to Stalin's death in 1953 was carefully orchestrated, the 'rehabilitation' of Tito, well-substantiated rumours about anti-Semitism, the execution of Lavrenti Beria, amongst other developments, spoke of a CPSU in great flux. Used to being told what to think, the leadership reacted slowly and confusedly to the new situation. The *Daily Worker* did its best to carry on as normal– at precisely the same time as readers were writing in numbers to ask when there would be any accounting of the Khrushchev speech it ran extensive upbeat coverage of his diplomatic visit to England with Bulganin (itself indicative of a changed context). But the readers' forum page

told of grave concern from all sections of the party (not just intellectuals), not only about events in the Soviet Union but about British party practices and structures that had produced a loyalty to the CPSU so complete as to collude in cover-up and falsification over many years. A partial debate on the basis of incomplete information about the content of the speech through March was prematurely closed, just before the full text was leaked.[38] Failure to discuss the issues in open session at the 24th Congress at the end of March intensified demands for an explanation, but the leadership equivocated. It accepted the threadbare excuse of the 'cult of personality', declared full confidence in the CPSU courageously to correct past 'mistakes', asserted that 'full collective leadership' had been restored and that an 'exceptionally healthy situation' now existed.[39] As disquiet mounted, General Secretary Harry Pollitt's account of the implications of the 20th Congress, published in late April, stolid but in a limited way reflective, was followed in May by Palme Dutt's notorious comparison of Stalin's abuses to 'spots on the sun' and portentous reminder to 'ivory tower dwellers in fairyland' that the 'thorny path of human advance' involved both 'unexampled heroism', and 'baseness, tears and blood'.[40] Dutt's crassness provoked an outcry and promise of a 'more helpful' rejoinder.[41]

Unable to react flexibly and intelligently enough to the different demands on it or to bring into clear focus the implications of fast-moving events, the leadership could neither contain debate nor get control of it. This demonstration of weakness enabled those who saw the Khrushchev speech as an opportunity for party renewal and reform to seize the initiative. Already through March, Thompson had been writing in increasingly provocative terms to Bert Ramelson and James Klugmann (a member of the party executive committee and author of *From Trotsky to Tito*, an abject justification of Soviet policy withdrawn in 1956) both of whom he was on friendly terms with and who he hoped might shift their positions to alter the complexion of the leadership.[42] Describing the leadership as 'opportunist and lacking in socialist principle', and questioning Klugmann's own record, Thompson admitted he was moving into a position of opposition within the party, and suggested those 'most responsible for selling the Stalin lines' should resign or temporarily retire at the congress, making way for comrades 'known and trusted in the districts', as a first step toward a deeper process of renewal.[43] On 22 March he wrote to Harry Pollitt suggesting the 24th congress be followed within a year by a 25th or emergency congress.[44] In early April, a day after having sent Saville a savagely parodic 'official letter' mocking the style of party discussion, he wrote Pollitt that he was 'desperately disappointed at what I have learned so far of our Congress'.[45] Saville addressed John Gollan, soon to replace the under-pressure Pollitt as general secretary, in stronger terms, describing the congress as a 'fiasco': 'I now find it impossible to stand up in public and defend party

policy, and unless I and those who think like me can effect some measure of change, I for one shall be forced to resign.'[46] The two now began to coordinate their activities closely. Both were members of the party historians' group, chaired by Eric Hobsbawm, though Saville was more active within it. On 8 April he attended an extended meeting of the group's committee that debated the implications of the 20th Congress in a discussion opened by Klugmann, whose own compromised position was clear to all. Resolutions were passed expressing 'profound dissatisfaction' with the British party congress, calling on the leadership to make 'a public statement of regret for the British party's past uncritical endorsement of all Soviet policies and views' and to initiate the 'widest possible public discussion of all the problems involved for the British party in the present situation'.[47] At the same time Thompson resigned from the Yorkshire District committee, declaring himself opposed on a number of fundamental points to the theory and general line of the party.[48] A long resolution drafted by him and passed by the Halifax branch made similar demands to the historians' group resolution.[49]

By mid-April it was becoming clear that the Yorkshire comrades were laying down a challenge to the leadership. Although couched at this point mainly in terms of 'opposition rights' to express opinion freely in the party press, both sides understood that the stakes were higher. Anxious to head off a wider revolt, the leadership tried to placate the ringleaders. In an (intercepted) phone call Gollan asked Ramelson to do all he could to persuade Thompson to 'stay where he was' and withdraw his resignation from the District Committee.[50] Ramelson's efforts through May extended to inviting Thompson to make proposals for pieces for publication. Thompson sent in a draft of a 'minimum statement' to be published by the Executive Committee.[51] Though the resolution actually published fell far short of Thompson's suggestions (it admitted a 'certain dogmatism, rigidity and sectarianism' in party work in the British labour movement, hived off questions of reform to a 'special commission' that would eventually exonerate the leadership and, while acknowledging 'abuses and grave injustices' in the USSR, dodged the question of its own responsibility, blaming 'false information') he and Saville now secured space in the party press.[52] Saville's pithy contribution took aim at Dutt: 'if the crimes we now know of were historically necessary, the man in the street is entitled to say "Not for me brother!" and I would agree with him.' With 'our political honesty as a political party' at stake, nothing less than a full accounting would suffice.[53] Thompson meanwhile was at work on a longer contribution, having pushed via Ramelson and Arnold Kettle the idea of a 'polemical article on the moral issue' that would appear in *World News* at the end of June as 'Winter Wheat in Omsk'.[54] By late May the leadership expected a cessation of hostilities; a bugged conversation between assistant

general secretary George Matthews and Klugmann has Matthews reporting that Thompson had been asked 'to write down quite logically and clearly what it was that he wanted, and it had not been too bad. He also said that he thought Savill [sic] would quieten down now his letter had been published'.[55] Ramelson could have told them differently a few days later, having received the letter that sparked MI5 interest. In it Thompson recognised 'definite concessions to our point of view' in the EC resolution, but saw no commitment to genuine change, only a 'safety valve' opened by a 'bureaucracy in whose interest it is to prevent too close an examination of their past actions'.

> Now you inform me that W[orld] N[ews] is closing down on real controversy in a week or two, and the predetermined discussion is starting, on unity. All I can say is, Thank God there is no chance of this EC ever having power in Britain: it would destroy in a month every liberty of thought, conscience and expression which it has taken the British people 300 odd years to win. And it would do it all with benevolent safety valves and in a smug and supremely self-righteous belief that it was acting in the interests of the working class, whose interests it was divinely inspired to interpret.[56]

Throwing in personal criticism of Ramelson, as a disingenuous philistine susceptible to the 'bloody awful tradition of dogma and the priesthood', Thompson could hardly expect a positive response to his demand for 'full controversy in a discussion journal' under editorship including oppositional elements. 'If the EC wishes to close up World News etc, I and others will in time find the means to circulate or publish our ideas.' He was also explicit that his points of disagreement were now so fundamental as to 'lead on to a demand for change in policy and personnel so far-reaching that at the moment they are quite impracticable'. Through June and early July he and Saville planned the first *Reasoner* and canvassed support among a network of contacts which included rank-and-file party members and regional officials as well as intellectuals. 'I don't think our party has got a chance unless we have a public fight to change the leadership at once', wrote Thompson to Howard Hill, District Secretary for Sheffield, and a party official whom he respected.[57] And to another comrade: 'We feel it is now or never, and that our position is fairly strong at the moment.'[58]

Publication of *The Reasoner* (noted in *Tribune* on 20 July under the heading 'Opposition group start paper in CP') opened a new phase in the party crisis that needed delicate handling on both sides. Since Thompson and Saville's aim was to force a discussion that would shift the balance of forces toward reform, they chose the ground of their challenge carefully to avoid alienating potential supporters and triggering immediate disciplinary sanctions . While publishing

in the non-party press would certainly have been regarded as disloyalty, , they judged that the rules around independent party publications were unclear enough to afford a little time.[59] To avoid implicating others, production and distribution of 650 hand-duplicated copies was managed entirely by the editors. Under the motto 'to leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality' the journal was 'written by and addressed to members of the Communist Party'. It contained two editorials, a critique of democratic centralism by Ken Alexander (a close collaborator later on the board of the *New Reasoner*), and documents and correspondence from party contacts abroad, to place the British party's hidebound response to the crisis in broader context. John Gollan (away with other EC members on an – ironically timed – trip to Moscow) was sent a copy with a cordial note from Saville blandly rebutting 'any suggestion of factionalism' and insisting 'we have no aim except to provide an additional forum for discussion'.[60]

The most substantial piece in the first issue was by Thompson, developing the case for rethinking attitudes to morality that 'Winter Wheat in Omsk' first put. 'Winter Wheat' argued that moral concern could no longer be belittled as the preserve of Dutt's fairyland dwellers, nor trumped by expediency: 'we are concerned not with pure consciences, but with honesty and good faith in our actions, not with absolute and ideal integrity but with Communist principle in our methods, socialist integrity on our political relations.' Anticipating themes later developed as 'socialist humanism', Thompson urged the party to rid itself of the 'silly, mechanical view that morality is something to do with idealism', embrace 'conscious struggle for moral principle in our political work' and recognise the value of basic democratic liberties. 'The British people do not understand and will not trust a monolith without a moral tongue.' So incendiary was this critique that it appeared with a reply from George Matthews, reminding Thompson that 'for Marxists every political decision is good or bad according to whether or not it serves the interests of the working people' and mounting a by-now familiar defence of the leadership, whose 'past attitudes' to the SU had resulted not from lack of moral principle but from 'lack of information' or 'wrong information'.[61] Thompson now rejoined the fray to demolish Matthews's case and mount a bolder attack on the habits of sectarianism, the practices of centralism, and the distortion of Marxism. Admitting their own 'share [of] responsibility for the failures which we analyse', the editors restated their commitment to Marxism and communism and urged the leadership to make the full and explicit break with Stalinism the moment demanded.[62]

That the leadership did not do so is a matter of record. Rules were invoked and the comrades requested (initially by the Yorkshire District Committee) to cease publication. Having refused, they were summoned to meet the Political Committee at King Street on 31 August. Here they reiterated their refusal to

close unless guarantees for minority rights and free discussion were given. Guarantees were not forthcoming, although there was still some attempt to conciliate: Thompson recalled that Gollan and Matthews 'as good as admitted there had been wide suppression in our press, and that this had been a mistake', and while insisting they put an end to the *Reasoner*, invited the pair to put proposals for continuing the discussion before the EC.[63] The second, September, issue was carefully timed to appear the day before the Executive Committee meeting issued an explicit instruction to close or face disciplinary sanction. Even now, the editors were hopeful of concessions, deciding to pause publication after a third issue, in a holding manoeuvre they hoped might yet pressure the leadership into allowing a full debate, while they appealed their inevitable suspension. The final *Reasoner* included an editorial (dated 31 October) announcing closure in order to give way to a 'serious socialist journal' with a larger board, urging the Party leadership to 'take steps adequate to the political crisis and itself … initiate the formation of such a journal.'[64]

For its part, the Executive Committee undertook a careful temperature testing of party feeling about the *Reasoner* controversy to inform its next move. A document summarising representations and resolutions made by party branches and groups reveals that disquiet was by no means confined to intellectuals but at the same time indicated partial success for the leadership's strategy. Thirty-eight representations supported the EC's instruction to close, though many qualified this by urging space for discussion in the party press, launch of a new party discussion journal or postponement of disciplinary action until matters could be fought out at the next congress. Seventeen representations opposing the EC's position were received, including from the writers' group ('in favour of independent publication, against EC statement, against disciplinary action'). Shawfields branch in Glasgow 'deplored' the EC instruction, while a group of Sheffield graduates were recorded as 'urging T&S to continue publication and offering to help them do so'. Among the 'non-committals' were the historians group, who opposed disciplinary action but at the same time asked the editors not to publish a third number.[65]

This game of tactics might have continued for some time longer, although the leadership felt it now had the upper hand. In the event, the *Reasoner* controversy was truncated as events in Hungary showed the limits of 'de-Stalinisation'. The British party decision to accept – against the eyewitness reports of *Daily Worker* journalist Peter Fryer, whose speaking out resulted in his expulsion – the Soviet line that military intervention was undertaken not to suppress popular revolt but to prevent counter-revolution and fascism polarised the situation. As Soviet tanks moved into Budapest to begin the second, decisive intervention on 4 November, the British leadership, notwithstanding an agonised meeting, passed a resolution that suppressed what they knew

in favour of full support of the Soviet action. 'The socialist system is being saved. The restoration of fascism is being prevented' it declared.[66] Outraged at the suppression of Fryer's reports, many *Daily Worker* staffers joined the next wave of resignees.[67] The *Reasoner* editors' efforts to conciliate and shift the party attitude from within were now redundant. With Saville just duplicating the third issue, including Thompson's 'Through the Smoke of Budapest', a passionate appeal for solidarity with the people of Hungary, there was time only to include a jointly-worded new editorial. This declared that 'the crisis in world communism is now different in kind' and marked 'a crucial turning point for our party'. It demanded the EC dissociate itself from Soviet actions, call for the withdrawal of troops, declare solidarity with the Polish Workers' Party and call immediate district congresses in preparation for a national Congress. With no hope of this occurring, it added 'we urge all those who, like ourselves, will dissociate themselves completely from the leadership of the British Communist Party, not to lose faith in socialism, and to find ways of keeping together'.[68] A few days after the EC moved to suspend Thompson and Saville on 11 November, they resigned. MI5 intercepted the party card that Thompson returned to Ramelson.

Intellectuals and 'Communist Principle'

> We believe that in our attempts to promote a serious discussion of Communist theory, we, and not the Executive Committee, have been defending Communist principle.[69]

Hungary and the British leadership's stance on it turned a stream of resignations into a flood. Yet one should be wary of assuming that the demands of 'communist principle' were self-evident, even in this more polarised situation, or that the decision to leave or to remain within the party betokened a clear dividing line. In making their challenge on grounds of 'communist principle', Thompson and Saville were evoking a range of meanings. 'Communist principle' implied distinction from and rejection of 'bourgeois' notions of abstract, universal moral principle. It entailed in practice, as we have seen, a commitment to self-discipline, the active suppression of individualism in pursuit of the collective interest. As such it could readily be mobilised against doubters, especially intellectuals, and for unity at all costs. Yet it also contained ideas of adherence to methodological principles of collective work, theoretical clarification, discussion and self-criticism. As the *Reasoner* affair proceeded, Thompson became firmer, or at least more forthright, in his view that the suppression of individuality, morality and conscience was an alien importation

with disastrous consequences, reparable however through recovery of homegrown traditions preceding but compatible with Marx. 'Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties', he demanded, via Milton, in 'Winter Wheat in Omsk'. Interestingly, while there is no suggestion that Saville disagreed with such an emphasis, his own invocations of 'communist principle' were almost invariably more pragmatic and tactical.

The positions of other oppositionally-minded intellectuals in the *Reasoner* controversy show a range of perspectives about what 'communist principle' might require, and in many cases these were argued out with the editors, whose correspondence shows ample recognition of the competing imperatives at play for each individual. Randall Swingler, a confidant of Thompson's who had resigned after attending the 24th Congress, was supportive of his friend's efforts but thought by making independent publication rights the issue they were 'narrowing the point of attack' and would be outmanoeuvred by the 'long outdated little clique' in King Street.[70] For him the party was irredeemable, and though he later joined the *New Reasoner* board, he remained aloof from the New Left, a marginal, largely ignored figure among the panoply of ex-communists. Lindsay, already viewed with suspicion in party circles, and like Thompson involved with both the writers' and historians' groups, took a different tack, attempting to act as a 'moderating influence' in the crisis.[71] In April he had urged on Pollitt regarding the Khrushchev revelations the need for 'sensitivity to the full issue and its possibilities', but after the *Reasoner* appeared wrote (jointly with Maurice Cornforth and Jack Beeching) a letter to its editors urging them to respect party discipline. 'Do you honestly expect to find a better party elsewhere?' expressed the nub of the issue as he saw it.[72] Lindsay stayed in, though he argued against suspending Saville and Thompson and strongly protested the EC position on Hungary.[73] His sense of being torn in different directions by the crisis was dramatised with heartfelt acuteness by Doris Lessing in *The Golden Notebook*. Though her first contribution to the *Reasoner* warned about seeming to become an 'intellectuals' revolt' scapegoating the leadership, she was among the closest to Thompson in putting the question of individual conscience to the forefront. Stalinism resulted not from an 'excess of individualism', but its opposite. 'The safeguard against tyranny, now, as it always has been, is to sharpen individuality, to strengthen individual responsibility, and not to delegate it.'[74] In December she resigned and, enclosing a copy of her resignation letter to Saville, told him she was beginning 'an incredibly witty and ideological novel which I only began inspired by the idea of you people starting a magazine'.[75]

The historians' group, despite its reputation, had no unanimity of view on the *Reasoner* controversy, although its demand that the leadership facilitate

a 'serious' party history was an obvious provocation.[76] Apart from the Thompsons and Saville, only Hilton contributed to the published *Reasoner*. His contribution, while supportive, warned that discussion should not be confined to intellectuals but must aim at overcoming the mistrust of non-communists in the labour movement. As the affair proceeded, his support intensified, and he more than once urged the editors to continue publishing even at the cost of expulsion.[77] After Hungary, he and Christopher Hill were the main instigators of a letter published in the *New Statesman* on 1 December after *The Daily Worker* refused it. Condemning the British leadership's 'uncritical support' of the Soviet action in Hungary, as the 'undesirable culmination of years of distortion of fact', it is sometimes identified with the historians' group but was in fact signed by a range of party intellectuals, including Hobsbawm, Victor Kiernan, Lindsay and E.A. Thompson, but also Lessing, Chimen Abramsky, Ron Meek and George Houston (who had produced *The Rhyming Reasoner*), Hyman Levy, Paul Hogarth, Robert Browning and Henry Collins.[78] MI5 telechecks on King Street show Matthews summoned from a meeting to speak to *Daily Worker* editor Campbell on 20 November about the letter, and that by 23rd a tortuous justification had been found for refusing it. 'Hitherto controversial letters have either been signed by individuals or by groups of people in the same branch or locality', wrote Campbell to Hill; printing it would therefore establish a new principle. Hill apparently reacted 'coldly' to this news, and warned that it would be sent elsewhere.[79] Hilton resigned soon after, according to a report of an intercepted conversation; 'Saville tells Ralph [Raphael Samuel] that Rodney is resigning, he is joining the Labour Party but is doing so (?resigning) without any fuss.'[80] Hill stayed to complete a critical minority report for the party's commission on inner-party democracy. His position on the *Reasoner* was that Thompson and Saville should have done more to get their views published in the party press, and he declined to subscribe.[81] Thompson, regretting this, surmised to Hilton that Hill's position as a reader of Russian might incline him to a view that 'he should bear as much guilt as anyone, and should stand beside them'.[82] Hill resigned after having tried, and failed, to shift the party at the next congress.

Other group members took a variety of paths; the young Raphael Samuel left in 1956, he and Kiernan (who left in 1959) were both involved with the New Left. Medievalist E.A. Thompson left in 1956. Brian Pearce published a pseudonymous pamphlet under the imprint of the *New Reasoner* in 1957; he soon after joined Gerry Healy and Peter Fryer's Trotskyist *Newsletter* group and was expelled from the CP.[83] Among those who stayed in the party (often earlier recruits than the leavers) were A.L. Morton, Maurice Dobb, Betty Grant and Klugmann. Dona Torr, acknowledged by many on the group as a major influence, died in 1957, having taken no part in the controversy. As for the chair

of the group, Hobsbawm, he was one of the very few intellectuals to remain in the party for the long haul while also establishing a formidable independent reputation. Friendly with Saville, Hobsbawm subscribed to the *Reasoner* despite finding its criticisms insufficiently constructive.[84] Minutes of the historians' group through 1956 show that he did what he could within the bounds of party discipline to support open discussion. A proposal he made in late 1956 to widen the membership and activities of the group beyond party lines was certainly partly designed to make good on his promise to resist any attempt to exclude Thompson and Saville from it (as well perhaps as to provide a more credible base for his own historical work), and he contributed an essay on Marx to the first *New Reasoner*.[85] Hobsbawm signed the *New Statesman* letter, but his individual correspondence was more forgiving of the leadership, describing the Soviet intervention as a 'at best, a tragic necessity' of which he approved 'albeit with a heavy heart'.[86] Such a balancing act irritated both loyalists and leavers, but fell short of provoking expulsion in a weakened party.

A final word goes to an anonymous remainer, a member of the party cultural committee who in late 1957 wrote a document opening discussion on *Declaration*, a collection of essays revitalising a longer-running debate around artistic and intellectual 'commitment'. The book was mocked as sentimental in the *Daily Worker*, but this writer engaged seriously with the argument of contributor Doris Lessing, that communism involved a basic ethical conflict between what is due to the collective and what to the individual. In words that might have passed muster with Thompson, he wrote:

> I believe Doris Lessing is right when she says that a writer must speak with his small personal voice … I believe that if what he wants to say in this personal voice conflicts with the party line then he must still say it. For it is not culture that must serve the party, it is the Party that must serve culture … This question of the relation between the individual and collective is the deepest problem of the socialist revolution. We have skirted round it, we have never faced it, and so we have shown ourselves indifferent to it. That I believe was the reason why Doris Lessing left the party.[87]

Conclusion

The dissidents of 1956, whether they left or remained, interpreted the demands of 'communist principle' in ways that were highly specific and individualised. This points to a complex picture of experience and commitment, adding weight to established arguments for acute sensitivity to the diversity of biographical and other contexts in party history. The MI5 files on these

figures accord occasional flashes of insight but overall give little indication that the indiscriminately extensive surveillance indulged in brought them much nearer to understanding the reasons for communist allegiance among these intellectuals, nor why some would leave and others remain. For this one needs to engage in 'imaginative understanding', 'thoughtful reflection grounded in historical evidence about the ideologies, cultures and experiences our subjects inhabited'.[88] If Thompson's appeal to conscience and humanity crystallised doubts for many, there were also those for whom this was politically naïve, and while a decision to leave the party can look obvious in retrospect, it was often not so at the time. As for Thompson himself, the released files add a little to our sense of his biography and confirm some continuities in his thinking, especially his concern with traditions of English moral radicalism. Although doing little to support any view of him as a strong voice of criticism inside the party prior to 1956, they help demonstrate the existence of a critically-minded subculture, a network of incipient dissidence that made the *Reasoner* episode possible. Critical attitudes were by no means confined to party intellectuals, let alone to one particular group, and the *Reasoner* drew support from many 'ordinary' party members. Yet the ability of the party partially to tolerate and contain these oppositional tendencies complicates the picture. 1956 for Thompson was life-changing in a way that differed even from his closest contemporaries like Saville and Swingler. His oft-quoted pun that he 'commenced to reason' in 1956 referenced the *Reasoner* episode but could not do full justice to the complexity of how it was experienced.

Notes

1   This article revises and expands an introduction to re-publication of E.P. Thompson's 'Through the Smoke of Budapest', https://revistanuestrahistoria.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/nh2_2016_madeleine.pdf (date accessed?). I am grateful to Adriá Llacuna and the editors of *Nuestra Historia* for permission to reprint, and to Kevin Morgan for helpful comments on a draft.

2   E.P. Thompson, 'Through the Smoke of Budapest', *The Reasoner* 3 (November 1956).

3   National Archives podcast, http://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/security-service-file-release-september-2016/ (date accessed?). Files on Thompson run from KV 2/4290 to KV 2/4294.

4   Letter from D. Haldane Porter to John (Jack) Rennie, 15 June 1956, KV 2/4292. The letter excerpted (document 94a) was from Thompson to Bert Ramelson, 28 May 1956 and is also available at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre (LHASC) Manchester, CP/CENT/ORG/18/04.

5   An authoritative recent study of the security services' monitoring of communists is William Styles, 'British Domestic Security Policy and Communist Subversion 1945–64' (unpublished DPhil, Cambridge, September 2016).

6   Melissa Benn, review of David Aaronovitch, *Party Animals* (Jonathan Cape, 2016), https://melissabenn.co.uk/writings/under-the-hammer-and-sickle-david-aaronovitchs-party-animals/ (date accessed?).

7   Michal Schatz, 'The Postwar Decade and "The Cage of Party Orthodoxy"', Socialist History 51 (2017): 8–28 .

8   John McIlroy, 'John Saville and Stalinism: An Exploration', and Paul Flewers, 'EP Thompson and the Soviet Experience' in Paul Flewers and John McIlroy (eds), *1956: John Saville, EP Thompson and* The Reasoner (London: Merlin, 2016).

9   Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times* (London: Penguin, 1992), 206.

10 Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: Verso,1980), 117.

11 McIlroy, 'John Saville' takes Saville to task for 'softness' on communism (363); Flewers, 'EP Thompson' argues that Thompson's 'sentimental attachment' to popular front communism precluded a serious engagement with Trotskyism (423).

12 First person accounts include John Saville 'The 20th Congress and the British Communist Party', Malcolm MacEwen 'The Day the Party had to Stop', Mervyn Jones 'Days of Tragedy and Farce', all in *Socialist Register*, 1976; John Saville, *Memoirs from the Left* (London: Merlin, 2003); Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*,197–210. David Renton, 'The Communist Party Historians and 1956', in Keith Flett (ed.), *1956 and All That* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 63–78 and Perry Anderson 'The Age of EJH', *London Review of Books*, 3 October 2002, 3–7, both question aspects of Hobsbawm's account.

13 See Terry Brotherstone 'History, Truth, Context and Meaning – Two Memories of the 1956–7 Crisis in the CPGB', in Flett, *1956 and All That*, 79–103.

14 Files on Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, Jack Lindsay, Doris Lessing and Randall Swingler are selectively consulted here. Saville's remains unavailable. Swingler's released files only go up to the start of 1956.

15 See John Callaghan and Mark Pythian 'State Surveillance and communist lives: rose Cohen and the Early British Communist Milieu', *Journal of Intelligence History* 12, no. 2 (2013): 134–55; Ben Harker 'Jack Lindsay's Alienation', *History Workshop Journal* 82, no. 1 (2016): 83–103; Geoff Andrews, *Shadow Man: At the Heart of the Cambridge Spy Circle* (I.B.Tauris, 2015).

16 See essays in Andy Croft (ed.), *A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1998); Kevin Morgan 'Comparative Communist History and the Biographical Turn', *History Compass* 10, no. 6 (June 2012) and *John McIlroy and Alan Campbell Party People, Communist Lives* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2002).

17 26 June 1949 report from Chief Constable of Halifax, document 31A, KV 2/4290.

18 James Smith, *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1930–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

19 Jennifer Luff, 'Covert and Overt Operations: Interwar Political Policing in the United States and the United Kingdom', *American Historical Review* 122, no. 3 (June 2017): 727–57.

20 See document 30a, KV2 4290.

21 The observations here draw from Styles, 'British Domestic Security Policy'.

22 Styles, 'British Domestic Security Policy', 53–4.

23 Styles, 'British Domestic Security Policy'.

24 For a summary discussion see John Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951–68* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2004), 50–5.

25 'Song of the Permanent Party Man' from *The Rhyming Reasoner*, CP/IND/MISC/19/11, LHASC. *The Rhyming Reasoner* was a satirical songsheet produced by Glasgow economists Ron Meek and George Houston. Authored by 'W.J. McGonagall' from 'the Elysian Fields', its two issues are well worth seeking out.

26 Thompson, 'Through the Smoke of Budapest'.

27 Saville joined during student days at LSE in 1934, Thompson in 1942, also as a student.

28 Callaghan, *Cold War*, 94.

29 E.P. Thompson, 'Edgell Rickword', in *Making History: Writings on History and Culture* (New York, New Press, 1994), 236.

30 See Schatz 'Post-war Decade' for a renewal of claims about the relatively wide extent of interpretive freedom permitted to intellectuals.

31 Thompson, 'Edgell Rickword', 236.

32 He made the admission in a 1950 party questionnaire that members or prospective members of national committees had to complete, intercepted by MI5. Lindsay file, KV 2/3255.

33 Thompson, 'Edgell Rickword', 234–5.

34 Thompson, 'Edgell Rickword', 236.

35 Andy Croft, *Comrade Heart: A Life of Randall Swingler* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 226.

36 Letter to Emile Burns, document 441, KV 2/4290, and to Margot Heinemann on 4 June 1952, KV 2/4290.

37 Hilton, letter to Ken Graves of Midlands District CP (Hilton was in Worcester Branch) 26 September 1955 KV2/4298.

38 See MacEwen, 'Day the Party had to Stop', 26.

39 See George Matthews, *World News*, 17 March 1956; Harry Pollitt 'The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU – and the Role of Stalin', *World New*s, 21 April and 5 May 1956.

40 Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month; The Great Debate', *Labour Monthly* (May 1956).

41 Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month: New times, New Measures', *Labour Monthly* J(une 1956; article dated 16 May 1956).

42 For Thompson's relationship with Klugmann and the background to their correspondence see Andrews, *Shadow Man*, 190–1.

43 Letter to Klugmann, 22 March 1956 CP/CENT/ORG/18/04, LHASC, also letter to Bert Ramelson 19 March 1956, KV 2/ 4291.

44 Letter to Pollitt, 22 March 1956, KV 2/ 4291.

45 Letter to Pollitt, 5 April 1956, KV 2/ 4292. Letter to John Saville, 4 April 1956, UDJS 1/68 Saville papers, Hull University Archives.

46 Saville to Gollan, 17 April 1956, CP/CENT/SEC/19/02, LHASC.

47 Minutes of 80th meeting of the committee of the Historians' Group, 8 April 1956, CP/ CENT/CULT/06/01. Hilton had written to the group secretary regretting his absence and remarking that he 'would have enjoyed listening to J Klugmann explain himself ', intercept note 6/4/56 to Edwin Payne, KV 2/4298.

48 Letter to Ramelson, 10 April 1956, KV 2/ 4292.

49 Resolution from Halifax branch, KV2 /4292.

50 13 April telephone intercept Gollan to Ramelson, KV 2/ 4292. Gollan said Thompson had a right to express his views and that he had a 'record of work and activity for which they were thankful'. Ramelson did manage to persuade Thompson to stay on the DC, though he did not moderate his criticisms.

51 Letter to Arnold Kettle enclosing suggestions for a minimum statement, n.d but early May 1956, KV 2/ 4292.

52 The 'Lessons of the 20th Congress of the CPSU', resolution of the executive committee of the CPGB, adopted 13 May, published in the *Daily Worker*, 16 May and *World News*, 19 May 1956. Thompson continued to press Ramelson on the deficiencies of the resolution, see letter n.d. but postmarked 16 May 1956, KV 2/4292.

53 John Saville, 'Problems of the Communist Party', *World News*, 19 May, 1956.

54   Letter to Arnold Kettle, n.d. but early May 1956, KV 2 4292. E.P. Thompson, 'Winter Wheat in Omsk', *World News*, 30 June 1956.

55   Lascar extract (Lascar was code for the King Street listening device), 22 May 1956, Document 93b KV 2/ 4292.

56   Thompson to Ramelson, 28 May 1956, CP/CENT/ORG/18/04, also KV 2/ 4292.

57   Letter to Howard Hill, n.d. but June 1956, KV 2/4292.

58   Letter to Gordon Schaffer, 12 June 1956, KV 2 /4292. See also letters to Jim Roche and Jack Cohen in the same file.

59   Thompson and Saville disputed the EC's claim that independent publication constituted a breach of party rules, arguing that no such explicit rule existed and that the EC relied on an 'explanation that under Rule 27 the EC is empowered to interpret the other rules as it sees fit, and has found it possible to interpret several rules to mean what in fact they do not say'. 'Statement by the Editors of *The Reasoner*,' *The Reasoner* 3 (November 1956). However, as the EC pointed out, the general principle that democratic centralism entailed control of the party press by the elected committees of the party was well understood.

60   Letter from Saville to Gollan 13 July 1956. CP/CENT/ORG/18/04.

61   Thompson, 'Winter Wheat in Omsk' and George Matthews 'A Caricature of Our Party' *World News*, 30 June 1956.

62   Thompson 'Reply to George Matthews' *The Reasoner* 1 (July 1956).

63   Thompson to Howard [Hill], 9 November 1956, CP/CENT/ORG/18/04.

64   Editorial, *The Reasoner* 3 (November 1956).

65   CP/CENT/SEC 19/02, LHASC. The historians' group position was a tactical one that had been discussed by Saville and Hobsbawm. At a meeting of the group on 30 September, it was noted that some had hoped the group might do something to bring an end to *The Reasoner* impasse, but that the proper route for representations to the editors and party leaders was through branch or individual action. CP/CENT/CULT/06/01.

66   EC statement on Hungary, published in the *Daily Worker*, 5 November 1956, p. 1.

67   Several contributed to or supported *The Reasoner* including celebrated cartoonist 'Gabriel' (Jimmy Friell).

68   Editorial, *The Reasoner* 3 (November 1956).

69   Statement by the editors of *The Reasoner*, sent by Thompson to Bert Ramelson with his party card, 13 December 1956, KV 2/4292.

70   Croft, *Comrade Heart*, 226, 228.

71   Lindsay to Pollitt, 2 April 1956, KV 2/ 3256.

72   Cornforth, Beeching and Lindsay to Thompson and Saville, CP/CENT/SEC/18/04.

73   Lindsay to Burns, 13 November 1956, KV 2/3256.

74   Doris Lessing 'A letter to the editors', *The Reasoner* 2 (September 1956), and 'The Cult of the Individual' 3 (November 1956).

75   Lessing to Saville, n.d. but covering a letter to Gollan dated 11 December 1956, UDJS 1/68.

76   This was, as Hobsbawm notes, the group's 'only collective intervention' in the crisis, *Interesting Times*, 207. The resulting commission had Brian Pearce and Hobsbawm for the historians, Pollitt and Dutt for the leadership and Klugmann, the eventual writer of an anodyne official history, in the middle.

77   Rodney Hilton, 'Labour Communist Relations', *The Reasoner* 2 (September 1956); letter to Saville and Thompson, 30 July 1956, UDJS 1/71, Saville papers, and another on 2 November (a copy of which was provided to me by Richard Saville).

78 *New Statesman*, 1 December 1956. Evan Smith's blog has useful pieces on the letter and the historians' involvement, see https://hatfulofhistory.wordpress.com/category/historians-group-of-the-cpgb/ (date accessed?).

79 Hill, KV 2 3945.

80 Telecheck, 22.1.57, doc 92A KV 2 4299 Hilton.

81 Hill to Thompson and Saville, 31 July 1956, CP/CENT/SEC/19/02, LHASC.

82 Thompson to Hilton, 13 Aug 1956, UDJS 1/71. Saville papers.

83 Joseph Redman 'The Communist Party and the Labour Left, 1925–29', *Reasoner Pamphlet* (1 April 1957). For group members' trajectories see Renton 'The Communist Party Historians'.

84 Hobsbawm to 'Stam' 15 July 1956, UDJS 1/71.

85 Eric Hobsbawm, 'Dr Marx and the Victorian Critics', *New Reasoner* 1 (Summer 1957). On proposals to reorganize the group see minutes of 93rd (emergency) full committee meeting, 25 November, 1956 and other group minutes on CP/CENT/CULT/05/13.

86 Hobsbawm, letter to the *Daily Worker*, 9 November 1956. For a critical view of Hobsbawm's role see Terry Brotherstone, 'Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012): Some Questions from a Never-completed Conversation About History', *Critique* 41, no. 2 (2013): 276.

87 'Opening of Discussion on Declaration; Cultural Committee 13/12/57', CP/CENT/CULT/1/2.

88 A point well made by Luff, 'Covert and Overt Operations', 755.

Raymond Williams and the Possibilities of 'Committed' Marxism

Nick Stevenson

Abstract

Raymond Williams's connection to Marxist ideas is often by-passed in more contemporary discussions. Here I seek to both explore Williams's Marxism in relation to questions of democracy, ecology and the politics of place. Rather than assuming these questions are only of historical interest, this discussion seeks to demonstrate that they have a great to say about our current neoliberal times. Especially pressing in this respect is the emergence of a radical politics of the commons that can be connected to recent debates in respect of the global anti-capitalist movement and a more radical form of social democracy that has emerged in the British context. Arguably these debates will have a great deal to say about the future of socialism in the twenty-first century. In this respect, I seek to argue along with Williams that a politics of place and location (including radical nationalism) is far from outmoded in the modern world. The essay concludes by suggesting that the Marxist tradition represented by Williams is likely to remain important to our collective futures.

*

At the end of the Cold War Marxist thought entered into a long crisis from which it is only just beginning to emerge. After 1989 it was no longer clear, apart from a few revolutionary outposts, what a commitment to Marxism meant. Not surprisingly, a generation of intellectuals who had previously called themselves Marxists either abandoned a relationship to revolutionary ideals or very quickly affixed a prefix to make post-Marxism. Marxism was charged with being intrinsically authoritarian, statist and hierarchical in the way it sought to manage the economy and wider society. These features remain a powerful strain within Marxism: many groups on the revolutionary Left survive as hierarchical organisations wedded to ideas from a more insurrectionary political period. Yet there remain alternative configurations of Marxism capable of reinventing themselves in the context of the present. A widely read collection of essays, quickly issued by Verso after the fall of the Berlin Wall, featured Jürgen Habermas.[1] One of the European Left's leading intellectuals, Habermas argued that socialists need to give up ideas of overthrowing the system and focus instead upon moral and cultural concerns. Socialism became

less about questions of ownership and control and more concerned with the redistribution of power through democratic means, as Left debate sought to reinvent social democracy for the emergent global age. The old model of socialism stood accused of seeking to capture state power, leading to the eventual subordination of civil society. However Raymond Williams, and the New Left more generally, had long been critical of the kinds of Leninist transformation that Habermas depicted. Williams had his own ambivalences around the term 'Marxist', but generally seemed to feel that it articulated a complex tradition of thought that had been significant in the formation of the New Left.[2] However, unlike many others who remained connected to Marxism, Williams was engaged in a careful exercise in re-thinking what this legacy might come to mean in the future.

According to Williams there were broadly two main traditions of socialism addressed by the New Left: Stalinism and Fabianism. If the failures of Stalinism were evident to many on the New Left then Fabianism had failed due to its inability to identify capitalism as 'an enemy'.[3] For Williams this 'enemy' was 'not just an electoral enemy, but a hostile and organized social formation which is actively trying to defeat and destroy you'.[4] The language of friends and enemies, however, had no place in the post-Marxist future and implied a previous generation's lack of theoretical sophistication perhaps hidden authoritarian intentions. Chantal Mouffe argued that we need to replace the language of enemies (and associated languages of victories and defeats) with a struggle between adversaries.[5] Indeed, she was to insist that democratic citizenship depended upon such a process. While Mouffe undoubtedly has a point, the adoption of a more neutral language masks the loss of something valuable. If Williams maintains a complex connection to Marxism as a tradition rather than as a doctrine, it was because he perceived that any humane and genuinely democratic future was not really possible within a society whose priorities were shaped by the needs and interests of capital. Williams retained a connection to Marxism as he recognised that a more democratic society could only emerge after a long process of cultural and material struggle on the part of the organised working class. The idea of society being constituted by a central fault-line like that between capital and labour was, after the collapse of 'actually existing' socialism, dismissed as both outdated and essentialist. Again Chantal Mouffe, despite recognising key weaknesses in third way 1990s socialism, fails to appreciate that her desired programme of reform would be fiercely resisted by the capitalist ruling class in both material and cultural terms.[6]

As Williams well understood, part of the project of the New Right in the 1980s involved the 'actual defeat of major sectors of the working class, in prolonged mass unemployment and in the restoration of the absolute prerogatives of capital'.[7] Despite the adoption of progressive social democracy

by much of the Left after 1989, much contemporary analysis lacks a more critical understanding of capitalism as a system. This has been a significant loss to our collective thinking and one of the reasons why Williams's writing has taken on a renewed importance after the banking crash of 2008.

If Williams was sometimes ambivalent about the term 'Marxist', this was because, despite his admiration of Marx, he was unsure about being so closely identified with one thinker, and he hoped to escape the Cold War disdain for the idea of Communism.[8] For Williams, commitment was poorly captured by words such as 'choice' as this failed to recognise the ways in which we had been 'made' by specific historical and cultural experiences.[9] Williams's sense of being 'significantly aligned' with Marxism had a number of sources, including his own early experiences of class politics, Communism in the 1930s and involvement with the New Left in the 1960s.[10] E.P. Thompson, who shared a similar commitment to the Marxist tradition, was especially interested in a living tradition that had become defined more through a popular struggle for democracy than abstract theoretical debates.[11] If Williams had been the subject of Thompson's rebuke for neglecting to connect the idea of culture to the struggle for a different society we need not overstate their differences.[12] Both Williams and Thompson had a shared connection to a form of Marxism that grew out of different historical circumstances and would need to be re-thought, depending upon historical time and geographical location. For Thompson this meant a popular tradition that included the Diggers, Levellers and on through the Chartists, resisting the rule of private property and governments.[13]

What became significant here was not *whether* Marxism, but more crucially which kind of Marxism? As Terry Eagleton has argued, the centrality of the class struggle remains determined by the need to gain democratic control over economic surplus or profit.[14] More recent debates about the so-called 'decline of class' remain wide of the mark. Indeed, since Williams's time what has happened is that the priorities of capital have been increasingly extended through society under the guise of 'austerity' and the dominance of neoliberal ideas. Similarly, David Harvey has argued that the democratisation of society depends upon control over the economic surplus.[15] In this respect, neoliberalism remains hostile to social and cultural priorities, instead promoting control by private corporations and elites. Having said this, Williams would have been quick to remind us of contestations that go on within Marxism and would have refused any dogmatic position that could not recognise some of the gains of the social democratic period.[16] Here I think we continue to need Williams's subtle thinking, should the debate over the future of the Left and Marxism more generally simply fall into the identification of opposed camps. Williams's writing on Marxism and democracy remains valuable for the way he carefully sought to think through tough and often historically contingent

problems. In reviewing the Marxist thought of the post-war period, Williams not only suggests that Marxism is necessarily always in the process of being re-thought but also that it needs to be clearly understood in terms of the role it plays in specific contexts.[17] Here Williams suggests that to polarise reformism and revolution is often deeply unhelpful; instead, we need more careful forms of dialogue between different traditions and forms of analysis.

Williams's 'commitment' to Marxism was a defining feature of especially his late work and should not be understood as an aberration or afterthought. Further, a stubborn commitment to Marxism is not only defensible, but increasingly important in the context of the early twenty-first century. This will mean refusing to allow those who oppose Marxism to consign it to the museum, but equally it will (following Williams) require a certain amount of careful and pragmatic re-imagining, not simply in terms of its often bloody history, but how it connects to ongoing features of the class struggle. Before thinking about how this might be done I want to look more closely at Williams's own relationship to Marxism, and how it remains significant. Overwhelmingly for Williams, his committed Marxism meant the deliberate and conscious choosing of sides within the class struggle. It also meant 'an emphasis on creative impulses "rooted in the people and the proletariat", and a corresponding opposition to creative impulses arising from other classes and ideologies'.[18] These ideas Williams assumed were foundational for anyone who wished to maintain a connection to the Marxist tradition. It would not be enough for scholars simply to turn Marxism into another academic area that might be studied. Instead the central thrust of critical work would need to work on 'the connection of theory and practice'.[19] Here Williams is indicating the importance of work that seeks to close the gap between critical work and a prevailing set of social and cultural practices we would need to describe as undemocratic, unjust or exploitative. For Williams, genuinely Marxist forms of inquiry were less about the defence of dogma or description, but more concerned with arguing for a genuinely humane and creative society that made use of the latent potential of the mass of the population who capitalism either used for its own purposes or left to live wasted lives trapped in poverty and unequal social relations. Critical forms of Marxism are then charged not only to rethink its legacy in the light of a changing society, but equally to close the gap between critical forms of analysis and more contemporary possibilities for emancipation.

Nick Stevenson

A Democratic Marxism

In terms of William's Marxism I would like to develop a number of themes that link together questions of democracy and decentralisation, his concerns with place, identity and nationalism, and ecological ideas. Williams's desire to develop a democratic critical theory of society is clearly evident within much of his early writing. For example, Williams argues that what he called the 'long revolution' was the struggle for an 'educated and participatory democracy'.[20] These features would clearly have implications for the way we organised some of the main institutions including the economy, media of mass communication and education system amongst others. A critical and educated citizenry not only requires participatory structures, but equally a break from the structures of a society built upon rank, hierarchy and privilege as well as the seductions of the market that addressed people principally as consumers. Later, during the 1980s, Williams was to argue more pessimistically that the democratic potential of the working-class movement and others was becoming subsumed into 'Plan X' or a society build upon the logic and assumptions of the market.[21] The main means through which capitalism was to be countered was through the election of a genuinely Left government and the insistence upon the recovery of the self-management tradition. During this period the struggle for a more democratic and less hierarchical society had entered into a new phase. Here Williams remarks, 'there is no real point in pretending that the capitalist order has not done its main job of implanting a deep assent to capitalism even in a period of its most evident economic failures'.[22] Despite Williams's ongoing optimism concerning the possibility of democratised society, it was, as ever, critical not only to point to the forces of optimism and hope but at the same time recognise the precise historical point from where this project would need to emerge.

These concerns also need to be linked to Williams's preoccupation with his own Welshness and sense of belonging in relation to certain places that come to the fore. The theme of cultural nationalism and the need to explore local experiences is not, of course, new to Williams. His early chapter 'Images of Society' contains a detailed analysis of different ways of representing 'the British' as either subjects or citizens.[23] These features are especially present within his final novels, but can of course be found elsewhere.[24] In this respect, it is worth investigating Paul Gilroy's well known critique of the position that Williams seemed to adopt in *Towards 2000*. Gilroy's view is concerned about the way that Williams's writing fails to reflect upon the experience of recently arrived migrants or other populations that have more complex ties of belonging that may indeed go beyond the nation. Indeed he is right that these features are missing from the argument. In the chapter 'The Culture of

Nations' Williams, having recognised that nations often speak a language of belonging and connection that cannot be met by capitalism, goes on to argue that within the modern world many of these constructions are somewhat artificial. For example 'the Yookay' is often addressed as if it were simply a means of enforcing transnational efficiency in the interests of international capital.[25] In addition 'frenetic nationalism' can be a means by which social divisions and conflicts of interest are maintained by the status quo.[26] The point being that the artificiality of these constructs is no substitute for what Williams terms more 'rooted settlements', whose complexity over the generations have helped sustain different forms of collective identity.[27] If in the European context the nation-state is at 'once too large and too small for the range of real social purposes' then we are compelled to address the complexity of more 'lived' and less 'alienated' constructions.[28] Yet as Gilroy rightly points out, ideas around a lack of rootedness can easily become mobilised by racists and ethnic nationalists.[29] This is an important criticism and yet Williams's point remains about how social and cultural identities are more about lived connections than legalistic criteria.

In a talk given to the Socialist Society in 1983, Williams contrasts the jingoistic British nationalism evident within the 'Falklands War' with the possibility of newly emerged nationalisms becoming the focus for an alternative socialist project.[30] Submerged nationalisms and more local identities remain significant as a source of collective solidarity within either processes of de-industrialisation or new forms of control being exercised through the media and state. This is not to argue that Williams treated his own relationship with his Welsh identity as anything other than complex. As we saw earlier, Williams often seeks to distance himself from a detached Marxism that is unable to relate to the complexity of more place-specific identities. The refusal to engage in the complexity of our relationship with place was indicative of more 'scientific', 'analytic' or 'positivist' strands within Marxism with which Williams found himself in sharp disagreement.[31] David Harvey's view is that while Williams saw more abstract forms of argument as necessary, we need to be careful not to overly disconnect people from their attachment to place and more specific loyalties.[32] This was mainly because the capitalistic mode of thinking and feeling that dominates our society depends upon viewing people as moveable economic units. Williams's Marxism did not fail to recognise the power of class relationships and capital in determining society, but in certain versions remained connected to the dominant logic of capitalism. If these themes are often overlooked (or at least underplayed) by some of the scholarship on Williams we might consider whether they could be said to have a broader relevance. Here I am thinking of the rise of English nationalism and the development of the alter-globalisation movement, both of which mostly emerged after

Williams's death in 1988. Williams himself recognised that the images we often associate with Englishness are overtly class-based, obscuring more complex accounts, and that a decline in British (or indeed English) imperial power had partially paved the way for the emergence of Welsh identity.[33] The cultural question that emerges for Williams is how he might live his own connection to Welsh identity: there were obviously different ways of being Welsh and his own depended upon the construction of a Welsh identity that could work towards more communal and place-specific versions of socialism. Clearly Williams hoped that a submerged nationalism and other local identities might breathe new life into the relationship between socialism and ecology.

If the eco-socialism of the future were to operate in a more complex society than that of capitalism, this would be because of an urgent need to break with ideas related to economic growth and associated capitalistic ideas of progress.[34] What matters instead is not only how goods are distributed, but also 'other kinds of production, notably the renewed interest in agriculture and forestry, in new forms of energy production and of transport, and in various kinds of more locally based, non-exploitative and also renewable and non-obsolescent kinds of work'.[35] The radically localised and socialised economy necessarily involves a different relationship to place as a space of 'bonding', but also as a distinctive location whose cultural difference is more likely to become apparent after breaking with the homogeneity imposed by capitalism.[36] If socialism depends upon the decentralisation of control and the revival of ideas of self-management, this is best expressed through a diversity of traditions and more complex appreciation of local identities than the dominance of the British state allows. This would mean breaking with the priorities of capitalism and consumerism in order to build a democracy based upon more direct forms of control, the satisfaction of basic human needs and self-development. These priorities would require a cultural revolution that radically democratised society and re-thought questions of production, work, care and other human relationships.[37] More recently Serge Latouche has sought to counter the productivist and consumerist society of capitalism based upon the idea of unlimited expansion with an ecological and democratised society that recognises the material limits of society.[38] This is an explicitly anti-capitalistic politics that both recognises the idea of localising the economy and rejects the false utopia of consumerism. A more emancipated society would be one where we learn to both consume and work less while building opportunities for expanded forms of human fulfilment. Here I want to argue that this set of ideas continues to have much to offer more contemporary debates on the potentially emancipated societies of the future.

A Sense of Citizenship

Radical politics is about human flourishing and self-realisation. Terry Eagleton comments that to 'live a really fulfilling life, we have to be allowed to do what we do just for the sake of it'.[39] In this context, socialism becomes a means of organising social life to make self-realisation a collective as well as reciprocal affair. But capitalism has a certain form of instrumentality that is intrinsic to how it operates, driving society for greater productivity, effort in the workplace or indeed profit. This means that radical politics is inevitably involved in a discussion of morality as well as particular social and historical contexts. Williams joins a number of other libertarian socialists – Murray Bookchin, Cornelius Castoriadis, Andre Gorz, Ivan Illich, E.P. Thompson and others – who are explicitly involved in rethinking what socialism might come to mean in an age of ecological limits.[40] In short, the outer limits of capitalism are not only a matter of the strain it places on the lives of the working class but also the pressure it places upon the sustainability of human and non-human life. This means not only that capitalism is structured around inequality and exploitation, but also that it threatens the possibility of life (and inevitably fulfilment) on the planet. If the culture of capitalism insists upon consumerism and a disposition of 'more is never enough' then more radical forms of politics would be required to adopt a more (and not less) materialist approach.[41] What becomes pressing in this situation is self-government, not being led by a hierarchy; and production for human needs, not the 'wants' of a consumer culture.[42] The new eco-socialist politics would require a revival of the self-management tradition whereby workers can be directly involved in discussions about production that is necessarily geared around questions of need rather than the more environmentally destructive imperatives of capitalism.

Here I want to argue that many of Williams's more radical ecological arguments are being kept alive by the alter-globalisation movement, which often imagines the global ecological commons under threat from a predatory capitalism utilising war, environmental destruction and exploitative social relations as a means of enclosing the commons. By taking direct action from below, the aim of those seeking to resist capitalist enclosure is to defend all that is free and then can be shared. Resistance against the enclosure of parks through property development, ecological landscapes through fracking, the surveillance of the net or the shutting of public libraries – the defence of common resources that can be enjoyed by citizens relatively free from hierarchical control. The commons is guarded as a space of freedom from control from above, and as a space that can be transformed by bottom-up energies opening up co-operatives and new modes of organisation.[43] Giovanna Ricoveri argues that the commons is best imagined as a form of direct

democracy where the local community seeks to gain control by establishing food banks, co-operatives, sustainable energy, public water supplies and access to common land for recreation and play.[44] The precise shape of the struggle for the commons will depend upon the character and shape of the locality. David Harvey refers to the assault upon the rights of the commons, downward pressure on labour and the repression of alternatives as neoliberalism imposing a logic of 'accumulation by dispossession'.[45] Since 1973 this has become the primary means of organising the capitalist economy, as citizens become increasingly subject to the rule of capital and previously publicly or commonly owned assets are privatised. The dominance of neoliberal assumptions within mainstream policy debates has inevitably marginalised more radical ideas involved in the transformation of the economy and pushed much of the Left into a position of seeking to protect social democracy. Meanwhile the more radical leanings of the alter-globalisation movement have helped keep an alternative political imagination alive.

However, if recent debate on the idea of the commons has breathed new life back into Marxist and anarchist debates, this was not the direction taken by many discussions on the Left in the aftermath of the Cold War. Here there was a general sense that state-planned socialism had failed and there was a need to revive a discussion based upon rights, obligations and a sense of belonging through national forms of citizenship. These debates dominated much of the political discussion of the 1990s and were central to the idea of the Third Way adopted by New Labour. The sociologist Anthony Giddens – who was a key architect of the Third Way – argued that the state should be positive about globalisation and insisted there could be 'no rights without responsibilities'.[46] The problem is that social democracy had treated rights 'as unconditional claims'.[47] There were of course other Left-orientated thinkers like Chantal Mouffe who pointed out that the Third Way had entirely erased the languages of capitalism and class, thereby removing any sense of a democratic struggle.[48] Yet, as I suggested earlier, the absence of Marxism from the conversation and the dominance of the New Right meant that much of the Left conceived of problems of social justice and ecology as an exclusive matter for state policy. Further, ideas around ecological citizenship adopted an analytical language and spoke of the need to emphasise issues related to responsibility over those of rights.[49] While many of these debates were progressive in that they recognised questions related to virtues such as care and compassion, there was little mention of capitalism or of an ecological politics that recognised the bonds of place. Since the passing of Raymond Williams it is arguable that a more radical language is required in respect of the ecological commons that recognises the importance of social and cultural needs over that of global capitalism.

Many of the debates around citizenship have shifted their tone since the financial collapse of 2008, adopting a more critical frame of reference in relation to capitalism. Jonathan Rutherford (who briefly became associated with a group within the Labour Party called Blue Labour) suggested that social democracy is losing its way as it has lost its connection to the local.[50] While Rutherford was exploring a specifically English identity his conclusions had implications for other European socialists, who he suggested form deeper forms of connection to national and local rather than cosmopolitan identities. The Third Way had championed a top-down, technocratic politics which was disconnected from any language of place or belonging. Here there is an explicit need for the Left to address the terrain occupied by the right-wing populism of the English Defence League and UKIP. The loss of jobs for life and the fragmentation of communities has meant that many (especially men) have experienced a loss of identity. For example, a recent sociological study of the lives of young men attracted to the English Defence League uncovered a sense of exclusion, anger and precariousness with little contact to or understanding of the history and traditions of the labour movement.[51] Neoliberalism has brutally undermined family life and the wider community, making access to well-paid employment difficult. This has helped support a wider sense of anger and resentment in the context of de-industrialisation.

Ironically, if Raymond Williams had felt that submerged national and local identities could become a vehicle for the renewal of socialism, then more recently Scotland and England have supplied different solutions to this problem. While the recent success of the Scottish National Party has been a result for more progressive forces, within England the populist Right for a time won the upper hand. For Rutherford to reconnect with working-class people he suggests that the rise of the populist Right means that the social democratic project needs to be re-articulated in more conservative terms. This is a brave essay dealing with a number of questions that make many on the Left of politics feel deeply uncomfortable. Many on the English Left dislike discussing nationhood, preferring to speak of cosmopolitanism or a broader engagement with more radical social movements. The problem with such a view is that it tends to see the politics of nationhood as intrinsically reactionary and racist. Indeed, this is the view that many in cultural studies more generally are seemingly prepared to defend. Paul Gilroy argues that national politics and race are inevitably connected and dominate citizenship through nationalist displays of flags, military hardware and 'fantasies of absolute cultural identity'.[52] This means that alternative modernities can only be found within more cosmopolitan and border-crossing identities, less fixed to place and settlement.

With good reason, a more emancipatory politics is cautious about entangling itself within nationalist or place-based politics. Yet as Terry Eagleton suggests, it is possible to recognise that if Williams often described himself as a 'Welsh European', he did so in recognition that more local and global affiliations are not necessarily at war with one another.[53] If Gilroy is right to point to the histories of war and ethnic nationalism and its problematic relationship to race there are other ways of imagining more local and national feelings of belonging. What mattered to Williams was the ability to conceive of radical versions of identity that connected to the local, national and more global sensibilities. This has been replicated in much of the literature produced by the alter-globalisation movement that has sought to describe resistance against capitalist enclosure undertaken by a range of different identity constructions. Naomi Klein describes how social movements from below need to find local, global and national expression to refuse a model of economic growth that requires the continued extraction of new sources of carbon-based energy.[54] The version of the commons claimed by these movements will require both the ability to resist the power of corporations while engaging in more long-term planning for a sustainable energy supply.[55] Inevitably this will include complex webs of citizenship-based identity including national formations. The climate justice movement is called on to defend our shared ecological commons by working through a number of levels at the same time. However, we might be forgiven for thinking that within England the commons could only really be defended by more global and local forces, given the grip the Right currently exercise over national identity. However, this is far from being the case.

Remaking English Marxism and the Commons

The idea of there being a radical Englishness is of course fraught with difficulty. However, just as Williams's own Marxism engaged with national feelings and sentiments, so there is a need to explore these dimensions. A careful reading of his writing suggests there is little mileage in the Left's seeking to ape the social conservativism of UKIP. Many commentators have pointed to how UKIP have successfully gained support amongst voters who live in areas of economic decline and who tend to blame immigration for their problems.[56] These arguments are used to support a more culturally conservative Left of family, faith and flag. Such views perhaps echo those of Rutherford and Blue Labour, as discussed earlier.[57] Williams, however, would have quickly reminded us that more progressive ideas require a commitment to more emancipatory forms of politics while engaging with the historical and cultural complexity of English identities.

Williams recognised how the work of George Orwell was often presumed to evoke a radical Englishness.[58] This is precisely what Ben Clarke tries to do by explicitly rejecting some of Williams's more cautious remarks in this respect.[59] Indeed, we might argue that Orwell remains a deeply ambivalent figure for more progressive forms of thinking, both defending liberty and freedom of thought while in the next breath ruthlessly silencing his critics.[60] It is notable how Christopher Hitchens, who has written so passionately on Orwell, used virtually the same tactics against Left critics of the war on terror.[61] Scott Lucas demonstrates how the so-called 'tough liberalism' seemingly derived from Orwell was used to police dissent by critics of the war on terror by either declaring them unpatriotic or as seeking to defend dictators from attack. [62] For Williams Orwell's Englishness remains trapped within a class-bound logic that defends the right of the privileged to speak while maintaining a deep sense of ambivalence concerning the so called lower orders.[63] Indeed, E.P. Thompson, Williams's New Left associate, argued that the historical legacy of Orwell in the post-war period (irrespective of what he may have intended) became a means of maintaining the polarities of Cold War thinking.[64] For Thompson this was significant for producing views that suggested that the Cold War world could be constructed through an opposition between totalitarianism and freedom. This logic, Thompson warned, was deeply hostile to the possibilities of more democratic alternatives emerging, and when they did – as in Hungary in 1956 – they were soon sucked back into the system. Orwell became an intellectual battering ram used against those who struggled from below for more independent and progressive socialist alternatives.

This is not to argue that Orwell's liberalism does not connect to a suggestive strain of English thought that might be said to include Thomas Hobhouse, John Stuart Mill and Colin Ward, all of whom sought to defend the idea of liberty against more authoritarian currents. This is a conflict that cuts across ideas of liberalism, socialism and anarchism and that could be drawn upon to fashion a sense of belonging out of less conservative patterns of writing. The history of English libertarian thought could be said to offer a counterweight to some of the more prevalent conservative assumptions that are connected to more current debates on Englishness. In this respect, Thompson's work as a historian can be associated with the rebellious history of the English commoner.[65] The idea of the commons is, of course, not an exclusively English story, but could be said to have special relevance to a submerged radical national identity. This is worth investigating as it potentially ties together some of the concerns of the alter-globalisation movement while also articulating a more rebellious English identity. Indeed, if Marxism is to be re-made within the English setting then these contours are likely to remain crucial.

The radical culture 'made' by the English working class so famously restored by Thompson was partially a result of the 'class robbery' performed through the enclosure of common land.[66] However, what mattered just as much in shaping the protests was the historical inheritance of the idea of the 'free born Englishman'. These freedoms ('freedom from arbitrary arrest, trial by jury, equality before the law, the freedom of the home from arbitrary entrance and search', amongst others) helped form a libertarian consensus amongst the working class.[67] These liberties held by the community against the state can be traced back to the Magna Carta. Peter Linebaugh (originally a student of Thompson's) argues in an important book that Magna Carta remains significant in perhaps three senses.[68] Firstly, that it was designed to 'curtail the powers of the sovereign', thereby suggesting that law is not simply an expression of ruling-class power.[69] Secondly, that what has been forgotten is that the Magna Carta contained two charters – one based upon what we might call civil rights, and another charter that sought to establish rights to the forest. This was significant, as for commoners the forest was a source of identity; herbs for healing, festivals, play and of course food. Magna Carta establishes a different idea of freedom to the narrow definitions of neoliberalism, suggesting that civil and social rights are linked. The commons needed to be enclosed to capitalise the land and to produce wage labourers, thereby separating people from a means of subsistence. Finally, Magna Carta remains an important source not only of the idea of the 'free born' English, but equally has the cause of freedom across the planet, influencing the American constitution, the idea of human rights, the Zapatista rebellion and, of course, Chartism. E.P. Thompson drew on the diverse traditions of English radicalism when he sought to defeat the arguments of fellow Marxist historians or more right-wing critics who assumed that the English did not have their own rebellious and radical past. Part of the 'pecularities of the English' was the use of law and its ability to utilise defensive means in order to protect historical gains like the welfare state.[70] The radical and dissenting culture of the English, as Thompson recognised, is not specifically Marxist but nevertheless acted as a major restraint on ruling-class power. Historically English commoners were seemingly at their most dangerous and radical when trying to protect what were seen as their customary rights to wood, fuel, land and bread.[71] In other words, following Thompson and Williams, the relevance of a more place-specific and ecological Marxism of the future would depend upon its ability to exhibit an openness to these and other radical histories.

More recently David Horspool has sought to track the radicalness of the English by arguing that it should not be seen as an exclusive property of the Left.[72]

However, perhaps agreeing with Thompson, we should remember that the 'English have proved remarkably tenacious rebels, but rather less than effective revolutionaries'.[73] As Thompson recognises, it was during the Chartist period that the English came closest to a revolution. Dorothy Thompson (writing with E.P. Thompson) outlines the revolutionary nature of the Halifax Chartists who, inspired by the French Revolution, galvanised themselves with the slogan 'France has the Republic, England shall have the Charter'.[74] English radicalism in this respect historically worked through public meetings, the production of pamphlets and attempts to change the law rather than attempts to overthrow the system. This stops short of those calling for a short sharp revolution, but at the same time is not readily reconciled with more reactionary formations. The recent work of Michael Kenny is important here, pointing to the complexities of the historical debate in respect of Englishness and the cultural resources that are clearly available to re-make it in more civic terms.[75]

The idea of a grass-roots English radicalness has recently been revived by Paul Kingsnorth as a reaction against the sterilised environments required by a consumer culture built on an explicitly manufactured, placeless culture.[76] Neoliberal corporate globalisation has produced the 'citizens of nowhere', seeking to flatten out local difference and diversity.[77] This has helped produce a sense of Englishness under threat by a culture of sameness. This is a world that has been made safe for corporations, specifically middle-class lifestyles and gentrification seeking to uproot people who do not fit into this project. More explicitly, what is emerging is the defence of the local and distinctive against a number of projects from airport expansion to motorway widening and supermarket growth to the construction of yuppie flats. Notably, what is at stake in many of these cultural developments is a sense of belonging that is perceived to be under threat by the corporate and inauthentic. Similar to the radicalism of the commoners discovered by Thompson, what Kingsnorth articulates is what happens when a resurgent localism is pitted against capitalist modernisation projects. The attempt to preserve the customary can become articulated by a number of differing political agendas including the defence of the commons. Indeed this tradition may well have a considerable role to play in mobilising popular sentiment against top-down projects such as HS2 rail that threaten rural communities or, just as significantly, the practice of fracking that is often contested by local people as well as green movements and organisations.

Kingsnorth's journalistic impressions end with a plea to imagine 'a future in which England is not a vain consumer monoculture, but a patchwork of living communities'.[78] Such views break with the denial that national cultures and landscapes don't matter and introduce the possibility of the flourishing of different cultures of the country and the city. This slightly nostalgic Englishness,

just as Thompson suggested, could have radical implications. Kingsnorth here begins to locate a point at which issues related to Englishness and some of the sentiments of the alter-globalisation movement meet in defence of the local and the distinctive against the corporate homogeneity of global capitalism. These concerns come close to what Williams's place-based and ecological Marxism was trying to achieve in a different setting. Williams perceived that the merging of the 'Red and Green' was closely related to the idea of the long revolution, whereby the working-class movement sought to end capitalism and construct a liveable and democratic society for humanity beyond the structural necessity of fighting for better wages and conditions.[79] This would of course not be possible unless it re-made itself in terms of the histories of different struggles related to more specific localities. Williams, then, was perceptive enough to recognise that some of the older understandings of England as the coloniser made less sense in a situation where much 'that happened, over centuries to the Welsh are now happening, in decades, to the English'.[80] While the ruling class power and privilege of the English was formidable, the effects of de-industrialisation, poverty and marginalisation nonetheless cut across national borders.

A Politics of Hope

As we have seen, Williams's Marxism was inspired by the need to progressively democratise capitalism. Social democracy had been a considerable victory for the labour movement and yet was never likely to go far enough if it remained primarily defensive or conservative. However, since Williams's death it has become much clearer that the working-class labour movement as a significant actor is in long-term decline. If Williams faced some of these questions, he did not live long enough to see the erosion of the 'moment of socialism'.[81] This was especially evident during the 1990s when more centrist and pragmatic arguments seemed to hold sway. Williams's calls for a 'new and renewed labour movement' in the context of post-industrial decline could still be met with new waves of militancy after the assaults on the working class that took place in the 1980s.[82] Williams's dogged refusal to give up on radical forms of socialist critique demonstrates a clear and necessary refusal to abandon the need to transform society beyond capitalism. Marxism, despite its stained and bloody past, continues to have a number of intellectual and cultural resources to aid us in this quest. However, for these possibilities to be fully realised and discussed we need 'a new kind of socialist movement' to emerge from below that is as concerned with a change in the culture as it is in winning elections.[83]

Indeed there can be little doubt that Williams would have taken a keen interest in the recent relative electoral success of Jeremy Corbyn. The unlikely rise of Corbyn is mostly due to an unpredictable set of events that resulted in the Labour Party returning to a more genuine engagement with the idea of the common good. Here we are perhaps witnessing the beginning of Labour seeking to establish itself as a genuinely popular and socialist force within British politics. There are considerable grounds for hope to be found within some of Labour's more recent policy proposals, especially the report on alternative models of ownership.[84] This not only recognised the need to combat inequality and unfair and precarious employment practices, but also the need to enhance the power of local authorities, promote co-operative organisations and reintroduce nationalisation. Further, Labour has recently organised a number of events and discussion groups to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Charter of the Forest.[85] These features are likely to remain crucial to any humane future, given the threats to many people's security posed by new technology and globalisation.[86] If in the end counter-hegemonic forces in the age of capital need to think locally and globally, they continue to rely upon radical national currents as well. However, it is important to remember that if Corbyn were to be successful in the context of a democratic election he would potentially require support from other 'federated' nations as the agents of capitalism would continue to have interests to make sure that the project to democratise capital failed.[87]

I want to end by summarising the resources that the Marxist tradition continues to offer a radical analysis of society. The first resource that Marxism gives us is the recognition that capitalism is central to the basic nature and character of our social order. Capitalism could not be said to represent the common interest and would always prefer the promotion of a society based upon the financial calculations of the ruling class.[88] As Terry Eagleton argues, the class struggle continues to act as the 'joker in the pack of civilisation'.[89] Secondly, historically more humanistic versions of Marxism have sought to recover and defend values other than those required to make profit. These values – such as co-operation, mutuality and democracy – find it difficult to find expression in a world dominated by corporations and neoliberal nation-states. Here we might think about what happens when literally everything becomes subordinate to the 'cash nexus'.[90] Similarly, Andy Merrifield argues that cultural Marxism has a long historical connection to a more poetic and literary sensibility that stands diametrically opposed to the 'car boot sale of our culture'.[91] Under the sign of an increasingly capitalist society there is an ongoing need to defend the study of art, literature, history and society in terms beyond dominant forms of instrumentality. These concerns are of course traceable back to the Romantic tradition whose cultural ambiguity Williams did

so much to capture.[92] Finally, Marxism remains necessary for its ability to point to the limitations of capitalism (especially apparent in relation to questions of hierarchy and class, and ecology) and for its call to imagine a different society where, in Williams's terms, we begin to honour our connection to place and locality. If the technological and hurried culture of capitalism is hostile to these terms then a more place-based sensibility could yet find its way into more critical forms of analysis. Here the argument is not to defend Marxism in its endless variety, but to defend Williams's own 'commitment' as having something to offer our own times. This will mean Marxists joining a number of struggles to save the commons from manoeuvres by capital to turn it into a form of private property. This could include attempts to save libraries from closure, defend the dignity of low-paid workers (the living wage campaign), the downgrading of contracts into precarious forms of labour and, crucially, attempts to prevent the further erosion of the environment and spread of consumerism. But equally it will also mean the forming and supporting of radical political parties that seek to use the state to defend 'the alternative ethic of common wellbeing'.[93]

Raymond William stood for a non-dogmatic Marxism that could be remade in the context of social struggle. For a Marxist analysis to remain relevant it needs to connect itself to an anti-capitalist sensibility. Joel Kovel argues that if the first phase of socialism sought to overcome the exploitation of labour it mainly failed to question the need for economic growth that can be linked to the destruction of nature.[94] Instead, our common interests are now challenged by an economic system that threatens the very survival of humanity. The struggle now is not only for the well-being of the working class, who continue to suffer from exploitation and precarious forms of labour, but for the survival of humans as well as other planetary life forms. As Kovel suggests, such a struggle against the destructive power of capital will inevitably involve the opening up of questions of value other than those that require the instrumental functioning of the economic system. This will mean directly challenging what we understand by 'development' with a different paradigm, where social questions and the need to preserve life take priority over capitalist forms of growth. Serge Latouche has usefully summed up the new, more ecologically, sensitive form of politics as radical strategies to question the centrality of work, revalue the natural world, redistribute wealth, localise economies, reduce over-consumption and promote recycling and alternative forms of transport, amongst other strategies.[95] Such features are not only necessary for the long-term survival of humanity and the planet, but will of course be resisted by capitalism and most of the mass media. Such a politics is not really possible without a recovery of a sense of our connection to a locality and the radical revival of the self-management tradition.[96] This would include enhanced

forms of participation within local decision-making processes as well as the development of more co-operative and ecologically sensitive economies. As I have indicated, these are all areas of policy that link to a number of social movements and the current emergent direction of the Labour Party.

The danger, of course, remains, however, that a return to Marxism could equally lead to the celebration of new forms of productivism. The Marxist imaginary remains historically connected to the contradiction between the forces and relations of production. The more abundant society of the future becomes possible in the society of common ownership where technology is able to harness labour power, producing goods for the community rather than private interest. Here science and technological mastery are used to further subordinate nature to the needs of the community rather than capital. These arguments are hostile to the wider sustainability of the commons.[97] After the crash of 2008 and the imposition of austerity, there are indeed dangers that new forces will emerge, offering more consumerist forms of abundance for the future in ways that could well have a popular appeal. The path more in keeping with the writing of Raymond Williams is perhaps more difficult but offers a better prospect of an emancipated future. For Williams, a crucial part of any humanistic socialism was the recovery of 'specifically alienated human capacities' that were not allowed expression in a society built upon commercial values and class hierarchy.[98] These questions need to be asked again within a society that cannot produce meaningful employment for everyone and where many people struggle to find a balance between work, time for caring responsibilities and other more cultural pursuits.[99] There is still a need for a humanistic Marxism less focused upon increased economic production and more upon a life devoted to parenting, play, artistic activities and civic forms of engagement in ways that cannot be satisfied by neoliberal capitalism. The tragedy is that historically, Marxism, in seeking to produce a more humane world to that of capitalism, ended by producing what Williams called 'new kinds of alienation'.[100] The hope remains that a more democratic and ecological version of Marxism will pick up the task of transforming a social order adequate to meeting the needs for more democratic and sustainable ways of human flourishing.

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Keywords

Commitment

The origins of **commitment** are complex; the term is derived from the early fifteenth century verb 'commit', a double borrowing from the Latin *committere* and the French (via Anglo-Norman) *comitter*. The Latin root is the prefix 'com' ('together, in combination or union') + the verb 'mittere' ('to send'). In Latin the wide range of meanings included 'to bring together', 'to engage in battle', 'to begin', 'to involve', 'to consign', 'to entrust', 'to impart', 'to perpetrate', 'to break the law' and 'to incur a penalty', with the later, post-classical meanings of 'to send someone to trial or prison' and 'to send on a mission' or 'to appoint'. In French the range was broadly similar, though with some extensions: 'to perpetrate a crime, sin, or error', 'to hand over', 'to accomplish', 'to punish', 'to send', 'to empower', 'to appoint' and 'to command'.

Commitment enters English in the mid to late sixteenth century and carries over many of the etymological root senses of 'commit'. There are four main semantic trajectories in the early uses that are related, though the connections are not obvious: to detain; to send (for consideration); to entrust; to perpetrate. The dominant link is the use of **commitment** in relation to the law. Thus the earliest use pertains to detention before a trial (or imprisonment afterwards), and is retained in legal use (though the more usual general term is now 'committal'). An extension of this sense is recorded from the nineteenth century and refers to detention in an institution for care or treatment (specifically in what we now call a psychiatric hospital). Concurrent with the first sense is the technical meaning (now rare but still used in parliamentary jargon) of sending legislation for the consideration of a committee for the purposes of scrutiny. This is clearly related to another sense that also appears in the early seventeenth century: entrusting something to the care of another, specifically the transfer of responsibility or control. The final sense amongst these early uses of **commitment** is a departure, though rooted in the etymological origins of 'commit': perpetrating a crime, sin or similar offence (in contemporary usage the term would now more usually be 'commission').

Interestingly, although all of the early senses are retained in the language in one way and another, it is not until the end of the eighteenth century that the first use of **commitment** in the modern sense appears. That is, the general meaning of the act of making a binding obligation to a particular course of action or policy, or the act of giving an undertaking (implicitly or explicitly). The

narrowing from the reference to the action to the meaning of an obligation or responsibility *per se* occurs slightly later in the early to mid nineteenth century. Significantly, although the late-eighteenth-century sense is non-specific in its connotation, the earliest recorded examples are political (George Washington in 1789 and Thomas Jefferson in 1793). Given that politics involves the conscious espousal of causes, involving belief and practice, it is unsurprising therefore to note the late-nineteenth-century development of **commitment** in the sense of being dedicated to a political cause, ideology or particular form of activity. There are two further semantic extensions to the term. The first is its specific use in Sartrean Existentialism in the mid twentieth century, to mean engagement with the world by committing oneself to a political cause. The second is the broadening of the term to its use to mean the act of committing oneself to a person in a specific relationship (formally or simply by practice). Two other meanings also occur in the twentieth century: the act of assigning resources for a particular purpose, and by extension, in a specialised military use, the deployment of troops. In contemporary use, **commitment** is often deployed in a considerably weakened sense to mean engagement or effort, though the stronger sense persists even in general usage.

It is in the context of questions of aesthetics that the meaning of **commitment** was most problematic in the twentieth century. Debates around politics and aesthetics within the socialist tradition have often revolved around competing definitions of this complex term, specifically in relation to the political alignment of a work of art or its author. Marx and Engels, for example, dismissed what they called 'tendency literature', while praising the work of Balzac and Dickens. And Brecht rejected what he took to be Lukács's narrow demand for a specific form of writing, with the contention that artistic production is unpredictable and therefore not politically controllable. Summarising these debates, Raymond Williams argued that the meaning of **commitment** is as yet unresolved and remains unhelpfully positioned between a type of formalism (the imposition of a particular style) and a late version of Romanticism (in which the individual artist commits to a cause). In the political sense, of course, **commitment** must mean a conscious and active choice of position. In relation to the aesthetic, however, the term remains contested, open, and subject to specific understanding.

Recoveries

Commitment and Apostasy

Introduction

The book whose title almost defines the ex-Communist confessional is Arthur Koestler's collection, *The God That Failed*. Unfortunately the only British contribution to that volume is from the poet Stephen Spender, who says he never attended a Party meeting and that his membership in the 1930s 'lasted for a few weeks'.[1] This contrasts sharply with the experience of six other British ex-Communists whose autobiographies, long out of print, were also published in the same period as *The God That Failed*.[2] Their collective membership amounted to some 75 years in the Party and between them they were involved in all its campaigns of the 1930s and the war years. They too left embittered and hostile and their accounts were similar interventions against Communism in the Cold War.

They deserve recovery for two reasons. They demonstrate how some characteristics of the autobiography made the form particularly suitable for this political moment, for the personal options open to the authors and the particular intervention they wished to make. Some of the observations Raymond Williams made about class and autobiography are useful for this discussion. Secondly these accounts can contribute, despite their polemical origins, to a nuanced understanding of Communist history and political commitment. A brief summary shows their potential importance as sources.

The Authors

Fred Copeman was dismissed from the Royal Navy after his role in the Invergordon sailors' strike in 1931. After this he was groomed, he implies, by the CP and was soon 'in the thick of the political battle on their side and liking

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1 Arthur Koestler (ed.), *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950), 231.

2 Fred Copeman, *Reason in Revolt* (London: Blandford Press, 1948), hereafter *RIR*; Charlotte Haldane, *Truth Will Out* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1949), hereafter *TWO*; Freda Utley, *Lost Illusion* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949), hereafter *LI*; Douglas Hyde, *I Believed* (London: Heinemann, 1952), hereafter *IB*; Bob Darke, *The Communist Technique in Britain* (London: Penguin Books, 1952), hereafter *CT*; and Margaret McCarthy, *Generation in Revolt* (London: Heinemann, 1953), hereafter *GIR*. *Lost Illusion* was first published in the USA in 1940 as *The Dream We Have Lost*. The version of *Lost Illusion* used here is from the Utley Foundation website, www.fredautley.com (accessed January 2017).

it'.[3] He drew great satisfaction from his role with the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM) in London in the early 1930s, recalling that 'a smile or a handshake from a white-faced, tired and obviously ill working mother, after some effort to redress injustice, meant more to me than anything else' (*RIR*, 70). He became a Communist trade unionist and later a senior officer with the British Battalion of the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. His experiences in Spain form the main part of *Reason in Revolt*. Within a year of his return in 1938 he had resigned from the Party; three other senior officers from the Battalion (Jock Cunningham, George Aitken and Tom Wintringham) also broke with the CP at this time. His verdict on the defeat in Spain is confused; he ignores the effects of the non-intervention policy of the British and French governments, for example, and claims vaguely that the supply of arms lessened because the Communist programme was alienating the wider movement. Copeman became a Catholic in 1945 and it is significant that in his memoir the Church's support for Franco is passed over in silence. He was involved with the faith-based anti-Communist Moral Rearmament movement when his autobiography was written.

Charlotte Haldane was married to the famous Communist scientist Professor J.B.S. Haldane, but was a feminist novelist and left-wing journalist in her own right. She travelled in Germany before the Nazis took power and in Spain in the early 1930s, and her knowledge of those countries fuelled her commitment to anti-fascism. She worked as an undisclosed Communist in the Labour Party, following directions about building platforms for the anti-fascist struggle, and in 1939 edited the journal *Woman To-Day*, published by the Women's Committee Against War and Fascism. The Communist Party arranged a clandestine role for her helping to process International Brigade volunteers in Paris, and actions like this made her 'proud to belong to it' (*TWO*, 101).

Haldane visited the Soviet Union as a war correspondent in 1941 and was appalled by the contrast between the life-styles of the Party hierarchy and the plight of ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, she omitted this from her subsequent book, *Russian Newsreel* (1941), in the interests of the joint war effort. She rejected any Party involvement in producing this book and the reaction this provoked from the leadership prompted her resignation from the CP. After *Truth Will Out*, Haldane published three articles in *Tribune* purporting to identify the personal and social dysfunctions of people who were attracted to Communism.[4]

Freda Utley had been a student member of the Independent Labour Party before joining the CP in reaction to the failure of the General Strike in 1926.

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3   Copeman, *Reason in Revolt*, 53. All further citations from the autobiographies will be in the main text with titles abbreviated.

4   Charlotte Haldane, *Tribune* 27 August, 3 and 10 September 1948.

She was active for the Party in the Lancashire cotton industry strikes in the late 1920s and in 1930, having been inspired by a visit to the Soviet Union in 1927: 'The study of history could not satisfy. I yearned to take part in making it' (*LI*, 26). However *Lost Illusion* is a devastating critique of life in the USSR as she experienced it between 1930 and 1936. She lived in Moscow until driven out by the purges, during which her Russian husband was arrested. Her work took her around the country and exposed her to the realities of the Five Year Plan and collectivisation. Encountering fear, corruption and hypocrisy, she stresses the essentially arbitrary nature of the repression: 'arrest was regarded like death, the reaper who might strike anywhere' (*LI*, 249). Soviet workers were worse off than the Lancashire unemployed but the Party elites were privileged when it came to housing, food and lifestyle – 'it was the contrasts that were always so appalling' (*LI*, 32).

Utley describes the British Communist visitors 'in whose presence we had the greatest difficulty in keeping our mouths shut'; some of whom 'I subsequently learned had spoken of my "anti-Soviet attitudes" in spite of their promises not to' (*LI*, 144, 167). During her behind-the-scenes campaign for her husband's release, her approaches were shunned by the Party leadership and received with equivocation by prominent left intellectuals. On her return to Britain she was still active with Communists in the Aid China campaign against Japanese aggression in the East but, as she says, 'holding my tongue for my husband's sake' (*LI*, 11). In 1939, after the news of his execution had been confirmed, Utley moved to the USA. She became a Cold War warrior and for a time was a supporter of Senator McCarthy.[5]

Douglas Hyde also left the ILP for the Communists after the General Strike; later, he was involved with the NUWM in the early 1930s and joined the Labour Party as an undeclared Communist to seek recruits for the CP. He was active in the Aid Spain movement in South Wales and describes incidents during that campaign, and the extraordinary passion the cause produced all around the country, as among 'the high spots of my own emotional experience as a Communist' (*IB*, 60). Later, he was a news editor of the *Daily Worker* from 1940 until he resigned from the Party in 1947; he was in charge of arrangements during the eighteen months from 1941 when the paper was banned by the government. Hyde converted to Catholicism and then resigned from the Party before the publication of *I Believed*, and his account is often the commentary of a convert, inserting a moral retrospective at every opportunity. His memoir was vigorously promoted by the Church and it became an international best-seller.[6]

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5   See Francis Beckett, *Stalin's British Victims* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004).

6   Kevin Morgan, 'Obituary: Douglas Hyde', *Independent*, 25 September 1996, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-douglas-hyde-1365102.html (accessed January 2017).

Bob Darke was a Hackney bus conductor who joined the CP through the NUWM in 1931. He was a trades council secretary, a Communist Borough Councillor and member of a Party national advisory committee until he suddenly resigned from the CP in 1953. He then sold newspaper interviews about his past activities and from these his book was derived. It was published as a Penguin Special, one of a series of paperbacks on topical issues that often achieved a mass circulation. Darke's book and his alleged 'exposure' of Communist work in trade unions appeared at a time when the Party was facing bans and proscriptions in them.

Margaret McCarthy left school at thirteen to work in the Lancashire weaving sheds. She was another who left the ILP for the Communists in 1926; like Utley and Hyde she had been impressed by their political seriousness and role in the miners' lockout that followed the General Strike. Later she was active in the Lancashire textile disputes of 1930 and participated in a Hunger March. McCarthy recounts the self-esteem gained from knowing that far from being 'a mere mill worker' (*GIR*, 93), she was part of the class assigned the lead role in making history and building socialism, part of a great movement with similar young people all over the world. Later she worked in Moscow and Leningrad at the Red International of Labour Unions where, like Utley, she experienced the realities of the Soviet system, including the disappearance of friends. McCarthy describes realising how Communist mistakes had eased Hitler's path to power, and how on her return to Britain she was depressed by the calibre of Party recruits at that time. It was soon afterwards that she was expelled from the CP when she voiced criticisms of the Soviet Union.

Form and Autobiography

Raymond Williams makes the case that writers are attracted to forms that correspond to their own experience, forms most easily available to them. He also notes that 'for several generations the most powerful writing about working-class experience has been in autobiographies'.[7] He argues that working-class writers in the nineteenth century chose this form to describe their working lives because the quite different narrative forms of the novel were 'virtually impenetrable' to them. In contrast, oral forms – the religious tradition of the witness confessing the story of his life, or defendants' speeches at their trials – were more accessible and centred on the single person.[8] Williams also comments that literary conventions can actually dictate modes of actual

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7   Raymond Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), 219.

8   Raymond Williams, 'The Writer: Commitment and Alignment', in *Resources of Hope*, ed. Robin Gale (London: Verso, 1989), 86.

observation as well as description. The results, taken as vivid, are in these cases actually prescribed: 'In Orwell's Lancashire it is always raining …because it has to do so as a convincing local condition of the North.'[9] These observations – how form relates to personal experience and conventions dictating observation and description – are applicable here, and they help to illuminate the political use of autobiography in this context.

By the 1950s, one form accessible to working-class people was the interview with newspaper reporters, and the popular press always had sensational forms of its own. Thus, Darke's first act on resigning was to organise his press conference; *The Communist Technique* was derived from newspaper serialisations.[10] Here convention dictated description. Fanatical Communists, ready to use any methods, planning to take control of unions for the purpose of shutting down key industries and seizing power, were almost a requirement of the genre. Darke's words claim the authority of personal experience and thus authenticity: as an ex-Communist, take it from me that this goes on. The conventions of the form are the scaffolding for the politics.

Haldane, Hyde and Utley were middle class and professionally engaged with writing but there are clear reasons why these three also chose the autobiographical form. Utley and Hyde had produced non-fiction and that was the form that was most familiar, most easily available to them in Williams's sense. Utley in particular had published socio-economic critiques of the Lancashire textile industry and of Japanese economy and society. It was logical for her to use her personal experience – again, the authenticating power – as the entry point for a similar critique of Soviet life and the errors of its supporters.

Haldane on the other hand had published novels before her involvement with the Party, including the dystopian feminist work *Man's World* in 1926. Nevertheless, she chose not to fictionalise her Party experiences as Edward Upward was to do in the first volume of his *Spiral Ascent* trilogy and Doris Lessing was to do in *The Golden Notebook*, both of which appeared in 1962. Haldane's biographer believes that one of the motivations behind *Truth Will Out* lay in her financial position at that time and her view of her own prospects.[11] Haldane needed to make her way in the world of freelance journalism and one obstacle was that her former friends and comrades 'shunned me, one and all' (*TWO*, 263) She feared these former comrades in the National Union of Journalists would now thwart her efforts to find work. However, an autobiography was

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9   Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 2015), 390.

10   Interviews in the *Scottish Sunday Express*, 26 May 1951, *Picture Post*, 20 and 27 September, 4 and 11 October 1952.

11   Judith Adamson, *Charlotte Haldane: Woman Writer in a Man's World* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 165.

a chance to explain herself as an innocent idealist who had been misled and manipulated but who was now politically cleansed. This was her passport into the Cold War world that was hostile to the politics with which she had been associated. Haldane's account has, as her biographer notes, a narrative style that is often detached, as if to put distance between herself and what she was once passionately involved in.[12] Distance here implies an ability to observe, to establish the detachment of the narrative and thus the detachment of the author from Communism.

She was not alone in re-evaluating her professional prospects. Hyde, having left the *Daily Worker*, needed to establish himself as a journalist initially with the Catholic press.[13] Presumably this was why *I Believed* was obliged to include some far-fetched stories about the International Brigade, derived from Catholic propaganda at the time, such as the ranks of the volunteers being supplemented by vagrants fed drink and then taken to Spain. Communism in his account has no moral compass for behaviour, something his audience would expect to hear, and this explains both dishonest political actions and how many of his colleagues 'had been able to love as irresponsibly and indiscriminatingly as barnyard fowls' (*IB*, 220). As with rain in Lancashire, convincing conditions require this claim.

In these six cases, autobiography is a method to retrospectively organise experience to explain the authors' current positions. Each account is organised around the disillusionment to come, some of them explicitly: Hyde, the Catholic convert, with the sub-title *The Autobiography of a Former British Communist*; Copeman, the other Catholic convert, with his explanation of how he 'passed through disillusionment to the discovery of a completely answering ideology and philosophy' (*RIR*, 10) In a similar way, when Utley describes herself in 1927 as 'an enthusiastic and youthful Communist' (*LI*, 1), the journey to the appropriate title of *Lost Illusion* is announced. When Darke states of his years as a Communist that his book 'isn't an attempt to tell you that I knew all the time that it was wrong, I didn't' (*CT*, 9), a voyage of explanation is surely forthcoming.

Each writer recounts a serious commitment, and how as activists they accepted heavy demands on their time, personal resources, risk to jobs and risk to life in Copeman's case, and the discipline required by the Communist organisation. Religion provided a convenient vocabulary for them to explain such commitment to a wider public, and reference points with which that public would be familiar. Readers, especially Hyde's Catholics, would also be familiar with the narrative of confession, repentance and the return to the fold: it provided an accessible form for writer and reader. Indeed as Williams

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12   Adamson, *Charlotte Haldane*, 94.

13   On the payments to Hyde, and Darke, for articles see Lawrence Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951–64: Old Labour, New Britain?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 22.

noted, the emergence of autobiography as a genre is intertwined with religious confession. McCarthy says that 'Communism is in reality a brand of religion, a blind creed striving to fill the vacuum created by the evaporation of other faiths' (*GIR*, 267). Utley confesses that 'I failed in my youth to perceive that Communism is a substitute for religion' (*LI*, 4). Hyde talks of Communism 'taking what is essentially a religious impulse and using it for evil ends' (*IB*, 273). Haldane on her trip to Russia describes Moscow as 'a city with the same symbolic significance for the religious Communist as Mecca has for the fanatical Moslem' (*TWO*, 192). Gidon Cohen has identified how the Cold War established a tradition of superficial generalisations about Communism and religion, so that the theme of 'Communism is a substitute for religion' became a dominant one in both anti-Communist circles and in the popular imagination.[14] These memoirs certainly made a contribution and thus helped to shape the reception of Communism among the public in this period.

Autobiography then presented an effective way to express personal experience through a narrative of confession, progressive disillusion and eventual distance. As a Cold War intervention it was particularly fit for purpose. It allowed these authors to justify their records as Communists in terms that were acceptable to the contemporary political culture.

Contributions

Kevin Morgan has noted how 1956 brought together the preconditions for a critical Communist historiography – defection, internal challenge and crisis within the Party.[15] Official admissions in the Soviet Union about the crimes of Stalin's regime raised questions about the British hierarchy's awareness of them at the time. This was followed by dissent in the CPGB over the leadership's uncritical support for the suppression of revolt in Hungary. These memoirs predate that moment, by eight years in the case of Utley. Along with McCarthy, and to a lesser extent Haldane, she provides lengthy first-hand accounts of Stalinism and how it was impossible to raise concerns about it within the Communist world. Also, recent histories of the Communist Party of Great Britain have drawn on autobiographies or life histories to illuminate qualitative issues missing from histories whose focus is on strategy and policy.[16] Each of these accounts makes a contribution, as is clear even from some brief examples.

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14 Gidon Cohen, 'Political Religion and British Communism', *Twentieth Century Communism: A Journal of International History* 2 (2010): 197–215.

15 Kevin Morgan, 'Historiography of the CPGB', in Dave Cope, *Bibliography of the Communist Party of Great Britain* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2016), 46.

16 Thomas Linehan, *Communism in Britain 1929–39: From the Cradle to the Grave* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen and Andrew Flinn,

Recoveries

Hyde provides a unique participant's account of the period of the *Daily Worker* ban and the clandestine activity undertaken to supply information to sympathetic journalists. He recalls 'a period of strain, but one also of sustained excitement when idealism, willingness to sacrifice, love of battle and adventure blended into a satisfying sense of purpose and fulfilment' (*IB*, 87). Despite the context he builds throughout *I Believed* of Communism's underhand mendacity, there is almost pride in how he describes his role here and this section is the one freest from retrospective moral critique. Years later, when he had rebuilt relations with the Party, it was this episode that he talked about to the Communist Party History Group.[17]

Copeman's was an early first-hand account of service with the International Brigade and it was the first to cover important policy clashes within the Battalion command and with the Party establishment. An example is the policy towards deserters from the Brigade; Copeman advocated leniency. Much of it has since been corroborated by historians. His description of activities before Spain has been described by Raphael Samuel as 'exceptionally life-like in its portrayal of the more working-class end of the Party'.[18] The same can be said of McCarthy, particularly in how she communicates the comradeship she experienced and self-respect she gained as a young activist: no longer a mill-girl who left school at thirteen but 'able to be proud of my class and background' and now 'someone expected me, even intended me, to study, and gave me the means, through literature, classes, lectures and conferences, to do so in a purposeful and directed way' (*GIR*, 93–4).

Darke provides a vivid account of the pressures of relentless activism – 'For every hour I put in as a bus conductor I put in two for the Party' (*CT*, 39) – and the toll it could take when family members were not also Party members. His wife and daughters 'grew naturally impatient with being moved into the kitchen every time the doorbell rang … ten or even fifteen Communists [were] present every evening' (*CT*, 110). Despite the continually fraught tone, his account of these pressures seems accurate in essence if not necessarily in detail, as is the claim that ex-Party members could find themselves shunned by their erstwhile comrades who would try to isolate them in the union.[19]

Communists and British Society 1920–1991 (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2007).

17 Douglas Hyde, 'Preparations for Illegality: CPGB 1941', *Our History Journal* (14 October 1989): 26–35. The text is taken almost verbatim from *I Believed*.

18 Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936–1939* (London: Routledge, 2004), *passim*; Raphael Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism* (London: Verso, 2006), 73.

19 Willie Thompson, 'British Communists and the Cold War', *Contemporary British History* 15, no. 3 (autumn 2001): 105–32.

Political Alternatives

All these writers had good political reasons for rejecting Communism. None of them withdrew from political engagement afterwards and indeed five of them remained with left politics. Perhaps this was inevitable, for as McCarthy revealingly states: 'I did not know how to live like other people, I could not conceive of a life without a revolutionary aim, a driving purpose' (*GIR*, 254). Under her married name of McKay, she was Chief Women's Officer at the TUC between 1951 and 1962 and served as Labour MP for Clapham between 1964 and 1970. Both Darke and Copeman continued as trades union activists and Labour councillors in London, with Darke supporting tenants' struggles in Hackney. The working-class members of the group, and also Haldane, remained in the mainstream labour movement and found hospitable spaces in the Labour Party for anti-Communist but socialist politics. The space they found for left politics in a mainstream political party would not have been so easily available in the United States and so Utley's later trajectory to the right was not unpredictable. Hyde's Catholicism later took him into liberation theology and he became a human rights activist.[20] Hyde says he expected that a faith should both be concerned with 'all those social abuses and manifold injustices of which I was sharply aware … and, in addition that it should feed the inner life' (IB, 18). In more secular terms, perhaps this was what the others were seeking and failing to find through their own commitment: a genuine movement for social justice through which they could be fulfilled and where the internal regime was supportive. This is what many still seek from a political commitment to the left and so memoirs like these will continue to be of interest.

Acknowledgements

Don Watson

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20 Tam Dayell, 'Obituary: Margaret McKay', *Independent*, 6 March 1996, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituarymargaret-mckay-1340565.html (accessed January 2017); Samuel, *The Lost World*, 73; Morgan, 'Obituary: Douglas Hyde', 18.

Recoveries

Helen of Four Gates by Ethel Carnie Holdsworth[1]

Writing for *Key Words* on the new edition of *This Slavery* (1925) published in 2011, Elinor Taylor notes 'that a wider recovery and reappraisal of (Ethel Carnie) Holdsworth's would be of immense value'.[2] Following the release on its centenary of Carnie Holdsworth's first novel *Miss Nobody* (1913) and with *Helen of Four Gates* (1917) now back in print, such a recovery has gained significant momentum. For Pamela Fox, who provides the introduction to this latest re-publication, a central focus should be on the radical potential of one of Carnie Holdsworth's departure points: popular romance. It is just one of many forms which the author worked from and re-wrote throughout her varied writing career. 'Carnie Holdsworth wielded her own brand of feminist critique addressing marital and family violence', suggests Fox, '[y]et her insistence on pleasure, gained from reading literary classics, enjoying nature, or the potential thrill of romantic love, also called for individual space and consciousness within the mass.'[3] *Helen of Four Gates*, her second novel, is markedly different to the confrontational ferocity of *This Slavery*. The socialist-feminist politics of the latter are traceable throughout *Helen*. But it also fully embraces melodrama and romance; it 'positively embodies' such popular forms, according to Fox.[4] The novel's plot gives a good indication of this embodiment. Its eponymous character, Helen Mason, is intelligent and resilient, confronting the physical and psychological violence of Abel Mason, whom she believes to be her father. As a young man, Abel was in love with Helen's mother, who married his friend Tom Hinson, Helen's biological father, who dies in a mining accident. She is two years old when her mother also dies and Helen is subsequently raised by Abel. He sadistically vows to destroy Helen to punish her mother and Hinson for their 'betrayal'. The latter informed Helen's mother that Abel is from a family with a history of madness; this is the same tactic Abel uses to divide Helen and Martin Scott, the farm hand she intends to marry. 'I acts mad betimes, just to be cruel', reveals Abel, 'to drag her by the hair that's like Hinson's, an' my only fear has lest I kill her outright, an' miss my revenge'.[5]

Like Hester and Rachel Martin from *This Slavery*, Helen is a fiercely independent woman from the north of England and, as the above extract demonstrates, working-class dialect is a defining feature of the novel. It is the

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1   Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *Helen of Four Gates* [1917] (Edinburgh: Kennedy and Boyd, 2016), xxxviii + 215 pp. £12.95 pb. ISBN: 978-1-84921-128-4.

2   Elinor Taylor, 'Recoveries – Ethel Carnie Holdsworth: *This Slavery*', *Key Words* 11 (2013): 125.

3   Pamela Fox, 'Introduction', in *Helen of Four Gates*, xi.

4   Fox, 'Introduction', ix.

5   Carnie Holdsworth, *Helen of Four Gates*, 33. Further references are to the 2016 Kennedy and Boyd edition and will be cited parenthetically in the main body of the article.

centrality of such textual voices, along with Carnie Holdsworth's own position as a female working-class writer, that signals one reason why this ongoing series of reissues is significant. Thanks in large part to Nicola Wilson (the series editor for Kennedy and Boyd) and Roger Smalley (author of a recent book on the novelist), Carnie Holdsworth's biography is now familiar: born on New Year's Day 1886 in Oswaldtwistle, Lancashire, she worked at a mill in Great Harwood from the age of 11; her poetry collection *Rhymes from the Factory* (1907) caught the attention of Robert Blatchford; she left the mill at 22 and moved to London to write for *Clarion* and edit *Woman Worker*. A bitter split from Blatchford and the collapse of *Woman Worker* saw her return to the north (and briefly the mill) and it was from Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, that she penned ten novels, edited *Clear Light* and continued to write journalism, poetry and children's stories until her death in December 1962.

There is a strong inflection in *Helen of Four Gates* of a literary tradition that also has close links to the moors and hills of West Yorkshire. The novels of the Brontë sisters, particularly *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), act as models for Carnie Holdsworth. And such similarities, in terms of genre, plot and place, come through forcefully in a remarkable 1920 silent film adaptation of *Helen*. Filmed in and around Heptonstall and Hebden Bridge, ten miles south of the Brontë's home in Haworth, it is directed by Cecil Hepworth and features leading silent-era actors Alma Taylor (as Helen) and James Carew (as Abel). The star, however, is the landscape, the sloping cobbled streets and expansive hills intensify not only the novel's melodramatic elements but also scenes of extreme violence and a painful sense of foreboding.[6]

Therefore, the ways in which both the film and the book invoke the Gothic form through the northern landscape, reworking the specific literary modes deployed by the Brontës, are both important and illuminating when revisiting Carnie Holdsworth's story. But, as Nicola Wilson has noted when discussing *This Slavery*, the 'sensational serial stories produced in the contemporary penny weeklies for working women and young girls' also act as a significant influence. The novelist 'adds a socialist and woman-centred framework to the classic mill-girl melodrama', acknowledges Wilson.[7] Certainly, *Helen of Four Gates* draws on the tropes of sensational fiction: revenge, family secrets, a cruel stepfather, thwarted love, suicide. Additionally, and as already mentioned, this is a novel

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6   It is a fascinating 78-minute film that was thought lost until a copy was found at the Cinémathèque Québécoise in Montreal, Canada in 2010. It is now available for free online through the British Film Institute, another important development in the recovery of Carnie Holdsworth's work. See https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-helen-of-four-gates-1920-online (20 December 2017).

7   Nicola Wilson, 'Introduction', in *This Slavery* (1925; Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), xvi.

about misogyny and about male violence towards women. Such abuse takes place in the family home and specifically the kitchen; here there is a compelling contrast with *This Slavery*.

Whereas Hester and Rachel Martin find this domestic space productive and enabling as a place of discussion and education (for the two sisters it is a predominantly female-only space), for Helen Mason the kitchen is a scene of physical and mental abuse. Again, this comes through strongly in the film: Helen is threatened with a kitchen knife and whipped over the kitchen table. Abel brandishes the knife, and has it turned back on him by a defiant Helen, while it is Fielding Day who resorts to a horse whip as a form of control. Abel arranges for Helen to marry Day: a 'Tramp Weaver' with 'the face of a man who has left dreams behind' (9), described by an excited Abel as 'hell-spawn' (28). She is passed on as if property, inherited by Day along with the promise of Abel's money and farm. Helen is singled out by this patriarchal society as 'different'. She is described as 'maunderin' round in th' dark an' weet as if she were a Pendle Forest witch' after being heard incanting an imaginary wedding ceremony (11). Similarly, the false account of her being from a 'mad race, a race wi' a murderer in it' is a common refrain (33). Here are two historic forms of oppression: the labelling of a woman as both 'mad' and, often as a result, a 'witch'. Importantly, numerous poor women were executed for being witches; for example, including after the Pendle Witch Trials of 1612 to which the novel obliquely refers. Therefore, class, mental illness and male violence towards women are themes that Carnie Holdsworth explicitly connects and has Helen counter with 'fearless eyes' and 'magnificent courage' (43). Described in the novel as having 'the abandon of a wild thing that has been caged, and has slipped out by chance into freedom' (18), Helen uses the hills and moors as a way out, as a potentially radical release from the fixed positions and 'orthodox moralities' of Four Gates (109). For this alone, it is a novel that deserves recovery and reappraisal, and Carnie Holdsworth is a writer whose work continues to offer radical ways of reading both popular forms and sites of oppression in the twenty-first century.

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Reviews

Daragh Gannon (with contributions by Sandra Heise, Brenda Malone and Padraig Clancy), *Proclaiming a Republic: Ireland, 1916 and the National Collection*, Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2016. xix + 299 pp. £21.99. ISBN 978-1-911024-48-4

Proclaiming a Republic: Ireland, 1916 and the National Collection is the companion volume to 'Proclaiming a Republic: the 1916 Rising', the exhibition held at the National Museum of Ireland to commemorate the centenary of the Easter Rising. Given the historical significance of the Rising in the struggle for Irish national independence, it is scarcely surprising that the exhibition that marked it was a landmark event. It featured a range of remarkable artefacts from the National Museum's collection – from James Connolly's blood-streaked vest, to watercolours by Countess Markievicz, to detailed photographs of the staggering damage inflicted on Dublin as the rebellion was defeated. The quality of the exhibition is reflected in *Proclaiming a Republic*, a beautifully (and lavishly) illustrated text with hundreds of images supporting an account that constitutes a stand-alone history in its own right.

That said, the general tone of the narrative is set by the words of Nellie Gifford-Donnelly, a participant in the Rising: 'Data is a cold affair, for the professors. History will be cold on the warm, human motive that impelled them, towards their target, or the odd kinks, loves and capabilities – all, in short that makes the man live on' (247). In other words, the emphasis on artefacts and personal histories, notable in the museum exhibition, is carried over into the historical account given in *Proclaiming a Republic*. It is significant, in this regard, to note that the professed aim of the text, in the publicity materials, is to 'challenge the traditional "villains" to "heroes" narrative and the extreme emphasis on the radicalising effect of the executions' (of the leaders of the Rising).

This desire to avoid a reductive presentation of a complex historical event is laudable. And the events of those momentous few days have been overlaid with all sorts of discursive representations, interpretations, tendentious analyses and so on. '1916' wasn't like '1916' in 1916. But the goal of challenging all forms of orthodoxy about the Rising surely needs to extend to the current revisionist tendency to pretend that Ireland's independence was not gained, to a significant extent, as a result of politically motivated violence directed against colonial rule. Accounts of personal motivation and feelings, the variable responses of the Irish public to the rebels, and a fascinating array of artefacts, are important in gaining a fuller comprehension of the complexity

of the Rising and its aftermath. But the shadow of violence in the war in Northern Ireland fought between 1969 and 1998 should not obstruct a clear view of the political importance of Easter 1916 for Ireland, Britain, and indeed international anti-colonialism.

Proclaiming a Republic is a wonderfully presented book and, for what it is, cheap at the price. Caveats notwithstanding, it is a text that adds to our understanding of a major historical event.

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Mark Perryman (ed.), *The Corbyn Effect***.** London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2017. 274 pp. £15 pb. ISBN 978-1-612-06468-7

The eighteen essays in this volume examine the recent transformation of the British Labour Party. Most contributors seek to carry forward the perspectives on social and political change developed by Stuart Hall, though not necessarily in the same way. Most also place developments in the Labour Party within a wider context, in Europe and America, that has seen the rise of populist movements on both the Right and the Left in a period of significant socio-economic change.

The overall politico-economic context, framing most of the other contributions, is provided by Paul Mason in his Foreword and by Phil Burton-Cartledge in his essay 'Class Politics and the Revenge of the Future'. Mason sees capitalist development as having ended its fourth long period of growth but as now stalled and unable to advance to a new stage. The current phase, starting in the 1940s, was, he argues, carried forward by atomic energy, electronics, advanced telecommunications and information technology and prolonged by Keynesian state management. Since this technological dynamism was exhausted, its decline has been marked by a sustained erosion of labour's income share enforced in the name of market optimisation or neoliberalism.

This period of social regression is posed as the context for the 'Corbyn effect' and as a politico-economic crisis it is seen as having two particular characteristics. Mason identifies one: financialisation. The aggregation of wealth in the financial sector, drawing its income from investment in the corporate sector, has been driven by the pursuit of short-term profit through dividend maximisation. The consequent decline in investment has led to a secular fall in the rate of profit, productivity and growth. For Burton-Cartledge the new technologies themselves, the potential basis for the new upturn, also present challenges to the traditional mode of capitalist accumulation. Situated predominantly in the area of artificial intelligence, software development and its creative applications, their hallmark is their *immateriality*. Because they do not

involve manual labour, they are not easily compatible with the old-fashioned extraction of surplus value and hence further militate against any new wave of investment that would permit the secular renewal of capitalism.

The character of this new technology, Burton-Cartledge also suggests, helps us understand the current dislocation of electoral politics. In Britain, and elsewhere in Europe, politics have historically been based on collectivities deriving from workplace relations. These identities are now fast dissolving as employment relations are transformed. Increasingly employees are networked, not aggregated, and the new structures of workplace association are predominantly vertical. Individuals respond to demands from above that require a responsiveness to, and incorporation in, managerial mind-sets. Moreover, employees do this sequentially, moving in and out of particular jobs. Hence identities are now based on occupational function and wider out-of-work associations rather than any form of workplace-based collectivism. This, Burton-Cartledge argues, gives added relevance to the arguments of Hardt and Negri that we now live in the age of 'multitudes', not classes in the classic sense, that these are international rather than national in their orientations and appetites, and that they require the creation of movements, not parties or unions.

Other authors by and large contribute within this perspective. The *context* of the 'Corbyn effect' is situated in this crisis of neoliberalism and the relative impoverishment of the young both financially and in terms of the wider quality of their life experiences. The 'effect' itself was achieved largely through currently emerging technologies: networking and social media. It is this that has aligned individuals to a cause – but still as individuals. Its future, particularly its electoral success, depends on two things: how far these individual alignments can be converted into a *movement*, and how far the old (the victims of de-industrialisation in the north and west, those excluded from the new networked society, the relics of collectivism) can be rescued from the populism of the Right and brought within the new movement.

The editor, Mark Perryman, provides an almost cinematographic reproduction of the enthusiasm of Corbyn's electoral campaigning. James Doran examines the phenomenon of 'Passokification', the collapse of social democratic parties elsewhere that failed to change and maintained their neoliberal identification. Marina Prentoulis looks to Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain as examples of movements that embrace diversity and match the multifold identities of the new political generation. Des Freedman analyses the sustained hostility of the press and chides some Corbyn supporters with 'conspiratorial thinking' when they highlight the levels of negative coverage and fail to see it as the product of something 'far more simple and innocuous: the routine marginalisation of ideas that challenge received wisdom'. Eileen

Glaser urges reference to the insights of Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau and the creation of alliances that avoid the empty populist posing of rhetorical enemies. Sue Goss, within the same perspective, calls for Corbyn to enter a serious engagement with 'academics and experts, city leaders and community entrepreneurs' (159) in creating open alliances.

In terms of more immediate political issues there is a general consensus that the Corbyn leadership should be responsive to the innate internationalism of the young generation and their opposition to Brexit. Mason proposes support for Single Market membership as a satisfactory compromise and one that will put maximum pressure on a divided Conservative Party (whose divisions are analysed in detail by Andrew Gamble). He also suggests that Corbyn should engage with the specifics of capitalism's current crisis by developing a joint productivist perspective with the entrepreneurs who seek to drive forward the new technologies and are thwarted by neoliberalism's financial imperatives – thereby opening up and holding a new 'centre' in British politics.

The message of most of the contributors is that the political priority should be on open structures and alliances, on cooperatives and community-based initiatives. It should, as Stuart Hall always argued, avoid the top-down statism that marred social democratic policies of the past. Public ownership should be local, cooperative, small scale – and it is with this connection that the trade union movement gets its one significant mention in the whole volume: Hilary Wainwright notes how in the historic evolution of the Labour Party it was trade union leaderships, looking for accommodation within the existing system, who ultimately framed the Labour Party's statist perspectives that left it exposed in face of Thatcherism.

It is, however, this lack of any positive reference to trade unions that might bring any reader directly involved in support for Corbyn to a moment of critical reflection. Surely, any such participant might ask, the trade union movement did play a central role and one that needs to be analysed and understood. Without the trade union vote, Corbyn's election as leader would not have been possible. Without trade union support on the party executive, his radical programme would not have seen the light of day. And without trade union funds and, far more important, trade union activists staffing the phone banks, the 40 per cent general election vote would not have been achieved.

Is this omission accidental? Very probably not. It matches the preconceptions of the New Times school led by Stuart Hall, which as recently as 2014 was explaining the continuing ideological dominance of neoliberalism, particularly among the young, in terms of the statist character of the Labour Party and the economism of the trade union movement.[1]

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1   Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin, eds, *After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2015).

It is an omission that also matches the long-standing New Times critique of classical Marxism as economically determinist and its own adoption of categories from Max Weber, particularly in terms of the definition and wider understanding of the working class. For Weber, as for the New Times school, labour is defined solely by its *manual* character. And class itself is defined as a *market* relationship, strictly distinct from concepts of status and power and without any necessary associational content. This was the root of the New Times critique of economism in the 1970s and the call for a new politics. The working class, so defined, was shrinking fast. Its strident demands were socially divisive. The Left needed to broaden, if not change, its base and engage with the new constituencies of identity politics that were precisely about association and relationships. The current publication continues this narrow definition of labour and the working class. Because the emerging forms of production are mind-based, their 'immateriality' poses problems for the extraction of surplus value. At the same time, and in contrast to the past, they enmesh their producers in the mental assumptions of their managers.

Marx and Engels, on the other hand, were emphatic that labour demands an integration of mental and physical processes. Their whole treatment of human development depended on the interaction of language, thought and the purposive use of tools. So also did their understanding of alienation inherent in any class society, but particularly capitalism, where those who labour are deprived of control over *how* their labour is used. Marx was equally emphatic, in terms of the appropriation of surplus value, that all those who sold their labour power to an employer for the creation of profit were, in capitalist terms, productive labour – whether they were clowns, teachers, actresses, dancing masters or bricklayers.[2]

Raymond Williams commented in the *Long Revolution* that 'most of us live by selling our labour'.[3] 'Setting one kind of worker against another has the effect of directing social consciousness into forms that simply perpetuate the overall system'.[4] He also argued against a one-dimensional view of trade union organisation as purely defensive and economist: 'the institutions of the labour movement – the trade unions, the cooperatives, the Labour Party – were a great creative achievement of working people'. Growing out of the sectional defence of self-interest, because it was also collective, came 'ways of living that could be extended to the whole society': 'collective democratic institutions and the substitution of cooperative equality for competition'.[5]

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2   Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 31 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 13.

3   Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), 323.

4   Williams, *Long Revolution*, 325.

5   Williams, *Long Revolution*, 302.

Corbyn's appeal, his 'authenticity', it could be argued, derived precisely from this 'class' background. A former trade union organiser in the public sector, he had maintained a commitment to socialism, as the 'substitution of cooperative equality for competition', that now matches felt needs arising out of life experience of a new generation. The danger of the tactics suggested in this volume, a movement modelled on Syriza or Podemos, is that it would lack this broader class coherence and enter alliances that would compromise any longer-term objectives for social system change.

John Foster

Charles Ferrall and Dougal McNeill, *Writing the 1926 General Strike: Literature, Culture, Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, x + 225 pp. £57 hb. ISBN 978-1-107-10003-9

Sometime in 1926, the year of the General Strike, my nineteen-year-old father won £20 in a pub raffle. With the money he bought a lorry and as many bags of coal as he could afford. A powerful cartel of coal merchants had already carved up the best rounds, so he had to seek out the unprofitable districts they had ignored. As a result, though, he soon built up a large and grateful clientele, until in 1942 he was called up and his two lorries requisitioned for the war. Early on, he had discovered that it was cheaper to buy his coal direct from the pithead, rather than the local depot, and thereafter, throughout the 1930s, he was a regular visitor to the South Lancs coalfields. The only comment I ever heard him make about the situation of the miners was unforgiving: 'I used to see them standing round on street corners. They didn't want to work.'

Thirty-five years later, aged eighteen, I worked for six months in a heavy engineering factory. One of my fellow workers, someone I only ever knew as Mick, a man in his fifties with a shock of white hair and the straightest back I have ever seen, told me of the Wigan pits in the 1930s. 'They lined you up each morning', he said. 'They picked out the strongest looking men first, for the best seams. Then they'd pick the average workers for the standard seams. And then they'd pick out the most desperate looking men, for the dangerous seams. We're never going back to that.'

Nineteen twenty-six, say Ferrall and McNeill, was the year when 'for many parts of the country, the 1930s and the Depression began' (3). The mining industry, 'private, localised, chaotic, archaic' (3), had been in decline for many years before the reinstatement of the Gold Standard in April 1925 rendered it even less competitive in the face of German coal re-entering the global market. The Sankey Commission had recommended nationalisation as a remedy for the industry's problems, but this was rejected outright by the mine owners and the government. Their preferred solution was to intensify extraction

of surplus value by driving down wages and extending working hours. The Miners' Federation, with a new and militant Executive led by the firebrand A.J. Cook, reacted angrily with the slogan heard everywhere in the next few months: 'Not a second on the day, not a penny off the pay.' When, on 3 May, the miners came out on strike they were backed, to the surprise of many, by the General Council of the Trade Union Commission (TUC) with the summons to a General Strike. This lasted for nine days until, frightened of the monster it had unleashed, the TUC called it off. The following day several thousand more workers came out in solidarity. There followed six months of lockouts in which the Mine Owners' Federation refused to allow a return to work until the new, rebarbative conditions of employment had been accepted. Even when the last pockets of miners' resistance were starved back to work in November, the country continued to be vexed by bitter class antagonisms.

Leonard Woolf, one of the few members of the Bloomsbury Group to actively support the strikers, observed in his postwar autobiography that 'anyone writing about his life in the years 1924–1939 must answer the crucial question: "What did you do in the General Strike?"', adding that 'Of all public events in home politics during my lifetime, the General Strike was the most painful, the most horrifying' (1). Ferrall and McNeill's account of the literature of the General Strike divides its writers exactly along the fault line sketched above, though it is unusual to find such starkly polarised points of view. Even the most hostile critics of the strikers' cause reserved a few, if crocodile, tears for the plight of the miners, their dignity and pathos. Taking its cue from a slightly gnomic remark of Raymond Williams's that 'The crucial problem for working-class fiction is not finding the way out, difficult as that is, it is finding the way in' (15), this book falls into two parts. 'Writing from the Outside In' examines the outsiders' view of the strike, whether hostile, patronising or sympathetic. Part II, 'Writing from the Inside Out', covers less familiar ground, exploring the fictionalised encounters of those who lived it from within, whether Scottish and Welsh Modernists (MacDiarmid, Grassic Gibbon, and a cluster of lesser known Scottish and Welsh writers, chs 6 and 8) or the trio of working-class novelists somewhat arbitrarily aggregated here as 'Labour College Radicals' (ch. 7), all of whom 'unsettle and overturn the old divisions of realist and modernist' (145); these include Ellen Wilkinson, James Hanley and the largely forgotten Arthur Heslop, whose 1929 novel *The Gate of a Strange Field* was praised by Alick West as superior to *Ulysses*.

A sequence of chapters in Part I discriminates between varying 'external' reactions. 'St George and the Beast' (ch. 1) surveys a number of once popular middle-brow writers, a largely Tory-leaning claque epitomised by the prolific best-seller Philip Gibbs, whose *Young Anarchy* (1926) admired the 'topping fellows' among the strikers who 'played the game according to the rules', while

despising 'the won't-works and the boys who hang round street corners looking for trouble' (28–9). The conflicted characters of Galsworthy's *Swansong* (1928) saw the strike as 'some kind of "Awfully Big Adventure"' (30); but for others it was a damp squib, as for Evelyn Waugh, who volunteered as a strike-breaker 'to escape boredom' (36) but didn't settle literary accounts with the Beast till his wartime fiction. 'The Aesthetic Fix' (ch. 2) is a shrewd assessment of a gaggle of old stagers, Wells, Chesterton and Bennett, striving to co-opt the strike as 'part of a rearguard reclamation of Liberalism' (7); while 'In the Middle Way' (ch. 3) offers a slightly supercilious account of the fence-sitting ditherers of the Bloomsbury Group. (Leonard Woolf, Maynard Keynes and Osbert Sitwell were honourable exceptions). Roger Fry found the strike 'unutterably boring and unimportant and yet very upsetting' (9). Though 52 Tavistock Square was a hub of political activity while Virginia Woolf was writing the middle section of *To the Lighthouse*, there is, the authors say, 'a peculiarly odd detachment' to her diary entries, which veer between the apocalyptic and the personally miffed. A letter of 5 May speaks of the strike as 'this horror' and London as a 'doomed city'; but the same day she finds it simply 'tedious & depressing' (69–70) and an intrusion upon her real priorities (which seemed to include going out to buy a dress). In a detailed interrogation of its various drafts, the authors demonstrate how the novel's 'problem of class is "solved" … by its transformation into purely interpersonal relation … a middle way between exclusion and the recognition of social conflict' (72). For the Auden circle's culturally orphaned fraction of what Christopher Isherwood christened the 'Poshocracy' (ch. 5), the strike was both a 'tremendous upper-middle class lark' (109) and an occasion for leftist virtue-signalling: for Day Lewis a 'melodramatic charade', for MacNeice 'a comic phenomenon' and for Auden the chance to drive a car (badly) for the TUC (105–6). Perhaps the most surprising candidate for Part I is the chapter on '*Lady Chatterley* and the End of the World' (ch. 4), which submits all three versions of Lawrence's novel and its various drafts and plans to a skilful ideological sifting and critique. But Lawrence, though he had risen from the same background as the strikers, was now a class émigré, bringing his returnee's guilt to bear from the outside on the misery he witnessed on revisiting 'the country of my heart' as the strike collapsed, and predicting, with anxious relish, that '[t]his strike will have done more to prepare for industrial revolution, than fifty years of ordinary life will have done' (88).

Part II takes as a determining narrative the recovery, after the defeat, of traditional modes of struggle in a new configuration, exploring both the 'complex modes of forgetting' (5) by which the working class came to cope with that defeat, but, beyond that, with what Williams in his 1976 essay 'The Social Significance of 1926' spoke of as 'the growth of consciousness during the action itself' (179). Ellen Wilkinson, a Labour College tutor, strike organiser

and MP, advised an American audience in 1926 that the Strike was 'undoubtedly … a rehearsal for something bigger' (163). That 'something' the authors rather grandly define in chapter 7 as 'an education in desire that can use the lessons of defeat to prepare a new politicized and gendered imagination for struggles to come' (144–5). In this 'activist pedagogy' (143), class consciousness, the lived experience of solidarity and community, is rediscovered in the immediacy of collective action, suffusing the order of politics with a libidinal charge. Though the analogy is never drawn, the model here seems to be Yeats's 'Easter 1916', with its conviction that, even in defeat, '[a]ll is changed, changed utterly.' But though the heroine of Wilkinson's *Clash* (1929) opines that 'individuals are helpless at a time like this. It's the mass that counts – both sides' (145), there is little sign in the aftermath of defeat of that wished-for 'terrible beauty.'

The middle-class radicals around Auden moved decisively left thereafter, as is evidenced by Spender's *Forward from Liberalism*, or Day Lewis's *Starting Point* (both 1937), which casts the strike as precisely that. But in the work of such proletarian writers as James Hanley it is the sense of alternative histories, contesting the hegemonic narratives of an 'essential English identity' (13), which deconstruct the ruling-class mythos, drawing on what the authors call 'occult lines of literary innovation outside the dominant narrative of English literary history' (144). Like Hanley himself, the eponymous family of *The Furys* (1935) are Liverpool Irish, with a history that incorporates memories of the Great Hunger and, more recently, of the great prewar Irish Transport Workers' strikes involving Dublin, Liverpool and Glasgow. Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*, its generational trilogy centred on the General Strike, draws on an alternative history of communal struggle which reaches back beyond the Highland Clearances. Ferrall and McNeill here provide an illuminating contrast between the polyphonic narratives of Grassic Gibbon's trilogy and the monological 'Stalinist bombast' (141) and elitist contempt for the masses in MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1934–35), between, as they put it, 'a Communist who was never a Marxist' and 'a Marxist who was never a Communist' (141). That coal, with its global networks, was nevertheless dug out of the ground in the semi-rural, culturally homogeneous pit villages of Scotland and South Wales sets up a tension in these writings between parochial polyphonies and the hegemonic monologism of the metropolis. The quite different narratives of subaltern nations and cultures, the authors argue, allow for a non-metropolitan, 'explicitly working-class modernism' (166), a diverse modernism of the margins. In particular, the Welsh tradition 'stresses the *active* role of memory', involving what Williams calls 'the factor connecting lived culture and period cultures, the culture of the selective tradition', where 'generations are distinct but all suddenly present' (165).

The book's conclusion surveys the General Strike's afterlives in the 'selective tradition' of both literature and popular memory, demonstrating its survival, not as nostalgia but as a politically enabling and still active anger, into the miners' last Great Strike in 1984–85.[1] Its final subsection is headed, with complex irony, 'Never Again, Again', for it is on the 'contested terrain' of *déjà vu* that working-class history is always reconstituted, beyond closure. Ferrall and McNeill have written an important book, thoroughly researched, richly informative and deeply moving. Every socialist should read it, whether the mandarins of *New Left Review* or the narodniks of *Socialist Worker*. For it reminds us that the struggle to wrest an alternative history from 'the active process, always challenged, often suppressed, of memory in formation' (188–9) is our responsibility now, in the present's 'moment of possibility', if we are to keep faith with my workmate Mick's assurance that '[w]e're never going back to that'.

Stan Smith

Ben Ware, *Modernism, Ethics and the Political Imagination: Living Wrong Life Rightly*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. xi+186pp. £66.99 hb. ISBN 978-1-137-55502-1

Ben Ware's *Modernism, Ethics and the Political Imagination* aims to assess what light modernist philosophy and literature can shed on the dilemma – a dilemma that for Ware is as contemporary as it is modernist – of living a right life in a wrong world. Maintaining a close and productive dialogue with contemporary as well as modernist thinkers, Ware presents not a theory of modernist ethics, but rather a series of illuminating and committed readings of texts by Wittgenstein, Beckett, Kierkegaard, Kant, Marx and Henry James.

An initial chapter establishes the false choice presented between ethics and politics, a choice articulated by the contemporary proliferation of quasi-ethical discourses of 'wellbeing', on the one hand, and the 'political' turn in modernist studies on the other. No turn from ethics to a 'pure politics' (or vice-versa) is legitimate since, Ware reminds us, all desires for emancipation are ethical at their roots (2–3). The book's underlying concern, then, might be the revelation of a certain unacknowledged relation of the ethical to the political.

Moreover, the political moves the book makes are revelatory in a specific sense, drawing attention to what is hiding in plain sight, like Poe's purloined letter. A prominent theme is a dialectical account of seeing that posits that the failure to see what is in front of our eyes generates a blindness to futurity, a closure of the political imagination. It is only through renewed attention

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1   On this, see Harry Paterson's splendid account, *Look Back in Anger: The Miners' Strike in Nottinghamshire--30 Years On* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2014), 298 pp. £9.99 pb.

to what is present, Ware claims, that the future might be opened. Chapter 2 pursues this possibility via Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, read not as statement but as method or technique, by which the perception of the everyday, including everyday language, might be continually renewed and transformed. Chapter 3 offers a powerful reading of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* that aims to demonstrate the dialectical form of Kierkegaard's thought, as against the readings of both the young and mature Lukács, in particular, and in so doing to claim Kierkegaard as an ethical and rational thinker whose work intimates what Ware calls 'political love'.

Chapter 4 considers Beckett's *Endgame*, extending and revising Stanley Cavell's suggestion that the play might be read in terms of 'Emersonian moral perfectionism' (72), that is, a perfectibility without end. For Ware, the play – in its inability to end – seems to constitute something like a negative moment in a perfectionist dialectic that measures the gap between real and the possible, returning with renewed attention to the beginning, to real possibilities, and crucially, to the impoverished reality of everyday language. Where Ware resists Cavell, however, is in the political dimension of moral perfectionism, which in Cavell is marred by a 'magical voluntarism' (75) devoid of an account either of social determination or of collective liberation. Ware attempts to avoid this impasse by turning attention from Hamm to Clov, and to the question of why Clov stays in the play's field of oppressive relations – of why those relations do not end. The most intriguing answer construes this failure to end as an ethical provocation that refuses the spectator a position outside the cruelty of the spectacle: a provocation, Ware suggests, to see Clov as a 'sign of the future', indeed, a 'negative image of utopia' whose liberation is the necessary (as-yet impossible) redemption of humanity (81). While one might hesitate to follow Ware this far, this chapter constitutes a compelling case for the possibility of reconstructing the positive term of which the play is the negation.

In Chapter 5, Ware considers the ethical potential of a rediscovery of Kant via Marx as a possible countermove to the prevailing inhabitation of the concept of living a good life by corporate and consumerist discourses of wellbeing, individual enjoyment, and so on. As elsewhere in the book, the central demand here is for attention to what is already right in front of us: in this case, the absolute incompatibility of Kant's ethical maxims with the logic of a capitalist system that can only treat people as means and not ends. The illumination of that fundamental (blindingly obvious) contradiction should remind us that exploitation is not deviation or excess but simply routine (99); for Ware, furthermore, this contradiction illuminates a gap between the present and an alternative future (98) – the condition of possibility of the political imaginary. But Ware also suggests that Kant's thought is marked by an internal contradiction between ethics and politics, a contradiction that can be

overcome only by a move beyond Kant himself through the transformation of the doctrine of 'pure morals' into a 'practice of critique' (109). It is Marx's thought, but also and at least as intriguingly Marx's literary style, that is endorsed here as a model for a form of critique that can, rather than operating merely as an oppositional discourse, inhabit or occupy the dynamics of capitalism itself.

Finally, Chapter 6 presents a very stimulating reading of Henry James's late short story 'The Beast in Jungle'. Turning away from the emphasis on what is in plain sight exploited so productively elsewhere, this chapter presents a more resistant Lacanian reading that turns on silence and concealment. Ware recasts the central relationship in the story in the ethical dynamic of the analyst-analysand relation, in which May Bartram is seen as trying to help John Marcher free himself from his attachment to 'the Beast'. To explain the failure of this therapeutic strategy, however, Ware gives a final twist to this reading by identifying 'the Beast' as none other than the collective, the common (150). From here, a more directly contemporary political argument is introduced regarding the tendencies of populist politics to construct a range of 'Beasts', all of them misrecognitions of capitalism itself, as figures against which political subjects can be formed (153–4). Intriguing as this is, the argument here feels rather schematic – isn't it equally the case that populisms are (mis-)identifications *with* various 'beasts' of commonality rather than misrecognitions of the beastly enemy?

Throughout the work, one might indeed wish for a slightly more focused sense both of the 'contemporary' itself, whose historical distance from the modernist texts discussed is a gap not registered here, and of the contemporary modalities of the political that drop in and out of view. Be that as it may, though, the chapters of this book, while not, as Ware acknowledges, a systematic theory of modernist ethics or of politics, nevertheless identify in compelling ways the outlines of positive political possibility in the most unlikely places.

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Stuart Hall with Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands*. London: Allen Lane, 2017. xvii + 302pp. £25.00 hb. ISBN 978-0-241-28999-0

In the summer of 1956, at the age of 34, Stuart Hall went on holiday to Cornwall carrying the two draft chapters from *Culture and Society* that Raymond Williams had given him and his friend Alan Hall to read. 'That was very important to me' (250), Hall remarks of this moment. He was proud also to have read E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) in manuscript, calling it 'a wonderful, wonderful book' (264); but their personal

relationship was less so. Thompson attacked Cultural Studies at a Ruskin College conference in 1979: 'he ripped us up and set out to destroy one of his greatest devotees, Richard Johnson. This was a savage, savage attack … We never really got it together again' (265). Hall writes of Williams and Thompson that '[t]hey were my fathers', with the former clearly the more sympathetic: 'The more excited Raymond became, the quieter he grew. He dropped into a sort of Welsh burr and you had to listen very carefully to hear what was being scrupulously formulated' (265).

This autobiography has, in a real sense, three authors. Hall writes of his wife Catherine that 'I am in perpetual conversation with her and have been for years. Much of Catherine is in this book' (267). The work of Bill Schwartz is crucial to its existence. Conceived some twenty years ago as a conversation between him and Hall about 'the major contours of his intellectual life' (xiii), it had developed at his death in 2014 into a manuscript of over 300,000 words. The dialogic element persisted, but did not survive a decision – taken with the publishers – to turn the manuscript into a first-person narrative. Nevertheless, the final text originated in conversation and shared revision, wholly appropriate to Hall's lifelong way of working in inspired conjunction with others: 'No book exists which is authored solely by him' (xiii). *Familiar Stranger* covers his life from childhood to his arrival in Oxford on a scholarship in 1951, through to his political work as an editor at *Universities and Left Review* and *New Left Review* in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and ends with his imminent arrival at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in 1964.

The dualism indicated by the book's subtitle is essential to its meaning: the two islands of Jamaica and England (not, it seems, Britain) are antithetical and embody a structure of submission and domination that is reconceived as a theorisation of politics, history and culture. The argument moves from the distress caused by a dualistic structure (imperialism) to a complex and incisive interpretation of that reality. His political positioning is clear: he was scathing about the 'frighteningly ambitious' (235) Labour Party people he met at Oxford, and he had no sympathy for either Trotskyism or Communism – though he suspected that the latter 'had high hopes of recruiting us' (236). Of that there was no likelihood, though Hall has a high regard for Raphael Samuel, whose intense Communism was destroyed by the events of 1956 but whose extraordinary energies persisted into the founding of *Universities and Left Review*, amongst much else. At this same date Hall himself had become both anti-colonial and 'self-consciously an independent socialist' (240). It was a position that eventually came to matter intensely to many people, first at *ULR* and after 1960 through its successor, *New Left Review*.

The author's relationship with Jamaica is complex and often intensely moving. His mother was a particular difficulty, thinking of England as her real

home, and imposing her outdated values on those close to her: 'Disastrously, she made the family her career' (29). She damaged Hall's elder sister Patricia, cruelly preventing a relationship with a man whom she judged to be too black; a serious mental breakdown followed. More widely, Hall defines himself as a creole, 'the product of mixed origins' (18), speaking a mixed language away from home, and estranged not only from his family but suffering even as a child 'an inner rage which I found impossible to explain' (51). He began to identify with an emerging politics that was anti-colonial and nationalist, and anticipated Independence.

The chapter entitled 'Thinking the Caribbean: Creolizing Thinking' marks the transfer from a personal statement ('I am a creole') into a consideration of the contradictions caused by the submission to colonial forces and the consequent theft of the Jamaican past by white dominance. The word 'thinking', used doubly here, is crucial. Hall rejects the social-science division between the 'objective' and the 'subjective', for theorisation is driven by the 'inner psychic dynamics of the theorist' (63). The personal becomes the cultural. If any of Hall's words can summarize this autobiography, it is these:

> Much of my professional life has been concerned with the politics of who we think we are. I've been riveted by the question of how we can understand the chaos of identifications which we assemble in order to navigate the social world and also how we seek to reach, somehow, 'ourselves'. Of course this arrival never occurs: we'll never be ourselves, whatever that could mean. To recognise that this is so makes the idea of drafting this record of a life a curious thing to do (63).

By such thinking does the author of *Familiar Stranger* make himself a stranger to himself!

Hall always locates the individual psyche historically: 'Historical shifts *out there* provide the social conditions of existence *in here*' (16). Identity is a process of becoming that is never completed: in this respect Hall echoes the thinking of Henri Bergson, which had such an influence on the conception of the modernist self in the early twentieth century; but his own revised modernism is far more radical than that early version, for it is here supplemented by forms of socialism, the troubling experience of being part of a diaspora reaching out of Jamaica, and the contradictions of being a black man in England as that country came to terms with losing its empire. This autobiography is the story of the creation of a subject; one securely located in history and culture, but a subject nonetheless.

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Roberto del Valle Alcalá, *British Working-Class Fiction: Narratives of Refusal and the Struggle Against Work.* London: Bloomsbury, 2016. 192 pp. £72 hb. ISBN 978-1-4742-7374-9

This book offers a fresh perspective on postwar British working-class fiction, drawing on the resources of the Marxist and more broadly Spinozan traditions emerging out of Italian workerism (*operaismo/*autonomism), especially the work of Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri, and Deleuzian poststructuralism. Covering a substantial period, from the late 1950s through to the present, it also deploys an expansive understanding of what counts as work and worker, as well as the political struggles to be covered under those rubrics, in keeping with this tradition's theoretical emphases. Chapters cover the writings of Alan Sillitoe, David Storey, Nell Dunn, Pat Barker, Irvine Welsh, James Kelman, Joanna Kavenna and Monica Ali.

Alcalá's argument relies on the claim – familiar at least in substance, if here extended further back than in time than usual – that postwar British society has been governed by a process of postmodernisation that has resulted in a smoothing over of distinctions and contradictions as capitalism has penetrated previously uncolonised domains. The postmodern represents the progressive realization of Marx's claims about the potential for the real, rather than merely formal, subsumption of society under capital. This process has also entailed the transformation of resistance, moving out from the factory as such to the 'social factory' (Tronti) beyond it, and directed therefore not at localised forms of power but at so-called immaterial labour and neoliberal subjectivation. The forms this resistance may take on include positive defiance (Sillitoe's Smith in 'The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner' or Welsh's Renton), but also various forms of desubjectivation, including death and madness.

Collectively, the novels chart a certain historical narrative, therefore, and are also made to exemplify, as well as in some sense apparently to 'prove', the theoretical take on that history offered by autonomist theory: we are told that the 'selection of primary texts in this book seeks to reflect a specific historical sequence leading from the disclosure of work as a concrete social relation projecting itself out of the factory (and into a plurality of institutional spaces), to its reconfiguration as so many instances and forms of diffuse, immaterial and biopolitical exploitation' (6). Alcalá achieves all of this impressively, and is frequently a compelling advocate for the value of the terms he invokes. The substantial discussion of Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen*, for instance, in terms of Judith Butler's distinction between precariousness and precarity, is rigorously and subtly developed. However, the book also persistently leaves one with the sense that something of the ideological, or even analytical, specificity of

the novels – the ways in which they seek to persuade us of a certain view of the world – gets lost in the determination to vindicate particular theoretical arguments through them.

That may sound like an 'anti-theory' kind of statement, but it is rather intended to prompt questions about the ways in which theory should be used. Here, fictional characters are made to illustrate modes of both subjection and resistance to the various regimes of work, so that the novels are treated effectively as realist texts that convey to us aspects of, and insights into, the postmodern condition (note Alcalá's invocation of the reflection metaphor above).

In the process, they are also made to yield political lessons. Thus, Welsh's *Skagboys* discloses how '[e]very trace of [working class] subjective autonomy has now disappeared, and what remains is nothing but a prostrate figure of the formerly combative proletarian subject' (175). Antagonism and resistance persist, but in necessarily transmuted, appropriately contemporary forms: 'The *unreformable* junkie emerges … as a paradigmatic figure of refusal, as an individual that has already deserted the political logic of engagement rehearsed by his/her working-class forbears and that calls into question the functional logic of subjectivity' (176). The pun here on 'functional' succinctly conveys the range of meanings that the category of 'work' is understood to cover in this book.

Thus, the question of whether or not we are ultimately persuaded by Alcalá's readings is inseparable from, if not exactly reducible to, how convinced we might be of the socio-political claims and philosophical reasoning of the autonomist tradition that has achieved its most influential expression in the jointly-authored works of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Fundamental to this perspective is the privileging of an immanentist over transcendental understanding of the relations of power and resistance, according to which neither side in class conflict can finally gain the upper hand; they rather exist in a perpetually agonistic relation. As Alcalá informs us, 'the growth of what appears to be a definitive form of proletarian autonomy by no means arrests the process of capitalist expansion; on the contrary, it leads to a general increase of its valorizing and extractive power' (6). For the autonomist tradition, workers' resistance is primary and capital's innovations are reactionary, though also thereby a kind of realisation of that resistance.

The sense that the working class goes through protracted periods of defeat, which is how most of us perhaps understand the period of neoliberalism's hegemony, therefore begins to look rather like a misperception attendant on Leftist nostalgia. And here, we need to acknowledge another feature of autonomist thinking: its principled suspicion of formalised collective activism of various kinds – trade unions, political parties and so on. Thus, autonomism

has contributed to the collapse in what Timothy Brennan has described as the Left's 'organizational imaginary'.[1]

This has consequences for Alcalá's understanding of both politics and literature in this period. At the outset, the positions of Labour consensualism, as represented by Anthony Crosland, and the New Left, as represented by Raymond Williams, are both differentiated and yet subsumed through the claim that they both downplay persistent class antagonism and 'effectively relinquish the sticky ground of revolutionary change' (13). This antagonism is rediscovered instead in fictional figures such as Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton and Smith who exemplify the ways in which 'class struggle has surpassed the gradualist dynamics represented by the existing organizations of the Left, and consequently, the collective action which they propose' (15).

It is not difficult to see in this, then, a dual operation taking place: an appropriation of the mantle of radicalism for autonomism that ultimately serves a politics that is not merely strategically but dogmatically *gradualist* in its philosophical rejection of transcendence. That radical posture is sustained through the rest of the narrative presented here through the overestimation of the power of various forms that have been widely critiqued – including immaterial labour – and their corollary, the romanticisation of resistance through various forms of desubjectivation.

This is not to say, however, that the novels themselves 'fail' from the perspective of an alternative political tradition I am inclined to defend because they do indeed focus on the subjective rather than the organisational, but rather that their characters may well be understood to express or embody modes of critique that need not be viewed as politically 'adequate' in themselves. It is true that Pat Barker's *Blow Your House Down*, for instance, offers no image of transcendence – the 'chicken Christ' of the final section is destitute of hope, because it symbolises the pervasive and apparently irremediable suffering of the present – but to discern in Maggie's alienation 'the release of life from the signifying regimes which presided over its universe' (83) is in its own way to redeem the novel's bleakness and thereby temper its radical humanistic critique.

Similar things might surely be said about the readings of at least some of the other novels discussed in this book, but they constitute a collection whose diversity is underplayed. This is a book that anyone interested in these authors and, beyond them, postwar British culture, will need to engage with, but unfortunately its undoubtedly sophisticated arguments are confidently developed in order to consolidate the narratives and theories of autonomism,

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1   Timothy Brennan, 'The Organizational Imaginary', *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 147-169.

with barely any recognition accorded the critiques of them. Aspects of these novels, at least, are in a similar sense silenced.

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Alison Jeffers and Gerri Moriarty (eds), *Culture, Democracy and the Right to Make Art: The British Community Arts Movement*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017. xiv + 263 pp. £67.50 hb. ISBN 978-1-474-25835-7

Revisiting the history of the British Community Arts Movement is timely; it offers an important moment to reflect on the relationship between art, hope and the messiness of lived experience as artists. Alison Jeffers and Gerri Moriarty are both leading authors and editors of this engaging collection of essays, and their careful framing allows readers to enter the ambitious and utopian world of community arts in mid-twentieth century Britain.

This is a book that carries the authenticity of experience. The authors gathered in this collection have first-hand experience of the community arts movement, and their knowledge animates their writing. This is an important quality, but Jeffers and Moriarty are rightly alert to its contradictions. They recognise that claiming to be the authentic voice of community arts can too easily slip into becoming the voice of authority. They sidestep this conundrum by bringing together different voices in debate, and, in the spirit of community arts, not all voices are in harmony. As advocates for the movement, Jeffers and Moriarty recognise that their enthusiasm should not 'diminish a sense of critique' (19).

Following a carefully positioned introduction by Jeffers, the book is structured in two parts: 'The Community Arts Movement: Experimentation and Growth'; followed by 'Cultural Democracy: Practices and Politics'. The distinct parts enable the editors to document the ways in which Community Arts was articulated as a movement in all four UK countries: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Jeffers's chapter frames the section, deftly steering readers through the complex web of narratives and politics that shaped the era between 1968 and 1986. Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams, she observes how new understandings of culture were defined in the period, and she maps how this was articulated in the various struggles for recognition of community arts in cultural policy. The subsequent chapters in this section are enriched by this historiography, and her depth of research and lightness of touch contextualises the autobiographical narratives used by authors in their chapters on England and Northern Ireland (Moriarty), Scotland (Andrew Crummy) and Wales (Nick Clements). Each offers a thoughtful account of

some of the significant moments in the movement, and each acknowledging both their research and their partisanship. Taken together, these chapters offer a rich reading of the ambition and political utopianism of the period, and it is striking how much of their optimism about the power of the arts to engage and create communities remains intact.

Cultural democracy is a sticky concept. Jeffers is left to offer a working definition that cultural democracy in community arts offers a 'model of offering opportunities to *produce* art' (135). Elsewhere, the ideal of democracy perhaps warranted further critical interrogation. It is unclear, for example, how far these opportunities to produce art favoured particular judgements of taste, or privileged ways of working favoured by community artists at the expense of others. As Oliver Bennett describes in his chapter 'Memories, Dreams, Reflections: Community Arts and Cultural Policy – the 1970s', community arts was mostly informed by 'a kind of Romantic Marxism' (171). It was a politics that focused on the rights of the working classes and disadvantaged groups to gain access to the means of cultural production, and yet this was also the period in which Thatcher was brought to power with the support of working-class votes. There is another irony, noted by Bennett, that the ambition to extend cultural democracy has been realised most fully by the digital revolution driven and sustained by capitalism. Owen Kelly picks up this rich seam of inquiry, and again citing Williams, offers an insightful reflection on how community arts negotiated the individual and collective. He concludes with a clear-sighted vision of 'dividuals', whose work is inherently plural.

The book charts the shift from community arts to participatory arts, and documenting how the vision was reshaped over time is one of its strengths. Janet Hetherington and Mark Webster describe approaches to training community artists, building on the ground-breaking work of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Questions about the professionalisation of the community artist might be addressed further, particularly in terms of the precarity of artists' labour. Yet the book skilfully captures the major cultural shifts as community (or participatory) arts move from a movement to a sector, and this is always likely to leave readers wanting more.

This is a book that invites readers to reflect on how some of the energy and vision of the community arts movement might be recaptured today. It is a welcome and important addition to the field, and succeeds in documenting the vitality of a significant cultural movement. As such it is far more than an engaging history of a generously-spirited movement; it also offers hope for the future, and shows how its legacy can lay down a challenge to the next generation.

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Helen Nicholson
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Reviews

David Alderson, *Sex, Needs and Queer Culture: From Liberation to the Post-gay.* London: Zed Books, 2016. viii + 328 pp. £16.99 p.b. ISBN 978-1-78360-512

Like David Alderson, I came out at university in the late 1980s/early 1990s, when the ruling narrative of the demise of structuralism and the necessary rise of the postmodern/poststructural faith in multiple, local, partial truths underwrote a then vibrant queer theory and politics. It is a narrative, however, that turns out not to be conducive to political action in the face of current political urgencies. In a time of neoliberal austerity, ongoing police violence against racialised communities, rising anti-immigrant and anti-queer backlashes, climate denial and fake news, postmodern refusals of grand narratives and of large-scale resistance appear to have hamstrung radical politics. Though I still teach Foucault's understanding of power for his insistence on its relational nature, I have abandoned Lyotard's scepticism over grand narratives. It seems counterproductive, if not outright dangerous, to tolerate scepticism about large, documentable truths about climate change or increasing violence toward racialised communities. And it is in light of the limitations of what some see as the postmodern apathy borne of such scepticism that Alderson revisits some overlooked thinkers from the radical 1960s.

Alderson begins with a trajectory, familiar to anyone interested in the intersections of culture and sexuality, that stretches from the radical, countercultural politics of gay liberation to the current 'postgay' moment – a moment buoyed by apparently widespread tolerance of homosexuality but co-opted by a less-than-radical politics focused on 'marriage equality'. While not exactly embracing the term, Alderson avoids the simplistic rejection of 'postgay' as apolitical, along with the typically attendant nostalgia for gay liberation's supposedly greater radicalism. Mapping this trajectory has the advantage of resisting the liberation/post-gay opposition in contemporary queer thought. In its place, Alderson opts for a materialist analysis of gay subcultures past and present. And for this, he turns to Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955).

Combining Marx and Freud, Marcuse offers a theory of sexual liberation and an analysis of false needs. Alderson also modifies Raymond Williams's residual/dominant/emergent trajectory to find in recent gay cultural formations what he calls a 'diversified dominant' (30). These frameworks structure Alderson's analysis of re-emergent gay subcultures as seen in recent queer cultural output. These newly configured (urban, moneyed, Northern hemisphere) gay subcultures benefit from late capitalist tolerance for sexual diversity and from the commodification and commercialisation of (false) needs, including sexual ones (31). While not exactly refuting the idea that late capitalism has

been good for gays, a cheeky question posed in Chapter 2, Alderson does suggest that communities are coherent only when oppositional (206). Late capitalist commodification of queer culture has altered the contours of those oppositional queer communities. Early gay liberation activism was inherently anti-capitalist, because of the close association between early capitalism and the hetero-patriarchal family; as Alderson notes, the recent popular embrace of queer culture has also rendered late capitalism if not outright good for (some) gays, then at least good enough to undermine the uniformity of queer opposition to capitalism. This leads Alderson to look for a 'diversified dominant' in queer culture and a queer presence in the diversified dominant (299–300).

Alderson's modification of Williams ultimately allows him to offer a smidgen of hope in the present, where he ends with an expression of the 'diversified dominant' and the challenges to the late capitalist logic of 'false needs' manifested in the Occupy movements. That several other collective actions, many of which have been spearheaded by young queers of colour – Black Lives Matter, the women's marches and March for Science, #metoo and, more recently, the March for Our Lives movement in the US – have sprung up since he finished the book suggest that the hard work of focusing on real needs continues. They also suggest that queer culture is no longer a privileged site of countercultural protest. As queer culture is no longer unified in its opposition to dominant structures, it has become instead yet another part of the diversified dominant.

As Alderson himself acknowledges, this study focuses entirely on gay male cultural output and gay male cultural formations (33). Missing from this otherwise compelling and persuasive discussion is any sustained reference not just to lesbian, queer, trans and bisexual women but also to any of the feminist thinkers who have worked to adapt Marxian analyses to questions of gender and sexuality. He does invoke Jack Halberstam, who is not a Marxist, only to critique him for not being sufficiently aware of the class distinctions amongst his motley collection of 'queer subjects'. (207) More generously, Alderson mentions Gayle Rubin in passing but only for her concern about the persecution of primarily male, cross-generational sex (288–9). The book is also missing a sustained engagement with Freud that Alderson's use of Marcuse would otherwise seem to support.

Finally, a word about the book's (shaggy dog) title, which seems to promise a different – more polemic, less sympathetic – book than the one Alderson has actually written. Beginning the title with the come-on 'Sex' obviously aids in marketing the book (even Zed Books must have a marketing department). But the book's subtle critique of 'false needs' and argument for non-puritanical resistance to them is lost in the superficial, polarising subtitle, 'From Liberation

to the Post-gay'. I'm not in a position to offer an alternative, but the fact remains that Alderson has written a much better book than the existing title promises.

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Notes on Contributors

David Alderson is Senior Lecturer in Modern Literature at the University of Manchester, and the author of *Sex, Needs and Queer Culture: From Liberation to the Postgay* (2016), as well as editor, with Robert Spencer, of *For Humanism: Explorations in Theory and Politics* (2017).

Tony Crowley is Professor of English at the University of Leeds; his latest publications include *The Liverpool English Dictionary* (2017) and an online archive, *The Murals of Northern Ireland (1979–2017).*

Madeleine Davis is Senior Lecturer in Politics at Queen Mary University of London. She has published widely on the history and political thought of the British New Left.

John Foster was an editorial board member of *Marxism Today* between 1966 and 1985. He is currently a Trustee of Marx Memorial Library and Workers School, a member of the editorial board of its journal *Theory and Struggle* and Emeritus Professor of Social Science at the University of the West of Scotland.

Alan Munton is an Honorary Research Fellow in the English department at Exeter University, UK. He wrote his Cambridge PhD dissertation on Wyndham Lewis. Currently he is publishing on Lewis (as a radical), and on Salman Rushdie.

Helen Nicholson is Professor of Theatre and Performance at Royal Holloway, University of London, where she specialises in theatre in community settings. She has recently led research projects on the arts in dementia care, and is currently working with the National Theatre in London on Public Acts, a programme that invites non-professional performers to take part in theatre.

Phil O'Brien completed his PhD on class, neoliberalism, and contemporary British fiction at the University of Manchester in 2016. He has written on the contemporary British novel for *Textual Practice* and on 1930s fiction for *Literature and History*. He is secretary of the Raymond Williams Society.

Glyn Salton-Cox is assistant professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His monograph, *Queer Communism and the Ministry of Love: Sexual Revolution in British Writing of the 1930s* was published this year

by Edinburgh University Press. Among other journals, his work has also appeared in *Critical Quarterly*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Comparative Literature* and *Twentieth-Century Communism*.

Nick Stevenson is a Reader in Cultural Sociology at the University of Nottingham. He is author of *Human Rights and the Future of Freedom*, which was published in 2017 by Routledge. Currently he is working on a series of papers connected to Marxism, culture and the New Left.

Stan Smith is recovering from a spinal operation and learning to walk again. He is currently updating and expanding his 1997 British Council *Writers and their Work* introduction to Auden for Liverpool University Press.

Elinor Taylor is a lecturer at the University of Westminster. She is the author of *The Popular Front Novel in Britain, 1934–40* (Brill, 2017) and a member of the executive committee of the Raymond Williams Society.

Rachel Warburton is Associate Professor of English at Lakehead University, Canada, where she teaches early modern literature and culture, contemporary drama, queer cultural production, and feminist, gender and queer theories.

Don Watson is an independent historian. He is the author of *No Justice Without A Struggle: The National Unemployed Workers' Movement in the North East of England* (Merlin Press 2014) and *Squatting in Britain 1945–55: Housing, Politics and Direct Action* (Merlin Press 2016) and a contributor to labour history journals.

Raymond Williams Foundation (RWF)

The RWF has continued to consolidate its various partnerships with the Raymond Williams Society (RWS), but has also extended its networking significantly through *Compass* and the employment of Nick Mahony (OU), working closely with our Chair, Sharon Clancy, taking the *Everyday Democratisation* (ED) project forward. Nick has replaced Derek Tatton as RWF Administrator, who is now RWF Advisor:

Developments over the last year have included:

1 The ***Chepstow Museum RW Border Country Art Exhibition Day*** event, Sat 18th February, 2017 with more than 200 attending.
2 Westham House Fund's (WHF) decision to award £2k in 2017 for 'reading retreats' at Wortley, Gladstone's Library or wherever and for ***Keywords*** (KW) Day and residential events.
3 Plans were made to assist:
    i) a developing **National Trust (NT)/Nottingham Uni/RWF 'oral history'** project;
    ii) links to the ***Anglia University Cambridge oral history project***;
    iii) partnership with ***TalkShop***.
4 Our new Sheffield University funded librarian, Fabiana Locarno, continued her predecessors' work within the ***Sylvia Pankhurst Library (SPL)*** and completion of the on-line catalogue is now in sight. The polished and completed SPL **Librarika web catalogue** will boost the re-launch of ***reading retreats*** and KW days and residentials at several centres, notably the ***Gladstone Memorial Library*** and the ***Working Class Movement Library, Salford.***
5 ***Discussion Circles*** in Pubs, Bars, Cafes, Church Halls etc (PiPs, DiPs, Sci-Bars, café philosphique and so on) flourish and RWF's support, through prepared notes on Trump/Brexit issues, have been posted on the RWF web and facebook pages. The Chair of RWF has begun work on a new ***Levenshulme Inspire*** Charity organised and funded initiative: *Discussion Group/s for Older People* in Stockport care homes.
6 The Committee proposed supporting the ***Great Get-together Weekend 17-19th June 2017*** through organisation of discussions/seminars on 'Democracy – Tolerance and Understanding', engaging with Jo Cox's theme 'We have more in common than that which divides us'.
7 ***Residential Education Colleges***: work-in-progress on campaigns to sustain surviving colleges, notably **Coleg Harlech** and re-open the ***Wedgwood Memorial College (WMC),*** Stoke-on-Trent.

Raymond Williams Foundation (RWF)

8   All the above – and last but not least, Nick Mahony's RWF collaboration with Compass on the hugely promising Everyday Democratisation and Progressive Alliance project - strengthens the strong case for a twenty-first--century residential education revival.

See RWF website/facebook for details on everything above: www.raymondwilliamsfoundation.org.uk.

Open-access Policy – Green Route

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is now committed to supporting open-access publishing, a policy which impacts directly on submissions for the next Research Excellence Framework (REF). (For the most recent HEFCE policy guide, please consult http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/rsrch/rinfrastruct/oa/policy/).

On acceptance for publication in *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism*, authors may deposit the accepted pre-publication version of their article on a personal or university department website, in a subject repository or in their university's research repository.

As soon as the article is published in *Key Words*, the published version may replace the pre-published version, but only after an embargo period of 24 months during which period the published version may not be made publicly available. Authors may, however, use the published version of the article for teaching purposes or for sharing with research colleagues on an individual, non-commercial basis.

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Key Words is an internationally refereed academic journal. In the first instance typescripts for prospective publication should be submitted as an email attachment to the Contributions Editor David Alderson at david.alderson@manchester.ac.uk. Articles should normally be no longer than 8,000 words; reviews should typically be no more than 1,500 words. Articles should be double spaced, with generous margins, and pages should be numbered consecutively. For matters of style not addressed below, please refer to The Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edn or http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/contents.html. Contributors who fail to observe these notes may be asked to revise their submission in accordance with them.

Provision of Text in Electronic Format

Key Words is prepared electronically. Consequently, contributors whose work is accepted for publication will be asked to supply a file copy of their work to the Contributions Editor. The preferred word processing format is Microsoft Word (any version).

References and Bibliographic Conventions

Notes should be kept to a minimum, with all discursive material appearing in the text. Citations in *Key Words* appear as endnotes at the conclusion of each contribution. Essays presented for prospective publication should adopt this style. Endnote markers should be given in Arabic numerals and positioned after, not before, punctuation marks, e.g. '.[1]' rather than '[1].'. With no bibliography, full details must be given in a note at the first mention of any work cited. Subsequent citations can then use the short form or a cross-reference. Headline-style capitalisation is used. In headline style, the first and last words of title and subtitle and all other major words are capitalised. Titles of books and journals should be formatted in italics (not underlined).

Please cite books in the following manner:

On first citation: Raymond Williams and Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film* (London: Film Drama, 1954).

On subsequent citations: Williams and Orrom, *Preface to Film*, 12.

Please cite journal articles in the following manner:

Patrick Parrinder, 'Politics, Letters and the National Curriculum', *Changing English* 2, no. 1 (1994): 29.

Chapters in books should be referenced in the following way:

Andrew McRae, 'The Peripatetic Muse: Internal Travel and the Cultural Production of Space in Pre-Revolutionary England', in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850*, ed. Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 41–57.

For internet articles:

Raymond Williams Society Executive, 'About the Raymond Williams Society', Raymond Williams Society, http://www.raymondwilliams.co.uk/ (accessed 26 March 2012).

Please refer to newspaper articles in the following way:

John Mullan, 'Rebel in a Tweed Suit', *The Observer*, 28 May 2005, Features and Reviews section, 37.

A thesis should be referenced in the following manner:

E. Allen, 'The Dislocated Mind: The Fictions of Raymond Williams' (PhD diss., Liverpool John Moores University, 2007), 22–9.

Conference papers should be cited in the following style:

Dai Smith, 'Translating Raymond Williams' (paper presented at the Raymond Williams's Culture and Society@50 conference, Canolfan Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea, 7 November 2008).

Quotations

For quotations use single quotation marks, and double quotation marks for quotations within quotations. Punctuation is used outside quotations. Ensure that all spellings, punctuation, abbreviations etc. within a quotation are rendered exactly as in the original, including errors, which should be signalled by the authorial interpolation '(*sic*)'.

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Book reviews should open with full bibliographic details of the text under review. These details should include (in the following order): in bold type, first name(s) and surname(s) of author(s), or first name(s) and surname(s) of editor(s) followed by a parenthetic '(ed.)' or '(eds)'; in italics, the full title of the volume followed by a period and a hard return; then, in regular type, the place of publication, publisher and date of publication; the page extent of the volume, including front papers numbered in Roman numerals; the price (where available) of the supplied copy and an indication of 'pb.' or 'hb.'; and the ISBN of the supplied copy.

For example:

> **Dai Smith,** *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale.* Cardigan: Parthian Books, 2008. xviii + 514 pp. £24.99 hb. ISBN 978 1 905762 56 9