

# Anarchism and the Arts



Enlargement of an anarchist badge from the 1980s  
(the original is 22mm ( $\frac{7}{8}$  inch) diameter)

**The Raven**

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QUARTERLY**

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# THE RAVEN anarchist quarterly

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This issue of The Raven was edited by Donald Rooum

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## *Lynn Olson*

### **Is Art Necessary?**

What good is art anyway? Do we really need art?

It has been argued that the human species had to wait until it had solved the problem of obtaining adequate food and shelter before it could find the leisure to produce and enjoy art. Another popular assumption is that art is only for the wealthy, with their free time and leisure, to collect and enjoy. Many believe that art is only a leisure time activity.

We know that primitive people used symbols, such as words and gestures, to successfully cooperate in hunting and foraging for food and in building shelter. We know that primitive peoples have found time to create both visual and musical art forms. The Eskimo of the frozen north, for example, with their need to constantly hunt for food have also found time to carve stone and bone into aesthetically sensitive sculptures. Art creates the symbols, words, gestures, drawings, numbers, diagrams and musical patterns, as well as the tools, that people, however primitive or advanced, have always used to cooperate in whatever tasks they faced. Far from being a leisure time activity art has produced the symbols that enabled humanity to develop the technology that leads to leisure. The origins of art are lost in the mists of prehistory.

Art creates the symbols – the culture – that gives meaning to raw reality and that transforms that raw reality into a reality that we can experience intelligently in a meaningful and effective way.<sup>1</sup> Without symbols – words, numbers, musical patterns, diagrams, drawings, paintings, photographs, sculpture and the semiotic expressions – we could never understand the world. If culture is the system of symbols that enables us to experience reality then art is the means that creates the symbols.

Art is people made. A tree, for example, is made by a process we call 'nature'. But the word 'tree' or a drawing of a tree is the symbol that separates the tree from the rest of raw reality and gives it meaning. Art cannot create a tree. Art can only create the symbols that represent the tree. But without the symbol of a tree the tree would have no

meaning for us. A tree may have had value to the pre-human anthropoid that climbed the tree to escape a predator but until someone invented a symbol for the tree it had no meaning. Without art and without symbols we could not communicate the meaning of a tree, or of anything else.

The human mind is a compulsive maker of symbols. The small child invents visual symbols and starts to draw before learning how to read and write. The unconscious mind creates symbols while we sleep. These manifest images of our dreams are the encoded symbols the unconscious mind creates to give meaning to our unconscious experience. They may require free associations to decode their latent meaning but they reveal the creativity of the unconscious mind.

Perhaps the first symbols were simple gestures or drawings made in the air by the moving hand. Watch anyone's hands while they talk and notice how the hands draw pictures in the air to illustrate the story being told. We can never know for certain but such 'air drawings' may have preceded speech and may have been the first form of art. Our own persistent need to talk with our hands may be the enduring vestige of the most primitive form of art.

In popular usage the term art is taken to mean only the visual arts of drawing, painting and sculpture. A more comprehensive meaning would include, in addition to the visual, all literature, music, architecture, body language, sign language, all the useful tools, implements, buildings, bridges, roads, cars, lorries, clothing and airplanes – all of what we also know as technology. Everything made by human effort carries a semiotic message that conveys a symbolic value. Unfortunately in our mass produced world the semiotic message is all too often that of monotonous and tiresome uniformity, a monotony we try to ignore. When everything was made by individual craftspeople the products had a unique semiotic value of interesting variation.

Architecture was formerly indigenous to a particular region. Building design reflected the unique culture of its own place with the aesthetic forms its people valued. Today's high rise buildings in Singapore and in Hong Kong look the same as the high rise buildings in New York or in London or in any other city. The semiotic message is international uniformity reflecting the uniform values of international capital. Art creates the symbols that give meaning to raw experience. Only with symbols are we able to deal intelligently with the problems of experience. With symbols we propose, test and evaluate possible solutions to problems.

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Art creates the symbols we use to implement the method of science. Art and science are two sides of the same coin.

At one time the only way to know if a certain building design would stand up by itself was to actually construct the design and watch to see what might happen. If the structure began to collapse before it was completed – and many did collapse during construction – the architect would change the design and try again. Today with our knowledge of the behaviour of materials and how stresses distribute within a material, and with the mathematical equations that embody that knowledge we can build the structure on paper – completely with symbols – to determine if it will support itself. And now with computers it is possible to work out in a few hours design equations for complex structures that formerly would have taken years to work out on paper. And the computer will even supply the blueprints and the lists of required materials all completely detailed to save months of tedious paper and pencil work.

Symbols enable us to solve problems on paper or in the computer. But there will always be occasions when it is necessary to test ideas and solutions, computerised or otherwise, in the experience of raw reality. Symbols can represent reality. They can give meaning to reality. But they cannot replace reality.

The aggregate of symbols that art creates – words, numbers, gestures, musical patterns, signs, diagrams, drawings, non-verbal semiotic messages – that transform raw reality into something we can experience intelligently, this system of symbols is what we know as culture. We often think of ‘culture’ as something to add on to the surface of whatever our technology has enabled us to produce. After constructing a complex building we decorate the surface with designs or patterns and hang pictures on the walls believing that we are adding ‘culture’. We easily forget that culture is the system of symbols that enabled us to design and construct the building. Decoration may be a part of culture but culture is much more than decoration.

Often confused with decoration is that part of culture that is assumed by some to have no useful purpose. These are also called the ‘fine arts’ and include literature such as poetry, fiction and essays, the visual arts such as drawings, paintings, sculptures, jewellery, photographs and prints, and the musical arts such as song, dance and instrumental. But these systems of symbols also transform raw reality into meaningful experience. The literary, visual and musical systems of symbols enable us to perceive what we see and hear with deeper understanding and with increased intelligence. This improved

perception brings with it an enhanced quality of life and living.

As we look at a painting we see how the painter has perceived a certain aspect of life. The painting is an organisation of symbols – experienced as line, colour, value and texture – that allows us to share the painter's perception of some part of the experienced world. If that painter is more keenly aware of some aspect of experience, more perceptive than we are, then our awareness is enhanced by studying the painting. A sculptor's ability to find three-dimensional symbols for experience, the writer's ability to find verbal symbols for the 'slice of life' experiences, the musician's ability to find tonal or atonal symbols for experience, all allow us to share the unique understandings of these artists. The more perceptive the artist the more our lives are enhanced by the work. Art makes available for all the perceptions and visions of the most sensitive and creative minds.

The visual arts are often divided into two camps – the representational and the abstract. If the symbols seem to suggest a recognisable object the art is called 'representational'. If the symbols are combinations of line, colour, form, texture and value (also known as the elements of art) but without any recognisable object the art is called 'abstract'. But all art is both abstract and representational. Abstraction and representation are two aspects of producing art. First we abstract from experience its significance and then we represent that significance with appropriate symbols that we may invent. We have now re-learned what primitive peoples have always known – that combinations of line, colour, form, value and texture can symbolise and represent the aesthetic experience of feeling and life. All symbols are abstractions of the reality they represent. All visual, literary, musical or architectural – achieves its unity through a dominant theme repeated with variations. The unifying theme may suggest a recognisable object or it may be the particular combination of line, colour, form, value and texture.

### ***Innovation***

In art, as in all human activity, there are both the *incorporators* and the *innovators*. The incorporators produce and reproduce only what has been produced before. They incorporate into their art the existing accomplishments of others. The innovators also incorporate existing accomplishments but in addition they innovate by perceiving differently and creating symbols for their new perceptions. Almost all the useful work is produced by incorporators. The highly skilled professionals who accomplish the complex technical work in our

industrial society are incorporators who have learned how to include existing knowledge in their efforts. Everyone has to know how to incorporate the relevant skills of the past into the tasks of the present.

Innovators are very few. But this tiny minority creates the new perceptions upon which all real progress depends. Without innovators the growth of culture would cease.

We recognise the innovators who have appeared throughout the course of history. Art museums, for example, collect and exhibit the paintings and sculptures created by those whose innovations have influenced the development of the visual arts. Private collectors who buy paintings and sculpture for a financial investment try to purchase what they hope will increase in value – the work of innovators. Art dealers try to convince collectors that they have innovative art that will increase in value. To promote the illusion of innovation the art media has developed a jargon of confusing expressions known as ‘artspeak’ – impressive sounding but essentially meaningless verbalisms – that tries to surround certain art and selected artists with an atmosphere of originality. But only those artists whose work has endured long enough to determine its permanent influence can be safely recognised as true innovators. And by that time the price of their work has escalated far beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest collectors.

Because computers can be programmed to deal effectively with large masses of detail, can produce visual patterns, ‘pictures’ of mathematical equations and can show the ‘other side’ of spatial concepts such as architecture and sculpture, it has been assumed that computers might also create innovations in the arts. The term ‘artificial intelligence’ has been invented to indicate the amazing feats of computers that are predicted to soon surpass human intelligence in creating new solutions. This requires us to look carefully at what is meant by intelligence. Human intelligence is often confused with such faculties of the mind as memory or the rapid manipulation of mathematical symbols. Now we find that computers can memorise and recall much more and with less error than any human mind. And computers can work through the most complex mathematical equation much faster and with greater accuracy than the best of human minds. This should help us to recognise that such faculties as memory, manipulation of symbols and working out equations is not what is meant by human intelligence. Instead, human intelligence is more accurately defined as the ability to learn – and by learning is meant the ability to change behaviour. Computers cannot change

their behaviour. They can only be programmed to do what has already been done in the past. They can repeat the past much more rapidly and with greater efficiency than any human mind but they can only repeat the past. Only the human mind – however imperfect and inefficient – can change behaviour, can innovate and create art.

Innovations can occur in any field of human activity but they are not always welcome. Established professionals find security in their identification with well recognised and widely accepted ideas. They often feel threatened by innovative ideas and will fight to prove the new ideas ‘wrong’. Some fields, such as chemistry and physics, welcome innovations more readily than other fields. A few researchers have even been known to falsify reports in the hope of achieving recognition as ‘discoverers’. But such deceptions are quickly exposed by other researchers who test and re-test to verify all reports.

Innovations in economics and social organisation are resisted with much more vigour and venom. Innovations in social-economic theory become a threat to the existing power structure and the privileged position of its parasitical beneficiaries in the ruling minority. New social-economic ideas cannot be tested and evaluated – as can a hypothesis in physics – because no ruling elite can allow any alteration of its power and control. New social-economic ideas are condemned to a media blackout and are ignored by respectable professors and intellectuals. A society with beneficiaries at the top making the rules for the exploited mass of workers at the bottom depends upon everyone continuing to see that static societal structure as unchangeable, immutable, eternal and even as God given. If the exploited working people should ever see the social-economic system as capable of change they might try to change it. If the workers – the useful producers of all wealth – should ever begin to suspect the existing property arrangement to be the means of their exploitation, they might start seeking a different system of ownership and control of resources.

Totalitarian rulers recognise the power of art. Their governments are particularly fearful of innovative art and take extreme measures to control all art. Plato would have banned all poets and creative artists from his ideal totalitarian state. The Nazis under Hitler and the Bolsheviks under Stalin established strict limits for all art. Writers, musicians, painters and sculptors were required to keep their work within narrow boundaries set up by the state. Only those themes and images that reinforced the power structure were allowed. Severe penalties were inflicted on any transgressors. The art produced under

these controls may have had high technical qualities but was all of a uniform monotony devoid of any creative individuality.

Ancient totalitarian regimes also limited art to narrow and static forms. The stiff and formally rigid figures in the ancient Egyptian sculptures, relief carvings and paintings suggest the stiff and formally rigid social system with its class structured hierarchy of priests, nobles and pharaoh. Apparently the Egyptian rulers enforced strict rules for all art.

When the Athenian Greeks built the Parthenon they had developed a figure art radically different from that of ancient Egypt. The figure sculptures from the pediment of the Parthenon and the relief carvings of the metopes (the 'Elgin Marbles' now in the British Museum in London) express a flowing grace of human form that breathes life into the marble. The nude male and draped female sculptures all reveal the lithe and lissom grace inherent in the human form. Even the horse's head is one of the most elegant animal sculptures ever carved in stone. Athenian society at that time was far from a completely libertarian and egalitarian system but it did support many free and libertarian views among its citizens. And the Athenian figure art embodies and symbolises those libertarian values. Their neighbours in Sparta, dominated by a rigid military hierarchy, produced no art to compare with that of Athens.

The prehistoric cave paintings of Lascaux and the other art of that time give us examples of art produced without the influence of government or any hierarchic social structure. We cannot know what social organisation these prehistoric people of the Upper Palaeolithic period may have had. There is no written record. But we know their technology was limited to simple hand tools of stone, wood or bone. They had no agriculture. They obtained their food by hunting and foraging. Such primitive food collecting methods required a high degree of cooperation. With such limited technology, each individual could contribute to the collective effort only enough to sustain one individual. When each individual must contribute to the collective food supply there is no opportunity for a parasitic ruling class to appear. When even the shaman has to help bring in the food there can be no parasitic priesthood laying down rules for others to follow.

Those who were fortunate enough to have visited the caves of Lascaux before they were closed to the public could only have been impressed by the vigorous vitality of the paintings. The recently discovered caves of Grotto Chauvet (1994) reveal more prehistoric paintings and engravings as vigorous and as aesthetically sensitive as those of Lascaux. As examples of animal figure art filled with life,

vitality and vigorous movement and rendered with a delicate aesthetic sensitivity these paintings have never been surpassed.

Since our own advertising art uses pictorial figures to promote sales – successful money hunting – it is easy for us to assume that these animals were painted on the cave walls only to be stabbed with arrows in order to promote magical hunting success. Perhaps we can now abandon our own mythological fantasies and begin to see this art of the prehistoric people as symbols that gave meaning to their raw experience, symbols that embodied the vigorous freedom and vitality the people who made them must have known.

### *Innovative society*

If innovative ideas can lead us to create a liberated social-economic system, what would be the structure of that social system? There is no specific and definitive answer and no blueprint. What we know about the liberated society is mostly what it would not be. The new society would not have a class structure with property and resources controlled by the ruling minority. It would not have a political government. It would not have a state. Institutions such as the military would not exist. We can safely assume that any free society would rely upon mutual aid to get the necessary work done but exactly how that mutual aid would be accomplished we cannot know until people resolve to put it into practice. We can review previous forms of mutual aid such as the collectives that developed during the Spanish Revolution, the organisation of the Kronstadt rebellion against bolshevism and the Makhnovist Movement of the Ukraine. These historical antecedents can give us many important insights and valuable encouragement. But the particular form of any new institution must await the building of that free and liberated society.

We should be cautious and even suspicious of any blueprint or detailed pattern that tries to outline the form and structure of the new society however logical and sensible it may seem. History likes to repeat itself and these blueprints for the future are little more than well disguised repetitions of the past with many of the errors of the existing social system concealed within. Even their authors and advocates are unaware of the unacknowledged mistakes of the past their blueprints contain. The Russian-Bolshevik experience reminds us of how Lenin's blueprint for the new society was actually nothing more than a repetition of the totalitarian past with all of the old Tsar's brutal bureaucratic bestiality brought back to life with new names and new faces.

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The building of the truly free society is a creative act and that means a creative society. A free and liberated people will regard their society itself as the medium of a creative art just as paint is considered the medium of the painter's art, and stone one of the mediums of the sculptor's art. As any artist must study the art medium to better understand its potentials and possibilities, so a free and liberated people must study their society to understand its potentials and possibilities. As any creative artist must be willing to try out and test new ideas and methods so a free and liberated people must be willing to try out new social and economic ideas and methods. They will experiment and evaluate with the medium of their art – the society itself. Unlike contemporary society where innovative social and economic ideas are ignored and censored a free and creative society will welcome innovative ideas to test and evaluate.

When a creative musician begins work on a new composition it is not possible to know in advance the specific and detailed form that music will take. When a painter or a sculptor begins a new work there is no possibility of knowing in advance what colours and forms it will assume. When a creative people begin to create a free and liberated society there is no way of knowing in advance what specific form that society will take. Like any creative art the creative society can only unfold and develop and find its own form through the efforts of the creative people themselves.

No creative literature, music, painting or sculpture is identical to another creation even when made by the same artist. One creative work of art may resemble another work but is never a copy of the other work. One creative society may resemble another society – may have many aspects in common with other creative societies – but will not be a copy of any other society. In a free and liberated world there will be many different societies each with a different particular structure and each trying out and evaluating different and innovative social ideas.<sup>2</sup> And each society will share its insights and new understandings with other societies as any creative art has an influence on other artists. Creative art – like evolution – leads to ever more variety and complexity.

The practice of creating art brings out the potentials of the individual who creates the art. Art is the means through which each of us can develop and realise the most of our potential abilities. Not only does the creative society develop the potentials of that society but only in the creative society will it be possible for each of us to find and realise our full potentials as human beings.

**Notes**

1. "... culture is a symbolic system which transforms the physical reality, what is *there*, into experienced reality." Dorothy Lee, *Freedom and Culture* (Waveland Press Inc [PO Box 400, Prospect Heights, IL 60070, USA], 1987) page 1.

2. This idea had also been expressed by Frederico Urales (Juan Montseny), 'La Anarquía Al Alcance de Todos' in his *La Revista Blanca* (Barcelona, 1932): "Anarchism must be made up of an infinite variety of systems and of individuals free from all fetters. It must be like an experimental field ... for all types of human temperament." As quoted by Burnett Bolloten in *The Spanish Civil War* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), page 65.



From *A Weekend Photographer's Notebook* by Vernon Richards

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## Steve Cullen

### One Man's Eye

This is a book\* of great beauty, and of great humanity. The selection of Vernon Richards' photographs is a record of artistic achievement, an example of the triumph of the amateur. In his introduction to this large format book, Vernon Richards explains that most of the 170 black and white photographs were taken during the 1940s and 1950s, many of them during the time when he worked as a travel courier. In consequence, the people and places portrayed range from the East End of London to occupied Italy, via backstreets of Belgium, the squares and streets of Paris and the beaches of Spain. This is a very eloquent book, almost a series of conversations in pictures. The photographs are, however, more than the view through the eyes of one man. They are, at times, crystal fragments of the autobiographies of men, women and children caught by his camera. Vernon Richards has managed to capture the lives of his fellows, but in creating the art of his photographs he has somehow minimised his own interlocutory role, allowing his subjects to speak for themselves. This is artistic success, the creative truth of the artist throwing a clear light onto the ordinary lives of people. One result of this success is that although the scenes portrayed are forty, fifty and more years ago, there is a feeling of the continuity of life, that, out there somewhere, are the successors of these young lovers, grandmothers and children, the poor and the wealthy. That the past is a place, not a time, and that we too live there already.

Vernon Richards has divided his book into eighteen sections, unity in each section being provided by a theme, such as 'Trees and Tree Stumps', 'The Homeless, Beggars and Tramps', or by a place, for example 'Paris, Jardin des Plantes' or 'La Escala on the Costa Brava'. But cutting across those sections I was aware of other themes. In particular, after spending a weekend continually turning to the book, I was aware of how people were so much to the fore, particularly women and children. And, perfect as some of his other compositions

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\* *A Weekend Photographer's Notebook* by Vernon Richards (Freedom Press, 1996, 130 pages A4, ISBN 0 900384 87 5, £6.95).



are – like the winter trees against bare skies, or the black-eyed cat on sun-striped stairs – it was to the photographs of people that I kept returning. My favourites are those of women and children, particularly the boys in La Escala by the harbour wall, with a boy laughing and pointing to something we cannot see, or the elegant but poverty-stricken children in Naples in 1946, and the Romany children at the station, with the little girl giving such a smile of pleasure, the sort of smile we only make when we are children. Then there are the women that appear in the photographs. Vernon Richards clearly has an eye for beauty, and beautiful women feature strongly in this collection. In 'Montmartre – Place du Tertre' an artist draws a picaresque shop front, watched by a middle-aged man sporting a marvellous wine-gut, both oblivious to the photographer, but in the middle ground sits a beautiful young woman in a white polo-neck, a cigarette in her hand, looking straight into the camera – a photograph to weave stories around, to start a novel with. And there are other women, a dark-haired protester at a CND rally, the back of a chic

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Parisian, the Italian girlfriend of a British soldier in occupied Italy. All beautiful, all 'ordinary', nothing posed, the life that we can see around us, now or forty years ago.

In his introduction Vernon Richards says that he wants the photographs "to be enjoyed as photographs", but as Camus observed, we all have a weakness for "the nostalgia of other people's lives". It is difficult to see these photographs without wondering about Vernon Richards' life. The viewer cannot help but think about the photograph that wasn't taken, the view that the subject of Vernon Richards' camera would have had if they were looking. Did the woman in the Place du Tertre broaden her smile after the shutter was closed? Did he speak to her? And what did Vernon Richards' companion buy in Le Printemps store in Paris in 1936, while he looked up and photographed a dome of steel and glass against a blank sky? Perhaps there will be some more clues in the companion volume of this collection that is promised, featuring photographs of his friends – something I am greatly looking forward to.

Throughout the book the photographs are reproduced with limpid clarity, and the entire production of the volume is first-rate, doing perfect justice to the photographs themselves. Vernon Richards gives credit to Charles Hall and Aldgate Press for the work put into making this such a successful piece of publishing. He also explains that the funding for the project came from his friend Hans Deichmann, to whom the book is dedicated, along with money from the sale of Vernon Richards' own books and papers. As a result, all the income from the sales of the book will go to a "new Freedom Press Solidarity Fund to help voluntary Freedom Press workers who don't get the dole and need a helping hand". I hope and trust that the book gets all the attention it deserves and that the fund benefits accordingly.

*A Weekend Photographer's Notebook* is an inspirational collection of photographs. It is a collection of beautiful photographs, but is also a statement of love, a love of people and places, a love of life. In this way it is also a testament to the purpose of anarchism – to protect, nurture and enjoy human life. It is an exercise of the artistic imagination that I will return to again and again.

## Gavin Burrows

### The Slipper and the Rebel: The Beano and Baxendale's Bad-Child Brood

[This article first appeared in *Comics Forum* number 11, published by the Comics Creators Guild (7 Dilke Street, London SW3 4JE, £2.25). It is reprinted here by permission of the author and publishers.]

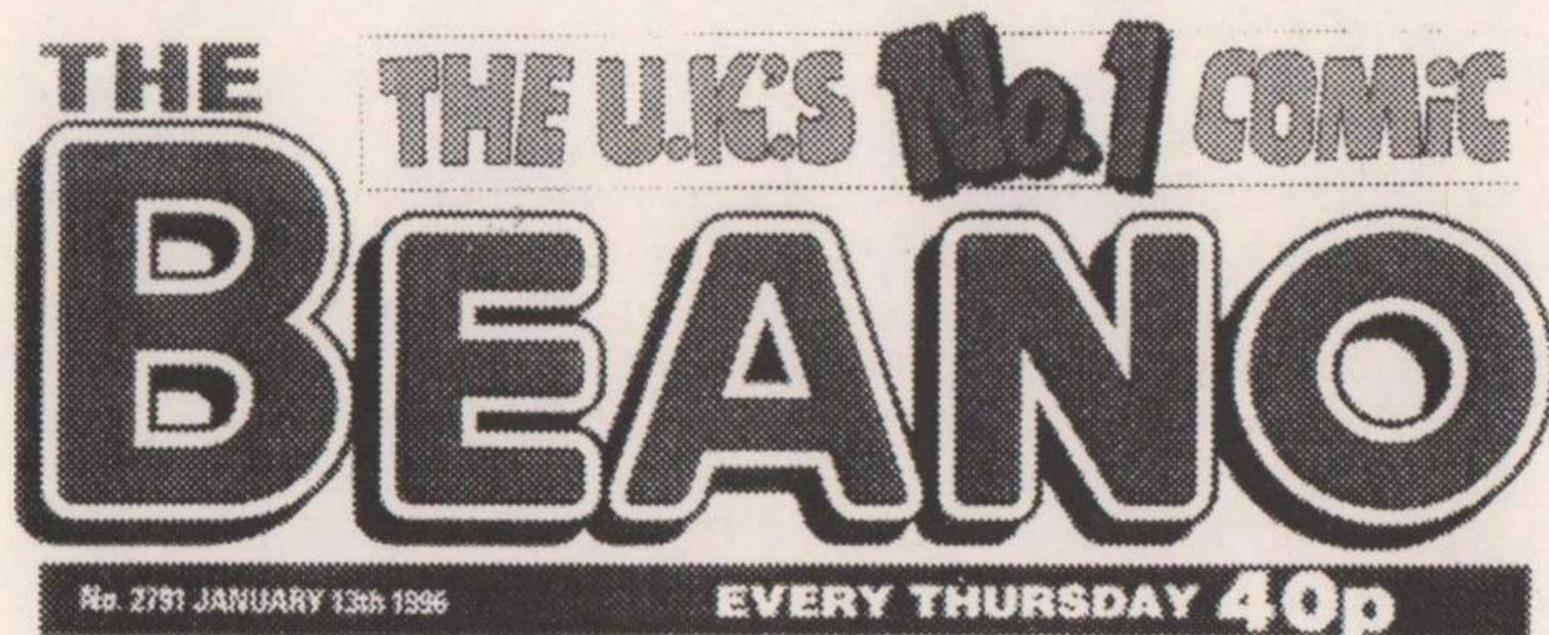
#### 'The UK's no. 1 comic!'

The rare individual who knows nothing of the *Beano* may take its title legend, 'The UK's no. 1 comic', as hyperbole. Those more knowledgeable of the current state of our comics industry might suggest damning with faint praise. Yet to keep a child's comic going for nearly sixty years, against so many changes in social and leisure activity, is a remarkable achievement. To manage this for a younger child's comic, with such a speedy turnover in readership, is even more impressive.

Though of course down from its '50s peak, readership is still a respectable one and a quarter million. Concentrated among six to thirteen year olds, this also includes a 'subterranean adult following' estimated at 12% (which presumably does not include parents reading their children's copies). Moreover there is a vast empire of spin-offs, including animated cartoons and a range of merchandising running to several hundred items.

More importantly for us, the *Beano* and its characters have crossed that indefinable line into the national consciousness. Like Mickey Mouse, the very name has entered our language; a 'beano' is now a meal only in stuffy dictionaries. These





disposable drawings have come to achieve iconic status, becoming as emblematic of British culture as Superman or Uncle Sam are of the American.

Of the many characters it is the 'naughty child' variants which have won most fame, principally Dennis, who fronts the comic and dominates the merchandising. The charmingly naughty child is of course hardly a *Beano* invention, more a cultural stereotype akin to the mad scientist and dumb blonde. But it is the *Beano* characters who have made themselves our reflex example of this figure.

We might wonder if there is any lurking ambiguity in these characters, who stand simultaneously for innocence and naughtiness. If so it is one to which publishers D.C. Thomson are sensitive. When interviewed for the *Arena* documentary founding editor George Moonie insisted the *Beano* had "a moral – if [the characters] do something really naughty they must be punished. But kids appreciate that, I think." This statement has become a virtual cliché, with almost any book or article using some variant of it. It's become popular wisdom.

This sensitivity is perhaps unsurprising. Dundee-based Thomson's were of course notorious for parochial paternalism, a state of affairs which has only started to change within the last ten years. Even in the comics industry, which denies creators rights as a matter of course, they became a byword in autocracy. Accounts depict their corridors as an almost Kafkaesque other-world of secrecy, rumour and regulation. Even into the '80s Thomsons were forbidding any outside reproductions of their strips, and eschewing any marketing or media tie-ins of their gold-mine characters.

### *The Baxendale myth*

Thomsons also insisted on anonymity for their artists, in a stance comparable to Disney's. This was something which impeded our study of the Mickey strips, as lack of knowledge about their creator drove us back into talking about the Disney group homogeneously.

However, we are luckier here. Leo Baxendale, creator of the bulk of the famous *Beano* characters, has been both vocal and articulate – producing two books and numerous interviews (see 'References' for details). Indeed, it's tempting to see the opposite occurring here, and a modern myth being built around Baxendale. (The term 'myth' is not used here to signify any falsity, which would need to be proven or dis-proven, but for the importance its adherents hold to it.)

The myth goes something like this: the corporate Thomson characters were actually invented by one man, Baxendale. He was a free thinker involved in such radical causes as nuclear disarmament and anti-Vietnam. Against the conservatism of Thomsons, or indeed the '50s decade in general, he created subversive characters in strips which glorified rebellion (it might also mention his later taking Thomsons to court). Perhaps Pat Mills put it at its pithiest: "That man has been doing anarchist propaganda for kids for years!"

This myth may have largely been spread by Baxendale's high standing among comics professionals, a following which ranges from his countless copyists within children's comics to the less likely Mills, Steve Bell, Fluck and Law and many others. His recent exhibition featured a wall of congratulatory telegrams from celebrity cartoonists.

This standing strongly contrasts with the one held by 'comics fandom', the adults and teenagers who collect and study comics as a hobby. Though Baxendale's court case overlapped with that of Jack Kirby and Marvel Comics in America, Kirby obsessed fandom while Baxendale was all but ignored. The efforts of Paul Gravett, Lew Stringer and a few others ultimately had little effect. This reflects a general bias against both British comics and cartoonists among a fandom grown up around appreciating American imports, and always keen to prove they weren't reading 'kids stuff like the *Beano*'. The infamous 'league table' of greats in *Fantasy Advertiser 110* sidelined British humour comics, suggesting even fandom's most intellectual developments were unable to escape their upbringing.

One way to examine this myth would be by a study of the production history of the characters, and of the cultural context which surrounded this. However the myth's *existence* is at least as interesting as its supposed 'truth', and may shed light on the wider question of

how these characters have achieved such longevity. We'll therefore start by looking at uses (and abuses) of these characters outside the pages of the *Beano*: examples which may tell us more about popular perceptions.

***Copyright is theft! Oo-err!***

Bill Watterson, creator of *Calvin and Hobbes*, recently railed against the 'thieves and vandals' who would license or plunder the images of his characters. The pirating of comic characters is of course nothing new, and probably as old as their merchandising. The slippery image is simply harder to tie to copyright than a brand-name or logo. Nor is it unusual for the kidnap victim to be subverted into satire. However, the widespread adoption of *Beano* characters by anarchist propagandists occurs on a deeper level, as we shall see.

It started in the 1960s or earlier, and is still going on, but it was at its height in the politically charged atmosphere of the early '80s. Even many provincial towns such as Hastings or Tunbridge Wells had anarchist centres or fanzines, while *Class War* outsold the *New Statesman* or *Spectator*.

With complete disregard for copyright law, anarchist posters and fanzines would be peppered with pirated *Beano* characters – principally Dennis, Minnie and the Bash Street Kids, though cartoon policemen were often thrown in too. Some would be crude copycat drawings, others would have their speech balloons subverted, while many would be changed only in context.

Though this practise became widespread, it was taken to its furthest in (the radical hot-bed of?) Maidstone in Kent. Their fanzine even took on the name *Be@no* (with the anarchist circle added to the 'A'),



The monthlyish paper of a Maidstone anarchist group.



leading street-sellers to report hassled mums buying copies for their troublesome kids whilst shopping!

Taking the propaganda of a political movement most of us associate with society's fringe and decorating it with familiar, even cosy, images is clearly a clever move. (And it's worth reminding ourselves that Thomsons were not then promoting or merchandising their characters – giving the anarchists an effective market gap.) Yet alone this would tell us nothing new about the characters themselves.

However there are not merely brand-names being plundered for popularity here, characters are also being used for their appropriateness. In so doing the anarchists are making statements about the meaning of these icons, and about the culture which generated them.

This is best explained by contrasting an anarchist badge (above, left) with graphics from the recent direct action news-sheet *SchNEWS* (above, centre and right). Superficially similar, these images are actually working in almost opposite ways. We laugh at a monkey-wrenching Florence from *Magic Roundabout*, and bad-boy Mickey Mouse, because we know such good girls and boys wouldn't *really* behave in such a way. Yet we laugh *with* Dennis, imagining he just *might* say that. And, as most of us have read Dennis since childhood, we become implicated. He is saying something that is to do with our frame of reference, our culture – with us.

### ***Subculture in the UK***

How were the anarchists able to come up with these images? Such imagination might surprise us. As we saw with the Marxist polemic *How to read Donald Duck*, by Dorfman and Mattelart, there has been a tendency among the left to treat mass culture with disdain – as the ideology of the rulers rubber-stamped onto the ruled. Sometimes the

cultural can even disappear altogether, as if just a cloak over what's 'really' political – as for example when Dorfman and Mattelart ignore Carl Barks, the artist who created the work they criticise.

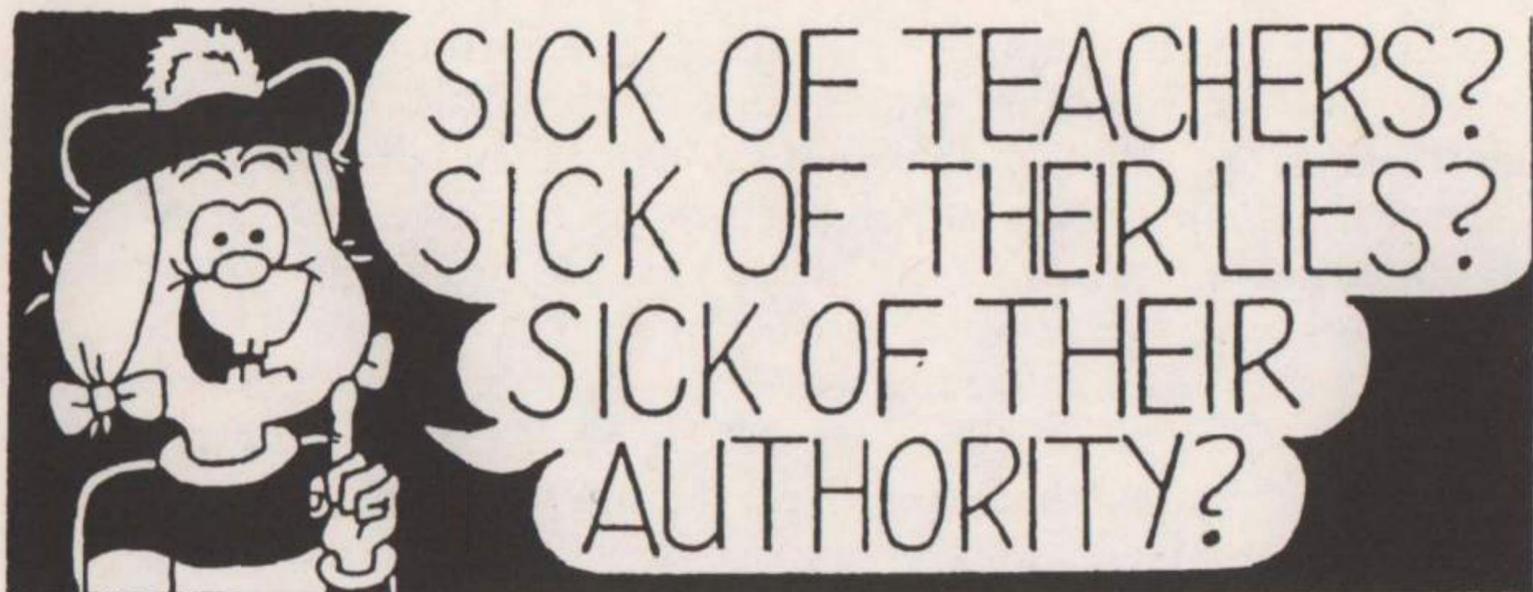
But while mainstream leftism portrays society as something subject to outside economic determinants, anarchist philosophy sees it more as a composite of social tensions. Given this, culture – even mass culture – can be conceived of as expressing rebellion. This tendency was exacerbated among the early '80s movement, which was *in itself* cultural in origin – it had grown out of punk subculture. Its antennae for cultural manifestations were therefore sharper than we imagine of 'political' groups.

The cultural context of the early '80s is hard to remember. There was actually a feeling of great *optimism* among radical groups, which lasted at least up to the defeat of the Miners. Some anarchists visualised the gloves coming off soon for a final confrontation between two rival British traditions: one a proud and defiant working class, aware of its own culture and traditions, and the other a petit-bourgeois enemy of penny-pinching shopkeepers and uptight bureaucrats. The disobedience of Dennis was seen as part of the proud history of the former, as something of 'ours'. (And, as if on cue, Thomson's official *Fifty Golden Years of the Dandy and Beano* book came with a tribute from Margaret Thatcher.)

With the suggestion that they were not distorting Dennis so much as unmasking him, the anarchists were producing a valid artistic



Dennis the Menace and Minnie the Minx in newspaper heads from the 1980s.



'We can run our own lives and make every day a holiday — Kids against school',  
poster by Attack International.

statement which should be seen as part of his history (something that could not be done for Florence, who can only be mugged for her innocence). The images may not have been linked sequentially, but this does not diminish their effect.

Indeed the 1980s anarchists could be said to have been more imaginative than the 'new comics' writers who followed them. Their fashion for reworking old characters typically contrasted a supposed simple-minded morality of the past with the oh-so difficult modern world, and served to diminish characters rather than expand on them.

As so much has been written on the influence of the Situationists on punk and modern anarchism, it may be worth briefly addressing this here. The study of Situationism seems to be fast becoming an academic sub-genre, and like most academic industries it's proving itself more adept at self-perpetuation than understanding its subject.

It's true Situationist theories such as the 'detournment' of popular culture did influence the anarchists. However, when the Situationists altered comic panels to make political statements, they worked oblivious to the context, or even content, of the panels – which were treated with the same contempt as advertising art.

Probably a greater influence on anarchist thought was Margaret Thatcher, whose share ownership and 'right-to-buy' council housing schemes composed a similar attempt to change society culture-first – though hers was ultimately far more effective.

Despite the dates of Baxendale's court battle overlapping almost exactly with their maximum use of his imagery, the anarchists never referred to him explicitly in their propaganda. Indeed, the case might have given them something of a dilemma. Their stance was implicitly anti-copyright, that intellectual property was just a variant of theft. Yet had Baxendale won ownership of his characters, they would merely have been stealing from someone else – and far less 'cool' a target than a corporation. (Baxendale was making clear that he regarded his characters as commercially 'under-exploited'.) Perhaps they secretly cheered for Thomsons!

Also, covert hierarchies in the movement were marked by a feigned anti-intellectualism that forced everything to appear spontaneous and unconsidered. Debates over aesthetics were about as 'in' as fascist sympathies.

Nevertheless, when I interviewed several ex-participants for this feature, many enthused over Baxendale's talent. This would seem to put the anarchists in the same broad field as the myth-makers, portraying an innate radicalism in the characters dampened down by

the 'bosses' at Thomsons. Let's now look at how this view compares to the actual production history.

***Crash! It's the suburban guerrillas! (1951-53)***

Thomson's publicity talks of a "cosy 1940s world" being "shattered by a gang of urban guerrillas", a crazy brood of new characters who blew apart the *Beano* of old. However, the transition was neither as painless nor as linear as this suggests, as we'll see.

At its inception (30th July 1938, six months after its sister *Dandy*) the *Beano* had been a mould-breaker in British comics. It featured child characters for its young audience to identify with, and gave them distinguishing gimmicks to make them recognisable. Stories were told by speech balloons and short captions, rather than the traditional and cumbersome below-panel blocks of text. (This style was almost entirely the work of one artist, Dudley Watkins, a Thomsons man so religious he drew only with an open Bible beside him.)

However, by the early fifties time had moved on and copycat comics been brought out to close the *Beano's* lead. Thomsons needed to make another leap to stay ahead.

They found it on 17th March 1951, with the first half-page appearance of "a new pal you'll enjoy, the world's wildest boy". Dennis the Menace was the creation of Davey Law, a staff artist for Thomsons (a position he kept concealed from the freelancers) who had previously worked on their newspaper strips.

Dennis's character is best conveyed by comparing him to his American namesake, who started life the same week (see below). In fact we need only compare the hairstyles! While Hank Ketchum's Dennis sported a cute, fluffy blonde side-parting, Law's creation sprouted an unruly thicket of black hair which pre-dated punk by some twenty-five years.



However if Dennis set out to be bad from the start, early strips reveal some hesitations – as if he found it hard to leave *Beano* traditions quite behind. People will frequently exclaim ‘The Menace!’ and leap in shock from him - including a headless ghost (14th February 1953)! Yet a mere month later (14th March 1953) Dennis is so horrified by his parents threatening to leave home he runs distraught after his ‘dear old Dad’!

It was the sinister changeling Dennis which won out. From a first appearance where he ignores a ‘Keep off the Grass’ sign (7th March 1951), he went on to mount gargantuan pranks. The strip often carries the suggestion he was a universal spirit of mischief compressed into a boy’s body. Yet however huge his scheming, Law was always careful to see him punished by each set’s end. One slipping he gets is so severe it shows up on the RAF’s sonar (28th March 1953)!

This wild youth quickly came to top *Beano* popularity charts. He pushed his way into full-page status in March ’53, and annexed the colour back cover the following year. Law continued to draw him until his retirement in 1970, when the strip was handed to Dave Sutherland.

There is perhaps an irony in Dennis becoming the most popular *Beano* boy, with Law himself remaining so anonymous (many assume Baxendale invented Dennis). The explanation for this may lie in the difference between the two’s drawing styles. While Baxendale is tight and rich in comic detail, Law is loose and expressive, with his feats of talent disguised by an apparent spontaneity. In short, while Baxendale’s style naturally displays his skills, Law’s serves to hide his.

### ***Baxendale and the Beano expansion (9153-56)***

In August 1952, some eighteen months after its introduction, Law’s Dennis was chanced upon by the young Baxendale. Though he had never previously considered the *Beano* as a possible market for his work, he was caught by the strip’s vibrancy. Here, he has written, “was a remarkable new character in a modern urban setting”. He immediately sent samples to Thomsons, and was called for interview by editor George Moonie.

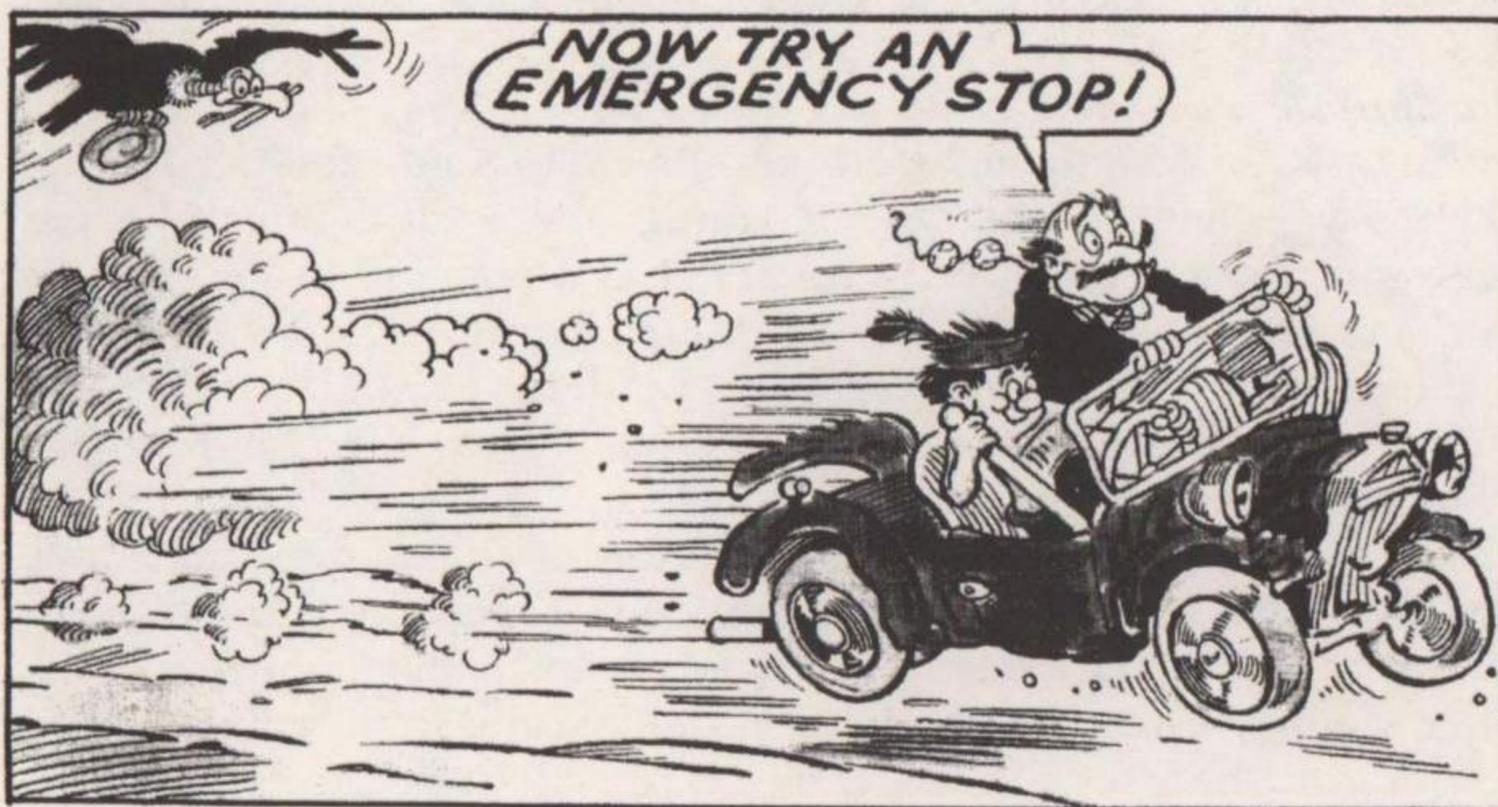
Despite his enthusing over Dennis at this interview, Baxendale was first given standard Thomsons fare to draw. Uninspired, he turned in lacklustre work and was shuffled up and down the Thomsons line. After seeing a Giles cartoon of “a tumult of children pouring out of school”, he had sent in an early sketch of Bash Street. Yet this languished in a Thomsons drawer. He seemed either on the point of quitting in frustration, or being dispensed with.

Perhaps part of the problem was Baxendale's youth. Unlike Law, a staffer of twenty years standing, he was a newcomer aged 22. The paternalistic Thomsons may have been assuming the lad needed putting through an apprenticeship (they often gave him Watkins originals to study). It should also be emphasised that at this point *Dennis* was the exception to an otherwise traditional *Beano*.

Whichever, fortunes were to change when Baxendale hit on a 'Red Indian Dennis the Menace'. Unlike the Bash Street drawing, this did meet Moonie's approval and 'Little Plum Your Redskin Chum' appeared in April 1953 (however, despite being billed as 'The Redskin Dennis' little of the Dennis imitation made it into the final character).

Pleased by Plum's reception, Moonie assigned Baxendale another Dennis variant – this time a girl menace, to be called 'The Minx'. Baxendale was not keen on the project, as Law himself was already doing this successfully with 'Beryl the Peril' in the *Topper*. Sneakily, he obediently dressed Minnie in a Dennis look, but rebelled over her character.

While Dennis was driven by predatory plotting, Minnie exploded with boundless ambition. Her flights of imagination about herself inevitably took her into conflict with authority figures – who were invariably male. The Careers Officer set (5th July 1958) show this the clearest. Minnie tells the Officer of her plan to become "heavyweight boxing champion of the world", dispatching the Headmaster with a



Little Plum has a driving test, *Beano*, 2nd November 1957.



Minnie being babysat, *Beano*, 28th December 1957.

“Minnie tum-tum crusher” as proof of her sincerity. When told “little girls aren’t allowed” such careers, she rages “I bet that’s a new rule they made up when they heard about me!”

About 73% of Baxendale’s sets for her fall in this category (while in most of the rest, she battles marauding gangs of boys). Unlike Dennis, she has not been conventionally ‘bad’ so she need not be conventionally punished. Most sets end either with her coming out on top or in a ‘general shambles’. Minnie was to be no girl copy of anybody. (While more recently Minnie has taken on Dennis’s addiction to practical jokes, along with his leap-forward in age, the newer strip ‘Ivy the Terrible’ – starting 8th November 1986 – features a younger character in much of her original mould.)

Minnie proved an even bigger hit than Plum, and was on a full page by August 1957. This encouraged Moonie to take the ‘tumult of children’ drawing out of his drawer, and put it into production.

There can be little doubt that Bash Street was Baxendale’s crowning achievement. The set-up, a rampaging mob who could never be reduced to a sum of parts, played to his talent for comic detail: panels would writhe with the motion of a dozen or more figures, each one a mass of limbs and bursting pockets. However, it was also the slowest to find its formula.

WITH A ROAR, OUT THEY POUR, EVERY AFTERNOON AT FOUR!

When school is done, the kids of Bash Street School have fun. LOOK FOR THEM EVERY WEEK!



First Bash Street strip, *Beano*, 13th February 1954.

It first appeared under Thomson's title 'When the Bell Rings', in a format where a short set-up led into a large panoramic panel (13th February 1954). But by that June the big panels had been phased out, and the army of kids reduced to the core group of today. This looser structure was less restrictive, while the recurring characters were better for reader identification. It was promoted to full-page in November 1955, and attempts at two-page expansion commenced in 1961. As everybody from the sack of fan mail to the staff room called



The Bash Street regulars impersonating circus chimps, *Beano*, 29th July 1961. It 'Bash Street', the name was finally changed officially (17th November 1956).

### ***Crime and Punishment***

Becoming Baxendale's most popular work, Bash Street completed the suburban guerrilla revolution at the *Beano*. The circulation had risen to an all-time high of two million. Moreover, it was also the first strip to receive fan mail from adults. Donald Room (later to create the anarchist strip *Wildcat*), has told Baxendale of the big contemporary following at Bradford Art College for the then-anonymous 'Master of Bash Street'.

However, Bash Street was also to prove Baxendale's most controversial strip, and his differences with Moonie were to start from the very first set. Seeing the final panel incompletely inked, Moonie pointed to a pencil teacher ineffectively attempting to reassert authority (and of course about to be snowballed for his pains). Moonie suggested he be replaced by a platoon of police "to keep the Kids in order". Himself under rule, Baxendale complied.

The third, 'Club Night', set had arriving police in the script. Baxendale complied again, even arming the police "with a formidable collection of weaponry", but showing the Kids preparing an elaborate booby trap! On seeing this, Moonie insisted the police were removed and the set toned down.

From then on Baxendale left out the police and put back the gangly and ineffective teachers. These slowly coalesced into the one Teacher we know today, who bore a resemblance both to Minnie's Dad and to Moonie. It was as if that booby trap had frightened the police off.

(However, Baxendales's Banana Bunch over at the *Beezer* – starting 20th January 1956 – regularly featured police.)

The cover proved another area of contention. Though Thomsons knew the new strips were selling their comics, they insisted on the moribund Biffo the Bear (a chart-bottomer) keeping the cover. (Bizarrely, this state of affairs continued until he finally yielded to Dennis – in 1974!) When Banana Bunch was put on the back cover of the *Beezer* instructions came down for its removal. This decision was stuck to in the face of reader complaints.

It's possible Thomson's concern was over adverse parental reaction to this stronger material. As younger children's comics are actually bought *for* them by their parents, publishers are particularly vulnerable to their opinions. Moreover, the period was marked by a vindictive campaign against American horror comics, culminating in the 1955 Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act. Nevertheless, it is hard not to see a shade of moralism from the Thomson clan.

However, it is also worth emphasising how much slack Baxendale was cut for the inside pages. He would virtually ignore the scripts sent to him, and create such gems as the famous 'Army Display' set where the Kids steal their weapons to shell Bash Street School and machine-gun fleeing teachers! As Baxendale put it, "their worriedness soon disappeared when fan letters started pouring in and circulation went up".

### ***The end of an era – sob! (1959-62)***

Baxendale's leaving of Thomsons was therefore not reducible to any final clash of irreconcilable moralities. The truth is more prosaic, almost petty. While Moonie had worked well with Baxendale, he left in 1959 to be replaced by Harold Crammond. By this time the *Beano* had increased its own page count and spawned two new sisters that needed filling. Crammond set about trying to crank more work out of his most profitable artist.

But Baxendale had been working non-stop for nine years, seven-day weeks which included many late night sessions. Anecdotes abound of him turning up to dinner parties complete with drawing board, to finish off a few panels between courses. Unsurprisingly, by December 1960, he had fallen ill (a common occurrence among successful comic artists – a few months later fellow *Beano* artist Ken Reid developed a virtual allergic reaction to blank drawing paper). Though he returned to work within five months (against his doctor's orders), he had marked himself down as 'difficult' in Crammond's book. Relations became cold and curt.

Baxendale finally left the *Beano* in May 1962, supposedly over a ludicrously minor production matter. (He reproduces the whole Pinteresque exchange in his autobiography.) Even after this he continued to work for another editor at Thomson's *Topper* for another two years, before finally moving to IPC.

### *Writs and assaults*

In 1975 he left comics for good – frustrated by what he saw as a paucity of vision and institutional disrespect for artists. He drew volumes for the book publishers Duckworths, until stopped by illness in 1980. Perhaps inspired by Duckworths' better treatment, he then started a lawsuit against both Thomsons and IPC. (IPC were then engaged in a widespread reprint of his work, reaping their 'right' not to pay royalties.)

This dispute stretched on for seven years, before finally being settled out of court. Though exact details have never been revealed (perhaps a settlement stipulation?) it's known that instead of co-ownership of his characters Baxendale won a pay-off he's described as 'adequate'.

This resolution coincided with an economic boom, and a renewal of interest in comics. Whether motivated by the case, by the mega-success of the *Beano* parody *Viz*, or by their approaching fiftieth anniversary, Thomsons switched tracks and started a massive media assault and merchandising plan. The '30s era of closeted parochialism had finally come to an end.

Perhaps as a consequence the *Beano* of today shows some attempt to revitalise its classic strips, for example the remodelling of Dennis.



Merchandising with the remodelled Dennis, 1990s.

However, these are married to some anaemic new characters in abysmal mush that lack even the residual energy of the old. (Doubly sadly, it seems only these new character strips may be signed.) It's like reading a comic pulling both ways at once, making its future far from obvious.

### *Post-war hopes*

However complex and uninevitable Baxendale's relations with Thomsons may have actually been, we must still explain how his work could find two million readers a week. At the time, the post-war baby boom was producing an expanding comics audience, while the consumer boom expanded their supply of pocket money. Together these preconditions created the golden age of children's comics.

Yet this alone would not explain why, in a crowded market, Baxendale's characters should win that pocket money. Indeed, his works sits oddly with our prejudices about 'The Fifties', a phrase which resounds with quaint clichés of table manners, cricket greens and social deference. How could England be flag-waving for the Coronation while chuckling along to the Bash Street Kids?

It may help to escape such simplifications if we re-locate the early '50s to the post-war period. Many had seen the war as a battle for social change rather than a preservation of class order, and this was a battle they were keen to continue on the home front after VE Day.

There was a great distrust of privilege and elitism, yet simultaneously an almost universal view that society was best run by enlightened institutions (exemplified by the then-credible example of Soviet Russia). Hence existing institutions presented an ambiguity, with the ever-present suggestion all they needed was a good shaking-up of their old-world stuffiness.

Typically of the period, almost all of Baxendale's work revolves around two of the greatest institutions – school and the family. And the fact that his work came out of one of the most archaic institutions, Thomsons themselves, as much enhanced his work as limited it. Indeed, this gave it much of its direction. As Martin Barker puts it: "Thomson, precisely because of their great secretiveness [as a company] produced comics which conspired more directly with their readers the children". Perhaps this was the very spark missing from Baxendale's work at the more modern IPC which prevented it from entering the popular consciousness.

Thomsons provided a context where, whenever a Baxendale bad 'un cocks a snook at authority we know what kind of authority it is – stuffy

teachers, petty council officials, traffic wardens and Thomson sub-editors. Without this context the humour is meaningless (as it may well be to many foreign readers).

### *Friends and relations*

Our surprise at finding a generation to fit Baxendale into is in one sense odd, because he has always been open about his influences. Apart from the afore-mentioned Giles, he has regularly paid tribute to the Warner Brother cartoons and madcap radio comedies such as *The Goons* (with the radio of course companion to the solitary freelancer). If we examine these we will discover strong underlying similarities in times and places.

The wartime spirit discussed above was strongly associated with rebel comedies such as *ITMA*, which made it's stock-in-trade a range of crazy characters, frenetic gag-telling (for its day) and an unstated but unmistakable irreverence for authority. *ITMA* was kept topical to the hour, with researchers trawling pubs and factories for the latest slang. Censors were stupefied – was it keeping up morale, or encouraging insubordination?

It's chief post-war successor was *The Goon Show* (originally *Crazy People*), first transmitted in May 1951. Writer and star Spike Milligan always maintained its humour came from its team's wartime experiences, and the legendary backstage battles with BBC bureaucracy became part of the act as plummy-voiced announcer Wallace Greenslade got increasingly pulled into the antics.

Similarly, Carl Ronald Giles had been drawing for the left wing *Reynolds News* during the early part of the war, before leaving for Beaverbrook's arch-conservative *Express* in 1943. Summing up the paradox by calling himself "the sort of socialist who drives a Bentley" he kept the position for life. He was even awarded the Order of the British Empire, with the Queen commenting how "the Englishman's ability to laugh at himself has won us the Empire".

His 'anarchic' cartoons were clear predecessors of Baxendale. Of particular note is his cartoony expressiveness in portraying the eccentricities (even wildness) of his British stock characters, set against a minutely rendered and authentically drab suburban environment. His celebrated extended family of characters, British as bully beef, regularly attended demonstrations as family days out. Grandma in particular took a liking to battling with police!

To these comparisons we might add the Ealing comedies, particularly those of Alexander Mackendrick such as *Whisky Galore*

(1951) or *The Ladykillers* (1955). While Baxendale doesn't list these among his direct influences (presumably because, being live action, they lack his unhinged expressiveness), he does refer to them affectionately in his books. It isn't hard to reason why, given Mackendrick's comic focus on class struggle and glorying in the rebels beating their betters.

Charles Baar has described Mackendrick as an 'oppositional' Ealing director, reflecting critically back upon the cosy Ealing concern by setting his films in stand-in institutions.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Baxendale's sole American influence bears the least similarities. Warner Brothers animation as we think of it had been underway since 1935 (with the invention of Porky Pig), and by Baxendale's day most of the main directors (Avery, Clampett, etc.) had left. However, Chuck Jones remained to continue the operation. His own Road Runner (devised in 1948) perhaps influenced Baxendale the most, with surrealist desert-scapes that prefigured Plum's world. (In addition, it is noteworthy how Kurtzman's celebrated tenure on *MAD* magazine almost exactly date-matches the *Beano's* face-lift days – 1952 to 1956.)

### ***Bad boys get spanked***

So if the myth-makers' conception of the strips' creation as against prevailing social conditions is false (or, more accurately, over-simplified) what of their stance over punishment? Here the debate becomes more acute as it involves locking horns directly against Thomsons. We may remember Moonie's earlier quote to *Arena* as 'the Thomson line' on punishment, a quote which becomes more interesting given Baxendale's comments on that programme.

Baxendale devotes a long section of *On Comedy* to *Arena*, explaining how he repeatedly stressed to researchers (on and off camera) he never used 'punishment' in his sets. Yet these remarks were edited out of the finished programme – in favour of Moonie's. As research had been extensive, this was not an error – so we must presume it was an ideological choice.

As *Arena* had used a Baxendale panel of whacking to illustrate Moonie's remarks, Baxendale set out to research his old sets. He found a mere 17% of Bash Streets featured whacks, and few of those reduced to the punishment-as-moral Moonie describes.

For example, *Arena's* panels came from the 12th September 1957 set. In it, Teacher arrives each morning in a temper and whacks the Kids. Investigating, they find this is because he's losing morning golf to the Headmaster, so they surreptitiously cheat him into winning.

The strip ends with a happy Teacher – but the defeated Head whacking them with his golf clubs!

This clearly does not fit the conventions of Moonie's moralities, no more than does the oft-repeated gag of the Head whacking Teacher. Perhaps the 11th April 1959 set explains things best, where a new Head declaims: "I must impress upon you I do not agree with the use of physical force against other people – line up for the belting of your nasty little lives!"

We don't need to start delving into Derrida to explain this, we just have to remember our own childhoods. To a child's world-view adult exertions of power often seem to stem from child motives – spanking out of spite etc. (And they're probably more often right than we like to think!) The sets present a world where adult authority is not only exposed – it often gets its comeuppance!

To quote Martin Barker again: "What these strips do is to impose a child-like logic on an [adult] disorder. They use the main resource acknowledged to be theirs as children, and turn it into a weapon of response; that resource is the area called 'play' or 'fantasy'. Childhood is turned into a mode of response to the very forms of power that each day reproduce it."

Reader's voice: "Yes, but isn't all his emphasis on punishment getting things out of proportion?" Yes, good point! Ideological clashes often leave common sense behind. Certainly the children interviewed on a Radio Four feature on comics seemed strangely to be more interested in the characters being 'always naughty' than in slapped-on editorial warnings such as "Being naughty to teachers is only fun in comics". Law's Dennis was popular with whacks, and when whacks were inserted into Baxendale's creations after his departure readers didn't desert in droves.

Of course a moralising coda is a well-known trick for getting around the censors. Everyone, including the censors, had little trouble recognising that American gangster films and comics such as *Crime Does Not Pay* were not motivated by a sense of public duty. Ultimately, Moonie's quote is a fig-leaf. Hence he was happy to publish Baxendale's amoralities once they were selling without causing major complaint. (Nor, whatever their other differences, does Crammond seem to have attempted to reinstate policemen or punishment.

Also, *any* coda would have a lesser effect on a *Beano* audience than on public watchdogs. It is well documented how younger children have uncausal perceptions, tending to see events as merely a succession of unconnected incidents. Perhaps this is partly why

comics are constantly popular with them, the stop/start pattern of panel breakdowns reinforces this view. I can remember as a child looking again and again over favourite panels, oblivious of any story context.

Yet despite this it should be emphasised that debate over 'punishment' is not pointless and the *Beano* does tip towards a radical reading. Compare it to American Disney strips such as 'Mickey's Kangaroo' where childish exuberance is put to useful labour and resolved – here by the kangaroo's destructive energies being directed into prize-fighting. It is partly the weekly cycle of formula that stops the *Beano* doing this. For example, in the 'Careers Officer' set discussed above, Minnie is found a useful job – she's tied to a post, and her ragings make her a good scarecrow! Yet she's not tamed (in fact she's furious!) – and we know she'll be back to Minxing next week.

Yet there is also less of a tendency for Britain to identify itself with its child characters than there is for its younger cousin. Dennis may be British, jocularly speaking, but Mickey *is* America. Paradoxically, the lesser importance attached to him gives Dennis greater freedom.

### ***Conclusion – myths revised***

It's worth considering whether Baxendale himself would be sympathetic to the myth built around him. After all, his favourite of his characters was his first-born and Plum was a 'cowardly conniver', the very opposite of a rebel. Moreover, while Baxendale decried the classiest public-school world of character-building adventure that preceded him, he has always maintained his own work happens in a fantasy world.

It was just a *different* fantasy, a *Beano* world whose convulsive laws of physics allowed schools or whole towns to be destroyed and rebuilt each week, where the greatest explosions could do harm only to dignity. While the myth-makers saw Bash Street as a suburban reality in cartoon form, for Baxendale it was "the reality of a separate world, determined by the demands and possibilities of comedy". Given this, he might well see the myth as an attempt to reduce his art to politics.

However, the author is not an authority on his own work, nor the regulator of how it is consumed. Plum may have been Baxendale's favourite, but not with the readers. He was the last to expand to full page (in November 1958), and isn't even in the *Beano* of today. Also, as we've seen, Baxendale's post-*Beano* characters never managed to catapult themselves into the popular consciousness.

More importantly, this is equally true of the meaning of the strips. As Baxendale said himself: "The *Beano*, as art, is the antithesis of exclusivity". When we pay or money for our *Beano* products we can make our choice over their meaning for us. In fact his characters became popular precisely *by allowing* for this.

As he says: "The destruction of authority figures continued, but you couldn't tell from the beaming smiles of the Kids whether it was deliberate or just happenstance, *and that was an ambiguity which seemed to make it all the funnier.*" (Radio Four feature, my emphasis).

The creative ambiguity is vital not only in understanding these characters, and all their attendant myths, but to grasping the workings of popular culture in general. Even the anarchist appropriation of them, though it may present the illusion of revealing their 'real essence' (outside the confines of corporate censorship etc.) actually depends on this very same ambiguity.

Of course such characters have no 'real essence', any more than a word is imprisoned to just one meaning. Rather they are markers for discourses around subjects society finds problematic – in this case, constructions of childhood around obedience and rebellion.

Every appearance of the characters must express this discourse in some form. The conservative Thomsons may seek to push it one way, into warning morals about behaviour and punishment. The anarchists may attempt to wrench it in another. However, each has entered into a bargain where they might only express points along the discourse – and never a resolution of it.

For example, Thomsons could never have Dennis learn his lesson and start going to Sunday School. This is not only because sales would slump, but because the 'real' Dennis would be elsewhere. He would live on in the public mind, scoffing at the softie stand-in they had impersonating him these days (much in the same way that Superman continues to resist any changes DC would do to him).

The anarchist reading is similarly limited, perhaps even more so. They might show Dennis deposing his Dad and seizing control of the slipper, but the meaning of such an action would depend upon the audience recognising a wider Dennis who hasn't changed.

However, this does not mean the discourse is infinitely malleable. As we've seen, the *Beano* characters have a far greater predisposition towards rebellion than their American, or even non-Thomson, counterparts.

Neither does it mean changes along the discourse are but insignificant variations. Rather, they are the cultural barometers of

our times. This is nowhere better shown than the divided Britain of the early '80s devising two Dennises – as if one were for each side. But equally today's Dennis – imprecise, shifting in shape, half-leaning back to his trouble-making past but not quite grasping it – is just as much a mirror for ourselves.

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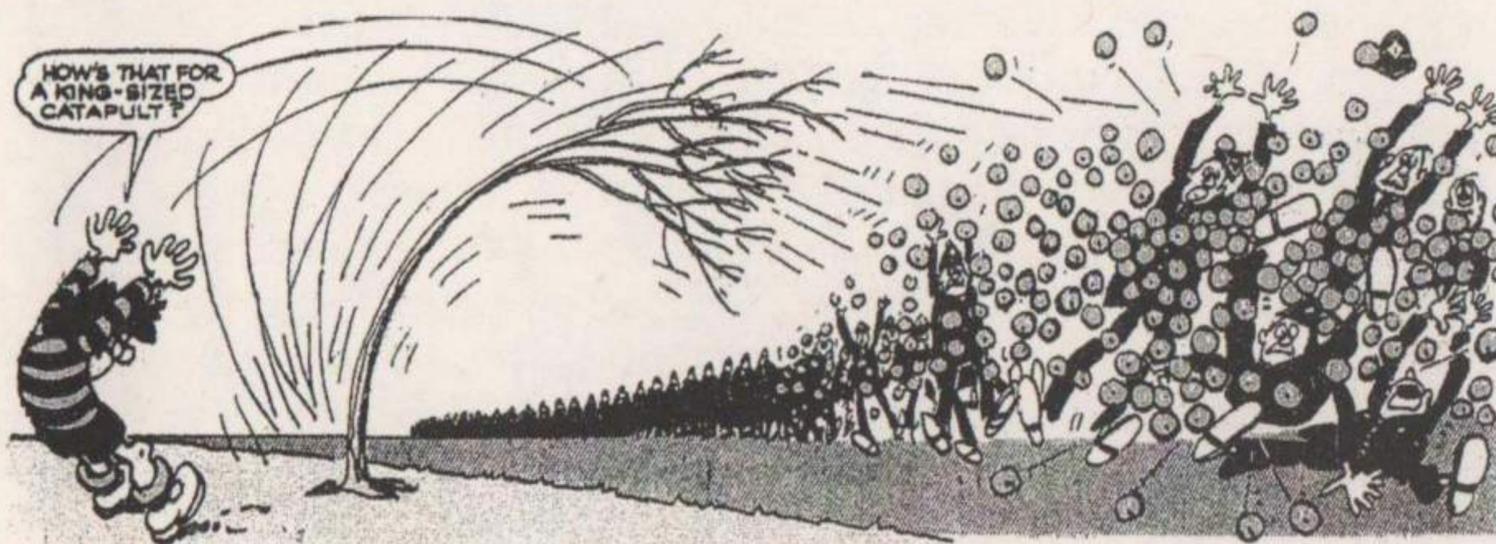
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### Acknowledgements

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Dennis and police, *Beano*, 15th October 1960.

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## Peter Neville

### Patronage or Independence? Elias on Mozart

One of the major problems within anarchist thinking is the suffocating feeling that anarchism owes much to Karl Marx and marxist collectivisation. So much so that much anarchist writing appears to be an apology to the ghost of Marx and much anarchist activity related to barely understood marxist concepts such as class struggle, whatever that means. Yet was Marx correct in his assumption that the society which we know owes its central *raison d'être* to the economy, and hence the apparent integration between the economy and the state? There are other approaches.

One of these is that the late Norbert Elias, who suggests that although the economy was important, culture was more important. Central to the development of the state was the high culture of court society, and it was this that led to the creation of the modern state.

Another major problem in anarchist thinking is the realisation that what one wants more than anything else is individual freedom unrestrained by collectivist pressure: the pressure of the employer, the pressure of family and the pressure of the group. Yet at the same time one needs the means by which one can sustain oneself. The problem is to work out what might be an acceptable ratio between economic and psychological survival. Few if any of us have private incomes.

Elias could be said to be a follower of Max Weber rather than Marx. Although in the '30s he worked in the Frankfurt School of Social Research, it was as Karl Mannheim's teaching assistant – Mannheim had been Max Weber's teaching assistant – not as a member of the young marxist elite in the school who later went to America and began to be later known collectively as The Frankfurt School. Elias's magnum opus was his book *The Civilising Process* which is divided into two parts, 'The History of Manners' and 'State Formation and Civilisation'. This was unfortunately published in Switzerland, in German, in 1939 and written by a Jew. Not the most auspicious way to begin a distinguished academic career, although the book is

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probably one of the best books published this century, and very relevant to anarchist thinking.

Much of Elias's work has followed a theme. If the main factor relevant to Marxist sociology was work and its influence on social structure, one might say that the main factor of Elias's contribution was leisure, our interests and not the imposed interests of an employer. Much of Elias's work was on the sociology of leisure, including the sociology of sport and how this affects our awareness and our identity. In his work on Mozart,\* Elias looks specifically at a person who, born at a time of strict class divisions, required the patronage of a royal court or ecclesiastical beneficiary in order to survive. He needed the role of servitor to the rich and powerful, as the means of sustenance to fulfil his genius.

Mozart differs from many of his contemporaries in that rather than just seeking a patron he tried to break out of the patronage system altogether and set himself up as a freelance, an independent artist rather than a dependent craftsman. In this, as the book relates, he was not very successful, yet a few generations later in the Romantic period of music, he could have become the performer and the composer for a middle class public, a public that barely existed in Mozart's time.

Mozart's assertion of individual identity was an important factor in relation to high culture and mirrored what was to come. The opening up of the court society to a middle class public led to bureaucratisation where court servitors would be replaced by functional administrators and technicians. It led to the growth of modernism with its parliamentary systems, its emphasis on progress and civil and political rights and, in a broader sense, the opening up and widening of the class structure. Mozart was not just the iconoclast ahead of his time but a revolutionary. He was an early modern man and a precursor of modernism.

Norbert Elias died on 1st August 1990 and was unable to supervise the preparation of his book, which was edited by Michael Shroter. The work may be of necessity incomplete, nevertheless it is an important work showing how an artist of genius tried to assert his independence yet still needed some means to provide for his economic survival. Did he fail? One can only judge by the quality of his output. I am sure he would say 'Yes'. I am not sure anyone else would. I wish I was such a failure as Mozart.

At this moment of time, of high graduate and high artistic unemployment, one has to ask what has change since Mozart's time?

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\* *Mozart: Portrait of a Genius* by Norbert Elias (Polity, 1993).

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Could I have survived, for instance, as a freelance sociologist? I think not. In a sense, even today, nothing has changed. One can only survive by the patronage of a bureaucratic employer such as a company, public corporation, education authority or some such entity. Many public performers in symphony orchestras and opera companies only survive on patronage, in some cases private patronage but mainly the patronage of the state, and now the lottery. Is the individual artist really any freer than in Mozart's time?

I remember recently hearing a street musician in Lichfield, a flautist – he was, I thought, worth the whole fifty pence I gave him. Perhaps that is the artist's future. Independence costs. You have to decide by how much you will give up your freedom to a collective. You also have to decide what is your *raison d'être*? What do you hope to get out of life? What interests me today is the fact that so many young people appear to have decided that unemployment, job scarcity and the general disappearance of security in modern life is the future, so why bother? I do not regard this as an unhealthy sign. What is important is to go for what you really want. Seek sustenance as you may. If public support is offered, accept it, so long as no suffocating strings are attached.

The artist should be led by his or her art, not by an unhealthy patronage. Decide where you draw the line.

## *David Murray*

### **No Ruptures Here**

To visit the ICA is to experience the heart of England. It reposes a mortar's throw from the key buildings of the British state; a minute's stroll from the top gentlemen's clubs; its nearest neighbour is the Institute of Directors. Here – it might be thought – is the perfect model for the English 'Establishment's' domestication of dissent: a bounded reservation in the core territory of the state. But to think this would be to give too much credit to the culture which is at home in the ICA.

On the 7th November 1995 the ICA began its series of 'Rapture' – a presentation of the work of performance artists who are 'controversial ... groundbreaking ... risktaking', according to the programme notes, whose final statement proclaims 'Sponsored by Toshiba'. It would be impossible for the cruelest satirist to choreograph a 'performance' that was more cosy, banal and conformist than the opening event 'Personal Choices' by Marina Abramovic. She opened by spreading one hand on a white board and jabbing a cook's knife into the spaces between her splayed fingers. The rapidity of her stabbing was rather less than that of drunken teenagers playing a game. Her conclusion was to slice into a finger and display the smear of blood on the board; she speedily had a neat elastoplast around it. She used the following two hours to show video clips of her own and others performance works, together with clips of Elvis Presley, Maria Callas and the Pope which she 'liked'.

Her commentaries on these clips was in the convention of 'alternative', 'independent' artists discussing works which influence them: no attempt at analysis, critique or judgement – she just 'liked' them. Her discourse had a simple and fashionable theme: We in the West have lost contact with our bodies, in the East they do this better, we must learn from them, we must wean ourselves from dependence on technology. There are obviously important issues here, but any subversive edge to these thoughts was swaddled in the wrappings of a dull orthodoxy. Like all those who chatter about the opposition of 'West' and 'East' she made no attempt to explain these categories – are they geographical, historical, political or ideal?

The most remarkable clip was the last one. This was of the present Pope at a New York rally in 1978. He responded to his audience's adulation by crooning, mumbling and hooting into his microphone, each grunt being responded to by ecstatic cheering from the crowds. He made two intelligible remarks: 'This is a charismatic moment' and 'Now we will destroy this programme'. Abramovic claimed that this event was being transmitted live and that the Pope's performance so disturbed the broadcasters that it was cut whilst still live. The most generous interpretation of the Pope's behaviour is that he was playing with his own status and subverting his audience's charismatic construction of himself. If so, he was being far more radical than Abramovic.

Her own most daring video performance was of her incising a star into her belly with a razor. The cuts were clearly very superficial and the blood flow minimal. Typically, no explanation was given of this, there was no account of its meaning or of what change in herself or the audience that this work was to effect. But of course, Abramovic, like all her tribe, declaims that language is inadequate, that it blocks the way of lived experience, that it muffles the body. Like all her tribe, she says this at great length. But, scorning logical argument as the 'Western' way, her discourse consisted of jokes, anecdotes about other artists and absurd assertions that were unsupported because they were the common sense of her culture.

The video clip that followed the one of her belly-razoring was from a French anthropologist's film of ritual scarification in an African tribe. Her commentary on this was that it showed an attitude to pain as a way to transcendence and altered consciousness. She ignored the fact that such scarifications are tribe-specific and function as a means for the terroristic control of the collective over the individual (a person banished from their tribe is permanently marked as of that tribe and will not be accepted by any other). The message was clear: if it's 'non-Western' then its okay.

The Abramovic event was announced as a 'lecture'. It was actually a sermon, or the pontificatings of a tribal shaman. It was structured so as to preclude any space for questioning or discussion. The interaction between performer and audience was as cosy and unchallenging as that between a comedian and audience at the London Palladium – rather more cosy; I'm being unfair to Dame Edna. We were shown a clip from a work by the 'conceptual artist' William Wegman of two dogs nodding their heads. The audience was supposed to – and of course did – find this hilariously funny. Then

Abramovic talked about one of her major works: a walk along the Great Wall of China from one end to meet her then partner who was to start from the other end. Predictably, this banal event was garlanded with platitudes about East and West, male and female and the supposed significance of the spurious claim that the Wall and the pyramids are the only human artefacts visible from the Moon. Cities, motorways and artificial lakes were presumably ignored because of their 'Western' nature.

The only interesting feature of Abramovic and her peers is the nature of the fraud that they perpetrate. What they actually perform in their performances is done by any 'ordinary' people (i.e. non-artists): hikers, tattooists, sado-masochists, martial artists, fist-fuckers, circumcisers. What these 'artists' do is to proclaim that their art is their life and that their life is art. That their own lives are important and special in a way that ours are not because it is called 'art'. Yet their only explanatory discourse about their art consists in a mix of biographical gossip and the saying of that which is simultaneously said to be unsayable. And it is said in a rhetoric of authoritarian demagoguery that suppresses questioning. Astonishingly, Abramovic told us that her way of dealing with questioners was to ask them to repeat their question 'and then I ask them to repeat their question and so on until there is no question'.

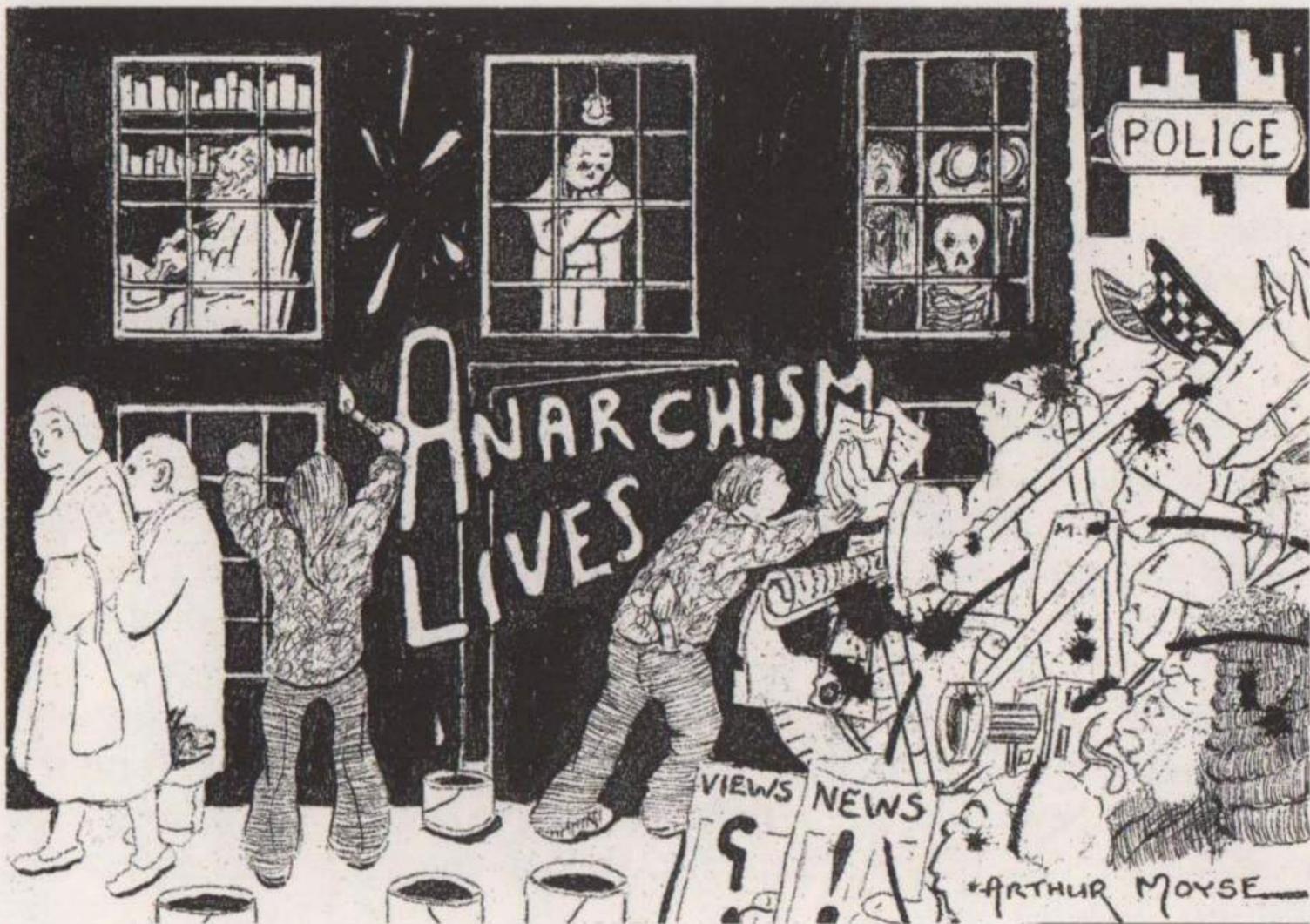
The heads of Toshiba, the men in the Treasury, the Directors at the Institute and the security services round the corner can all rest assured. The culture that flourishes at the ICA will not challenge them, will not subvert their world and will not break their ground.

## Arthur Moyse

### Beauty lies ...

The artist and the poet have always had, and will always have, the romantic persona that is the perk of the craft. This is because their interpretation and realisation of human and emotional problems does not commit them to anything specific. The artist and the poet play upon emotions in their work. The viewer and the reader want to understand the artist, and claim that the artist wants to be understood.

We view the canvas, and we choose to believe that we understand not only who the artist was, but how he or she lived. Reading poetry we imagine the sad-eyed romantic of suicidal bent, alone on some grassy hillock or by the leaded window of some small shadowed room, pensively gazing at the moon while seeking the immortal rhyme that lost lovers can whisper.



Do we accept the rhyme and reject the rhymester, reject Elliot as the grey bank clerk, Pound with his foolish fascist stupidity, or Swinburne with his canes and whips in his Putney whore-houses? They were the products of their times, their class and their society, their lives the mirror of our own problems. But they left us, each in his fashion, a few lines that we love to mouth in silence, or in fruitful company for such is the nature of the beast that in reciting a poet's words we bask in his reflected glory.

Those of us who have the misfortune to meet an actual poet in the living flesh move one step forward into the great abyss of human disillusion, along with Clause Four, real ale and the belief that life's enduring romance can last more than a week. Still, I will quote Wilde, Swinburne, Kipling, Elliot, Ginsberg, Marlowe and Shakespeare, and whisper in an attentive ear that 'Come live with me and be my love' was coined by me in that dark alleyway of instant adoration.

The painted image, on a canvas or in reproduction, floods the mind with images of a life which one knows, or chooses to believe, must have been led. The crude raw abstracts scream of an American way of life and a world of drugs and violence. The geometrical abstracts speak of a world of mental derangements, and always in those lectures by voices of authority we are shown how to seek and find the erotic imagery.

We see the French artist, sweat-shirted and bearded, swilling wine and absinthe by the pint, surrounded by laughing plump models in a studio romantically untidy with unfinished canvasses against every wall and never a bill to pay. A ride away, the gentle impressionists, defying society in word if not deed, as they paint their revolutionary, gentle interpretations of high noon in flowering meadows.

The German artist, painting bucolic high-kicking peasants or emaciated images of the crucified Christ hung out to dry, we see as a sad and lonely figure, cloak-wrapped with a wide-brimmed black hat, standing upon a dark mountain gazing down at caverns and crevices lost in endless night, or beside a stygian sea musing on the awfulness of life.

And the London-based British artist, a cheerful, ale-drinking, middle-class bohemian on his way to the Queen's Birthday Honour's List, perhaps even like Frederick Leighton to the House of Lords, for there is a need to be successful and success means wealth and social honours.

Leighton painted a world of harmless hedonism, of beautiful languid women all bathed in Mediterranean light, and for himself lived as a

conventional member of cultured society. His contemporary Louis Wain painted pretty little cats and kittens, living out his empty years in a lunatic asylum, where he was confined for killing his father. I would hold that there is nothing in the creative work of any artist to reveal the person.

When one is referred to as 'the artist' this means one is a 'successful' artist, where success means that one has either won the acclaim of one's particular social strata, or made it moneywise to the bank. I doubt if the sad, sick Wain, or the naive marine painter and rag-and-bone pedlar Wallis, would have found a listener for their social opinions. For Wain died friendless in a lunatic asylum, and those who buried Wallis were hard put to find a priest for his lonely graveside.

Lord Leighton was the grandmaster academic, painting from hindsight. The totter Wallis tried to translate the image of what he saw onto pieces of worn, torn cardboard. Leighton's *Flaming June* was sold by him for £60 and now has a price of millions, while the work of Wallis, in the streets where he totted in my lifetime, is not worth the price of a coloured postcard in the local shops.

It is a fallacy to suppose that Leighton's social opinion is of more value than that of Wallis, or that because someone is of high social status, particular ability or economic worth, their opinion is of more value than that of a woman trapped in poverty scouring a street market for the cheapest food, or an unskilled labourer, trapped in mind-destroying work on a pathetic wage. Yet this is a fallacy into which many who call themselves anarchist happily fall. 'He is a student, therefore let us bend the head in attention. He is an artist who has looked on the face of God, so breathe lightly'.

Those who believe in the artist as anarchist, as a concept of some importance, must acknowledge that their knowledge of art comes mainly from mass reproduction, and mass reproduction can only be of work that has found mass approval. Like a plumber, the artist sells not his soul but his skill, and his or her opinion on any matter should be accepted or rejected on the same basis as that of anyone else.

In Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany, skilled painters sold their services to evil causes. For the church they churned out pap by the mile, and stamped it Christian art by inclusion of a painted cross. The gentle old man by the bedside of a sick child, with the logo 'MD' on his case, is your medical painting. The scene with charging lancers is a patriotic painting, and it is by the painted logos on the flags that we know whether to cheer or boo.

The gentle old man painting flowery meadows, or the slap-happy visionary sloshing raw primary colours onto canvas, may defy the world and the landlord by proclaiming, with a roll of drums, that he is a militant anarchist. But I would hold that no-one has yet succeeded in producing an anarchist painting, as such, without stamping an anarchist logo on it.

On the stairway in the Royal Academy is a full-length painting of a troubled workman within a bleak and arid scene. The painting is of a man on strike. How do we know this? Because it says so in the title of the painting, attached to the gilt frame. Remove the title, and it could be a protest against the failure of the National Health Service.

Anarchism is a social philosophy appertaining to a way of life, and far too many of us believe that we shall drift into some happy Never-neverland with gentle bearded vegetarians, real ale single-pinters and friendly organised small collectives, or alternatively that we shall reach it in a few days of happy vicarious violence on the streets, all barricades and black flags. And after we have achieved it, the perennial question that has defeated so many collectives: whose turn is it to go out in the cold and milk the cow?

I, in my small way, have turned many an idle brush, and in my fashion I choose to call myself an anarchist in that I deem my individual freedom and that of others my main line of defence. But in the matter of what you should think of my opinions, do not quote me as an artist because, as two associates have said of me with contempt, 'He is only a common bus conductor'. And in my two lives and two remarks concerning myself lies the heart and problem of the anarchist movement in relation to you, comrade.

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## Brian Bamford

### Rendering Reality on Film: art and the emotion racket

How can one value a film like *Land and Freedom*? There is the film we see and there is the film we didn't see. There was the film that Jim Allen (the screenwriter) and Ken Loach (the director) intended to put on the screen, and the one which force of circumstances and budget constraints allowed them to produce.

How do we measure it as a job of work? How much does critical acclaim count? What are we to make of the decisions of the juries at the International Film Festivals in Cannes or Berlin with their awards? What about the box office takings? Or in this case the accuracy of the film as an historical account? Then there are the aesthetic qualities of the picture: how can these be balanced against the intellectual content?

In a recent Radio 4 broadcast *Print the Legend* about films representing 'revolution', *Land and Freedom* was used as an example alongside such gems as Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, the German film *Triumph of the Will*, and the film about the Algerian struggle for independence *The Battle of Algiers*. From Ronald Coleman in the 1930s MGM version of *Tale of Two Cities* (considered better than Dirk Bogart's later portrayal of the hero) to Ian Hart's interpretation of the unemployed Scouse communist recruit in *Land and Freedom*.

Nicolas Walter in his *Freedom* review claims: 'The new film *Land and Freedom* is one of the great works of our time, and everyone should see it ...' Does the Loach and Allen production really merit such illustrious company as *Battleship Potemkin* and such wild applause from an anarchist critic?

#### *Jim Allen as proletarian writer*

Let us consider what Loach and Allen are up to, and some of the practical restraints which governed the structure of their film. The main theme of *Land and Freedom* is about political betrayal in a revolutionary situation. Spain of 1936 is being excavated as an historical model for the future. As Jim Allen says, it represents what 'might have been', 'if only', given the 'correct leadership', etc.

The message of the work is aimed at Lady Thatcher and the monsters on the right who argue that socialism is unworkable. And it represents an idealistic challenge to Tony Blair and the New Labour cynics, who believe that socialism is all over bar the shouting.

This film ought to be considered against the other recent work done by Loach and Allen. In *Hidden Agenda*, set in the context of the Northern Ireland troubles, they try to explain the rise of Thatcherism in Britain. The main point of the film is to show how we got to where we are now. *Hidden Agenda* is the depiction of a conspiracy theory. The suggestion is that the Labour government in the 1970s was undermined by top-ranking establishment figures and the secret services, releasing fanciful details of alleged links between Prime Minister Wilson and the KGB.

Later, in *Raining Stones* in 1993, they are concerned with the problems of survival on the dole in Britain today. How to get by on a council estate amid the loan sharks and drug pushers. Making out and leading a decent family life, in the aftermath of an era of social blight and desperation for the poor that shows no sign of ending in the near future.

All these films mark a shift of content from earlier work like, say, *Days of Hope* and *Rank and File*. They all have the desperate psychological feel of people with their backs against the wall: the out-of-work Scouse David pitting his wits against the cunning Communist Party officialdom in Civil War Spain; Bob Williams in *Raining Stones* ducking and dodging to 'keep his head above water' on a Middleton housing estate; or the American Civil Liberties' do-gooder in *Hidden Agenda* trying to get some justice in Northern Ireland. In keeping with the times in which we live, their focus seems to have shifted from the proletarian to the lumpen-proletarian. The architectural glimpses in all these later films, whether it be Liverpool, Northern Ireland or Middleton, is of a working class buried in the urban decay of high-rise flats.

Ironically when Jim Allen in *Raining Stones* came to contrast this with a middle class area, he chose to film his own neighbourhood of Alkrington in Middleton. This brings us to the problem of the place of the proletarian writer in the arts and how one might operate. Mr Allen is a proletarian writer if ever there was one!

In a Home Service broadcast in 1940, George Orwell gave a definition of proletarian literature:

What people mean by it, roughly speaking, is a literature in which the viewpoint of the working class, which is supposed to be completely different from that of the richer classes, gets a hearing.

When he said that, Orwell was probably right in thinking that class distinctions in a country like England were becoming unreal and that the proletarian writer had already served his purpose. After all, in 1940 there was a war on and we were all supposed to pull together. Today, though, between what Margaret Thatcher calls the middle and aspiring middle class, and the unemployed urban poor, there is a growing gulf. This gulf is reflected in the work of Loach and Allen, perhaps more so than anywhere else.

Their films record the reality of an everyday experience which we don't notice in Hollywood films or in many other productions. Nor should we worry that some would describe their films as propagandist, purveying what Desmond Hawkins called the 'mystique of the class war'. Orwell's answer to this was:

... every artist is a propagandist in the sense that he is trying, directly or indirectly, to impose a vision of life that seems to him desirable.

The material of Loach and Allen throws into relief a whole way of life which other film-makers neglect. Jim Allen has a command of language which is raw, crude and vital, which contrasts with the smooth, slick and contrived dialogue in much of what comes out of Hollywood.

This kind of awkward squad approach had put Loach and Allen outside the mainstream. This has led to difficulties in raising funds for new productions and limited distribution of their finished work. The shoestring budget for *Land and Freedom* forced them to shorten the film, seriously affecting its content and structure. A scene in which there was a discussion of anarchism on a hospital train was cut out. There were no scenes depicting workers at factory meetings. To keep the film cheap, things have to be said in a narrative rather than shown – though a scene from the battle between anarcho-syndicalist workers and the communist/government forces at the Barcelona telephone exchange survived the cuts.

The cost of removing television aerials and tarring up the streets to look like 1930s Spain prevented depiction of the urban and industrial struggles in the Civil War. To shorten the film Jim Allen created the device of the hero's grand-daughter discovering a box of mementoes, press cuttings and letters in his flat, and staging a series of flashbacks as she digs through the dead man's life. It comes off, but only just.

### ***History and mistrust***

What are we to make of *Land and Freedom* as an historical document? This is important because anything which adds to our understanding of what Noam Chomsky has described as 'one of the crucial events of modern history', the Spanish Civil War, will, as Ken Loach has claimed, assist our grasp of twentieth century history. Some, like George Orwell, doubted that 'a true history of this war ... would or could be written', arguing in his essay 'Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War' that 'history stopped in 1936'.

In a way most of the history of the Spanish Civil War seems to have been 'partisan history' as Orwell predicted: 'broadly truthful' but unreliable on many minor points. But in the Anglo-Saxon speaking countries this history was largely one-sided in its emphasis on the war at the expense of the social revolution. The liberal (and Communist) academics developed a superior attitude towards grassroots revolutions like that in Spain in 1936, which lacked a clear vanguard party and was mostly spontaneous. This scholarly approach reduced what Chomsky called a 'predominantly anarchist revolution and massive social transformation' to a kind of 'aberration, a nuisance that stood in the way of successful prosecution of the war to save the bourgeois régime from the Franco rebellion'.

This tone was set very early on. György Lukács, writing his 'Marxist' socialist realist critique *The Historical Novel* in Moscow in 1937, declared 'the use of the slogan of the *immediate realisation* of socialism by *anarchist muddleheads and Trotskyist nuisances* in order to break up the popular front and thereby hinder the actual revolutionary struggle against fascism which *will reach its peak only as an ultimate end*'. We now know, from George Lichtheim, that Lukács wrote this under 'the watchful eye of his Stalinist overseers', yet this theme has been continued by the respectable scholars who throng our universities. In his lecture in 1968 Noam Chomsky (see 'Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship') argued:

Many historians would probably agree with Eric Hobsbawm that the failure of the social revolution in Spain 'was due to the anarchists', that anarchism was 'a disaster' ... with no 'concrete results', at best 'a profoundly moving spectacle for the student of popular religion'.

The Loach and Allen film addresses this neglect of the Spanish social revolution, and attempts to redress the balance by focusing on the struggle from below: on the front in Aragon, among the peasants in the villages, on the barricades outside the Barcelona telephone

exchange. The anarchist aspects of the struggle are treated sympathetically. In an earlier film, *To Die in Madrid* in the 1960s, there was no reference to the social revolution that swept through Spanish society in the 1930s – though both these films have had an immense impact and one critic, Phillip French, thinks *Land and Freedom* is one of the best films in the last decade.

An anonymous reviewer in the anarcho-syndicalist Norwich *Solidarity Bulletin* claims 'this new film recreates much that is central to Orwell's book [*Homage to Catalonia*]'. There is much of Orwell's experience of the Spanish Civil War in the film. Loach and Allen have based their work on the practical observations of an off-duty novelist and journalist rather than the donnish tracts of the university professors. But this version of events has taken half a century to percolate through to the collective consciousness of the general public. In 1940 Orwell wrote 'my best book, the one about the Spanish war, sold less than a thousand ...'

What we are talking about here is about how do we best portray social processes in action? What kind of comment can we make about ordinary and not so ordinary endeavours in a country like Spain in the 1930s? Most of the intelligentsia in the Anglo-Saxon world initially blinded themselves to the realities of Soviet foreign policy and the actions of the Communist International. As Leszek Kolakowski says, 'those who, like George Orwell, formed an idea of communism in action from empirical facts instead of from doctrinaire assumptions met with hatred and indignation'. And he adds, 'hypocrisy and self-delusion had become the permanent climate of the intellectual left'.

That is why Jim Allen, in the interview which follows, is keen to establish that his film deals in the facts. He insists 'what we show in the film happened', and later he adds that 'in the countryside what we showed happened. The Stalinists did smash up the collectives. They did murder individuals: anarchists and POUM members and so forth. So that was correct.'

But these facts wouldn't put off an orthodox Marxist like György Lukács. Their approach is, as Kolakowski says, one of 'reason in the service of dogma'. At one point in the *Land and Freedom* preview showing in Madrid, Jim Allen told me, the current Spanish Communist Party bosses marched out of the theatre in disgust. The Lukács approach is immune to contamination by ordinary everyday events. Through Lukács's conception of 'totality' Marxism, and Stalin's foreign policy, are protected in advance from any rational

criticism or empirical evidence, since the 'totality' cannot be deduced from any accumulation of facts or empirical arguments. And when the facts appear to contradict the pronouncements of the prophets of Marxism, as in the case of the Spanish Civil War, then it is the facts that are wrong.

Yet we must admit the film *Land and Freedom* is not only a partisan historical account, but also inevitably unbalanced and anecdotal. It is a portrayal of history as seen from the bottom. It is forced to concentrate on the rural struggle of the peasants and the formation of the collectives, and through lack of funds can't come to grips with the issue of workers' control in the factories and urban life.

In hammering away at history from below, as in *Land and Freedom*, or portraying rock-bottom existence in *Raining Stones*, Loach and Allen are going against the grain of mainstream Marxism, as proposed by György Lukács and the socialist realists. They are what Lukács described as 'disappointed plebians' in his book *The Historical Novel*. That is, they belong to that group of writers and thinkers who mistrust what Lukács calls 'large-scale politics' and 'external history'. Theirs is not an idea of history as a 'great man theory' through kings, emperors, statesman and diplomats promoting wars, peace treaties and the overthrow of states – they would probably say this political history, this 'outer history', is only a gloss on the surface of events.

Loach and Allen are clearly concerned with a counter-image in which this mistrust of politics is to be observed in the 'entire pre-Marxist history of the rise of socialism, from Saint-Simon to Proudhon'. This kind of 'mistrust' of high politics reaches a kind of literary pinnacle in the work of Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy presents what Lukács calls the 'upper world' – the general staffs, the court, the apparatus of authority – against a backdrop of the mistrust and hatred of the simple peasant and soldier. Except in *Hidden Agenda*, for Loach and Allen it is largely the 'upper world' of high politics which provides the backdrop to everyday life in, say, *Raining Stones*, and the practical struggles of the foot-soldiers of the militia in *Land and Freedom*. *Land and Freedom* is really the story of the evolution of political distrust in the life of an unemployed volunteer in the Spanish Civil War.

Many would now regard this approach to history and the discovery of social facts as somewhat old fashioned. With Proudhon, Lukács argues, his mistrust of politics leads increasingly to an impoverished 'picture of social life'. Then referring to the historical novel (the film is after all, according to screen-writer Chris Hampton, a kind of novel) he says:

The consequence of this over-nearness to the immediate, concrete life of the people is the shrinking or even disappearance of their highest and most heroic qualities. The abstract contempt for 'external' history gives historical events a grey everyday character, reduces them to the level of simple spontaneity.

The socialist realist alternative, posed by Lukács, to this concern of Loach and Allen with concrete historical events and what actually happened, is to say, as Kolakowski suggests, the Bolshevik party under Stalin 'is the source and criterion of all truth'. Hence we ought not to distract ourselves by historical details depicted in *Land and Freedom*, etc. – the murder of anarchists, the torture of Trotskyists, the Stalinist smash-up of the collective farms, even the purging and killing of their own communist comrades. People who dwell on these kinds of details – anarchists and the likes of Loach and Allen – are obsessively over-close to 'the concrete life of the people' and can't see the wood for the trees.

Of course, this concept of socialist realism (approved by Stalin, Gorky and Bukharin in 1934) is now also considered to be clapped-out. But many academics have now dashed to embrace another form of seeming intellectual unreality: post-modernism. This approach questions whether the past can be discovered, or rather should be represented.

In Marxism, Lukács had sought *absolute certainty in defiance of facts*: history through the Communist Party to replace God on Earth. Now that Marxism can be seen to be morally and intellectually bankrupt, many of its former disciples are saying with Nietzsche 'There is no God' and therefore 'There is no History', or rather only historical representations. *With the post-modernists we have absolute uncertainty in defiance of the facts.*

Recently Wes Sharrock, the ethnomethodologist, told me: 'It's not that there are no social facts – there are – but the problem is how do we discover them?' In 1942 Orwell wrote: '... what is peculiar to our own age is the abandonment of the idea that history could be truthfully written'. Many anarchists would, I think, agree with most ethnomethodologists that social facts are discoverable, and historical facts are recoverable. Jim Allen told me that he is not an anarchist, but he comes over as a disgruntled plebeian who, even if he is a Marxist, can't ignore the concrete facts of working class life or historical episodes such as the events of the Spanish War.

### ***On the trail of truth***

In rejecting Lukács view of reality as not what happens, but something which ought to happen according to the party line, and refusing to

embrace the post-modernist 'make-it-up-as-you-go-along' school of representations, we still have the problem of how do we get to the facts? And screen-writers, like Jim Allen, have to decide how to show what happened. In both cases, experience shows that the practical action and practical reasoning of the participants must not be drowned out by the theory of the professionals, be they scholars or film-makers.

Luis Buñuel, the Spanish film director, member of the surrealist movement and anarchist, said he became disillusioned with the Communist Party in 1950, when after a showing of his film *Los Olvidados* ('the forgotten ones') about poverty in Mexico City's shanty towns, the French Communist Party blacked it. A Party friend told him it was 'too bourgeois'. When pressed, the friend explained:

... there's a scene where we're looking through a window at some boys being propositioned by a homosexual and a policeman comes along and frightens the guy away. According to the party line, your policeman is doing something good and useful, and you know that's not exactly the position to take on policemen. And at the end, in the jail, you have this kind, humane warden letting one of the boys go out to buy cigarettes.

As criticism, Buñuel called this 'hopelessly childish', but it's something we've learned to live with now.

Facts are there to be dealt with even when they are disagreeable to us. And we can all make mistakes. I chided Jim Allen with Orwell's claim that: 'The backbone of the resistance against Franco was the Spanish working class, especially the urban trade union members'. *Land and Freedom* doesn't depict this, rather it shows us the rural conflict on the collective farms and in the villages of Aragon.

Lack of funds forced this one-sided portrayal of the war. But though the trade unions and their members, particularly in the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, stopped Franco in the first few months of the war this requires further explanation. True enough for logistical reasons, rural Andalucia and the anarchist cities of Malaga and Cadiz were lost to the fascists early on. But those writers who gave a balanced account of events have not been professional historians so much as anthropologists like Julian Pitt-Rivers, and anti-didacts such as José Peirats and Gerald Brenan. According to Brenan's biographer, Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy:

... there was a problem accounting for Catalan anarchism in industry. Gerald [Brenan] explained it by the migration of anarchist workers from Andalucia. In fact, it now appears that rather few southern workers went to Barcelona. It was Catalan peasants who migrated. Catalan anarchism, that is, can be explained by Catalan events – a discovery ... made by Catalan historians.

So trapped on the front, in the middle of the Aragon countryside, Loach and Allen may be focusing on the roots of the Spanish social transformation which was occurring in the 1930s. There perhaps they had stumbled upon the source which was nourishing the anarcho-syndicalist cities of Barcelona and Zaragoza.

### ***Ken Loach in the British cinema tradition***

Many of the scenes in *Land and Freedom* are not choreographed. It's not like a Fritz Lang film with special lighting effects and marks on the floor to say who stands where. When the POUM militia go to raid a village controlled by the Fascists, it reminded me of our gang going out on a raid for bonfire wood.

The dialogue, such as in the discussion to collectivise the liberated village, is treated skilfully. The professional actors have set lines to deliver. The amateurs playing Spanish peasants, and including one anarchist woman who was involved in the Spanish Civil War, have to get in what they want to say as best they can in the gaps in the debate between the arguing professionals. This works well.

In my view, though Jim Allen doesn't agree, the film may even have benefited from being less than two hours long owing to the lack of money. It may have made for a smoother, leaner, faster-moving film. The film would have been more literary if, as planned, we'd had endless talking-heads discussing Durruti's virtues as a leader, the aims of anarchism, the role of women, etc., etc.

Problems of finance in film production are not new. Colin Ward's *Anarchy 6 – Anarchy and Cinema*, in 1961, opened with a comment on the strategies for funding non-mainstream cinema. John Cassavetes had to do a broadcast appeal to raise the money to complete *Shadows*. Buñuel got *Las Hurdes* ('Land Without Bread') done only after the anarchist Ramón Acín promised to cough up if he won the lottery – two months later he copped 'El Gordo' (the fat one). Curiously Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, which Allen seems to despise, is an example of a relatively low-budget film (\$6 million) which made good box office. Tarantino's films are heavy in dialogue, though much of it is perverse, like discussions about hamburgers and the metric system or the meaning of a foot massage. The flop film *Showgirls*, by comparison, cost \$24 million to make.

Distribution is another problem. As I write, *Land and Freedom* is showing at a couple of art-house cinemas. Buñuel had similar difficulties with some of his films: with *Los Olvidados*, which he filmed in 21 days, he was physically attacked by one Mexican woman, labour

organisations called for his expulsion from the country and Mexican audiences, he says, left the theatres looking as if they had been to a funeral. In Madrid, after the showing of *Land and Freedom*, only the communists left when the hero, David, tore up his party card. Leaving, according to Jim Allen, the anarchists and veterans of the POUM dancing in the aisles.

*Land and Freedom* is a film which seems to generate strong emotions all round. Nicolas Walter in his *Freedom* review says: 'If you have tears to shed, prepare to shed them ...' That was at the end of the show, but the hard-boiled syndicalist writer Derek Pattison was more upset at the beginning when David, then an octogenarian, is dying following a heart attack in his tower-block flat in Liverpool. Perhaps Mr Pattison, as a trade unionist, is distressed because he is dimly aware that an actor who is dying when the film opens may not have such a big wage to look forward to at the end of the film. In order to keep up the tension, Ken Loach never told the actors how many days on set they could expect to get in – they didn't know from one day to the next when or if they were going to die. As unemployed syndicalists we are also distressed by the thought that we might end up in the same boat – dying alone in a bleak tower block.

Nicolas Walter, as a London anarchist, has more of a romantic streak in him and is only moved at the end when the grand-daughter reads a William Morris poem over David Carne's grave. Despite Walter's friendly review, anarchists must have political doubts about the Loach and Allen duo, and they ought to have doubts about the 'anarchist' film director Buñuel.

Buñuel, going by his autobiography, was friendly with Santiago Carrillo, then a young communist in Madrid, and seems to have operated as one of Stalin's agents during the Civil War. Last year Señor Carrillo was noisy in his condemnation of *Land and Freedom*, and Buñuel was still praising some of Stalin's purges as late as 1982.

Jim Allen speaks of the lack of 'correct leadership' in the Spanish war – at the Cornerhouse, Manchester, he told us that a failure of proper leadership was the lesson of Spain. If only Durruti had survived, he says. But when challenged by a Spaniard who said: 'Even the anarchists let us down when they entered the government', Mr Allen replies that the leadership must be accountable to the people and subject to recall. He may be an English Marxist, but if Jim Allen was a Spaniard he could just as easily be an anarcho-syndicalist.

Luis Buñuel, who also said nice things about Durruti, represents a vastly different artistic approach to that of Loach and Allen. He was

heavily influenced by Fritz Lang, as was Hitchcock. Loach and Allen's films are more in the English documentary tradition developed by John Grierson. Neil Sinyard says: 'Like George Orwell in the 1930s (and there is much in common between *Coal Face* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*), Grierson saw himself as a combination of socialist and sociologist ...' Grierson, like Loach and Allen, favoured films which pushed theme and purpose more than art, and education more than titillation. Fritz Lang's fatalistic dramas and Buñuel's surrealist films are artistically at odds with the work of Grierson and Loach.

Fritz Lang's films are largely studio bound dramas, in which there are marks on the floor so that the actors know exactly where to stand. Even in *Los Olvidados* Buñuel wanted to put a hundred-piece orchestra on the scaffolding of a building site in the scene when some lads pursue the blind beggars across it. The English tradition of Loach and Allen, and Grierson, which is much more down to earth and realistic, would probably regard that kind of thing as extravagant whimsy.

The criticism of Grierson and the earlier film-makers committed to the school of documentary realism is that they give the impression of portraying a middle-class conception of working class life. The plummy southern voice doing the commentary undermines the images on the screen. It comes over as 'exotic dirt', as Joris Ivens who made the Spanish Civil War documentary *The Spanish Earth* (1937) described it.

In his essay on the film in *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*, Neil Sinyard writes: 'Quality British cinema since the war has tended to be a struggle for supremacy and critical respect between two factions: the realists and the dreamers.' This conflict within the art also has a continual dimension. Grierson and Loach are representative of the realists, Buñuel's work and much of Lang's reflect that of the dreamers.

There are visual images in Buñuel's films – like the eye scene in *Chien Andalou* – which are branded in my brain. Will we remember anything from *Land and Freedom*? The tearing-up of the party card or the hands raised in a clenched fist salute at the funeral perhaps? But isn't all this a bit banal by comparison? Mr Sinyard said of Grierson's films: '... they never escape the impression of being middle-class perceptions of working-class life: sympathetic certainly, but also detached, inauthentic and with a hint of condescension.' Ken Loach dodges this dilemma by employing writers like Jim Allen to inject a bit of rough stuff into the dialogue and action. The films of these so-called

'Northerns' like Loach and Allen's seem to have rescued the English realist tradition of Grierson from the Home Counties dominance.

The underlying distinction between Luis Buñuel's surrealist work and Ken Loach's realist dramas is that one is involved in the artistic racket of alienation and shock for entertainment's sake, the other is engrossed in the manhandling of emotion and empathy in the cause of some perceived greater enlightenment. Buñuel admitted that surrealism had been a social and cultural success, but these were areas of least importance to most surrealists. The vital aim of changing the world and life itself had been lost.

### *The emotion racket*

John Grierson in his documentary realism tried to use the cinema as a pulpit and a vehicle for public education, but ended up taking state grants and industrial sponsorship only to become marginalised, producing the classic British art film playing to the dedicated.

The danger with what is called 'realism', as Ken Loach is no doubt aware, is of reproducing mere photographic reproductions of reality. Bertolt Brecht said: 'The man who drops a pebble hasn't begun representing the law of gravity ...' Nor has the film-maker who portrays the fall of the pebble. A realistic picture of David in *Land and Freedom* consequently makes it difficult for the audience to identify with him, because the way he changes with events makes him too unreliable as a hero for the audience to, as Brecht puts it, 'borrow its heart from'.

Hence anarchists can't help but be irritated by David's innocence early on in the film. And as David in the film matures so the communists, and their fellow travellers, feel let down. Jack Jones, former T&GU general secretary and volunteer in the International Brigade, wrote: 'It is a pity that film makers have not produced a popular authentic picture of the war ...' Clearly Jack Jones wants a grand socialist realist hero, not one like David who starts off with a very limited viewpoint. What Mr Jones and the communists would have liked was lots of commemorative footage with cardboard cut-out characters. What Loach and Allen have given us is a film that allows us to see through certain social processes that emerged strongly in the Spanish Civil War and operate in our everyday lives now.

In almost every major respect the film succeeds. The main character grows and develops realistically as he interacts with events. The film alternately irritates, alienates and polarises the audience. In so far as it avoids the trap of socialist realist drama proposed by Jack Jones and

the communist left-overs, and provokes the audience, it is a valuable job of work. It is a flawed masterpiece! Loach and Allen are still involved in what Brecht called 'the emotion racket': like Dickens they are opinionated moralists who always have something to say in their films. What sets David apart in *Land and Freedom* from the characters in the earlier films like *Hidden Agenda* and *Raining Stones* is that he grows up and matures as he interacts with events. This makes him unreliable for the audience to empathise with, and we know he both alienates and frustrates. But this doesn't matter because I think Brecht is right to say:

The actor doesn't need to put forward a fully elaborated character. He couldn't do it, and he doesn't have to ... He doesn't need to have fully worked-out opinions about everything he puts forward. He is drawing on a pool of things seen and experienced.

Bob Williams in *Raining Stones* is a more finished character – almost a caricature – than David in *Land and Freedom*. Bob is imprisoned in a proletarian urban environment – a victim of circumstances – and the fatalistic tenor of the film is captured as one character says: 'What chance have they?' Bob Williams, it seems to me, mainly acts and reacts to events, but David has an internal life which involves guessing, feeling and dreaming. With David you can watch his guessing lead to knowledge, his dreams turn into plans, and his feelings delivering him into actions. You could imagine yourself sitting down and having an argument with David. Much of the time one wants to have a row with David, while one just ends up sympathising with Bob's predicament.

George Orwell says: 'If you look for the working classes in fiction, and especially English fiction, all you find is a hole.' The working class is much better represented on film in this country. One couldn't wish for a better example of a worker, a modern unemployed worker, than Bob Williams in *Raining Stones*. But I'm not sure how well understood the film would be outside of Britain. *Land and Freedom* takes us out of this cultural and political ghetto and into Europe. It renders realism into an historical setting, as Jim Allen makes clear in his interview, the present day becomes part of history. Or as the film critic Phillip French puts it, history is used 'to illuminate the present, not as a place of escape'.

*Land and Freedom* breaks us out of the narrow parochialism and regionalism of the earlier films. Even the English intelligentsia have existed in the cosy confinement of ideological isolation – they never

seemed to get beyond playing footsie with the Welfare State. I can't ever see an English writer or film-maker today having the wide appeal and deep grasp of humanity of a Tolstoy. But there are signs, and *Land and Freedom* is one of them, that we could be getting out of our British backwater.

The problem and fundamental flaw in the film is the ending. E.M. Forster has said 'death ends a book neatly', and the funeral that concludes *Land and Freedom* is convenient in that it joins the hero David with his sweetheart in death – in truth we get two funerals for the price of one at the end. In a way it's almost a Hollywood ending, because Jim Allen wanted to give it an optimistic ending. Then because in this kind of social realist drama, unlike in the novel, this optimism must take the form of some action, we get the corny cliché of the clenched fists raised in a salute to close the film.

Following a film in which incidents are historicised and socially placed, this clenched fist is a trite trick which puts Loach and Allen back in the emotion racket. This has the hallmark of the worst form of socialist realism. This kind of exercise in empathy makes an ordinary incident of something special, while alienation would make something special of an ordinary event. The realists of all varieties seem to have difficulties with endings, even the novelists like Silone with *Fontamara* or *Rebellion of the Hanged*, or Zola's naturalistic end to *Germinal*, but against these the *Land and Freedom* closing with the clenched fist salute is what Balzac called an 'exit platitude'.

I hope this objection to an incident in the dying second of the film, which gave the anarchists such a good run for their money, is not seen as a churlish comment. In taking us to Spain and engrossing us in Civil War politics, Loach and Allen are helping to bring us back into history. (As I write this I know Ken Loach is working on a film based in Latin America and Scotland and Jim Allen is on a project in South West Africa.) The contrasting of Spain of the 1930s with England of the 1990s is a useful technique – the visual contrasts make an impact on the eye and the ideological contrasts engage the mind. The contradictions, the conflicts and contrasts all help to drive the film towards the culmination in which the last scene reminds us of the opening scene, and the soil of Spain is mingled with that of the North of England, and then the clenched fists reach up like the cold handshake of a commercial traveller.

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## *Jim Allen and Brian Bamford*

### **Looking Forward from the Spanish War**

[Transcript of an interview with Jim Allen, writer of the film *Land and Freedom*]

*Brian Bamford:* You and Ken have been keen to do this film for sometime. What drew you to this topic in the first place?

**Jim Allen:** It was four and a half years before we got it made. With the fall of Stalinism in Europe and Russia, and the claims of Margaret Thatcher, etc., that there you are the dream has ended, 'Socialism's impossible! Only the market economy rules!' Well the truth is that there never had been socialism in the Soviet Union.

We were looking for a project that could show this. I met a bloke who was organising the coming together of the International Brigade, and suddenly it clicked, and I rung Ken and told him: 'I think we've got a subject'.

Because Spain in the 1930s is everything – mass unemployment, the rise of fascism, the rise of Franco and his Generals – then you had the betrayal of Stalin, especially in Catalonia – in Barcelona. So all the elements were there, and the intention was to make a film ending on an optimistic note. And say: well look there is an alternative; we can still go forward; there is another solution. And that was Spain. What could have happened with the correct kind of leadership.

So that was the basic reason, and what we initially thought we'd need was £5 million to make the film. Which sounds a lot – but that's nothing to something the scope of Spain. But after four and a half years of knocking on doors all we had was £2½ million. So we sat down and had to make a decision. We could finish up with egg on our face, or we could have a go. So we had a go. And then we had to shoot the entire film in just over seven weeks. It was horrendous! So that was it; Ken went and Ken did it. I think we just nicked it ...

The heartening thing is that in Spain it has set off a huge discussion among Spanish workers. The crew, the Spanish crew, were only young people; they didn't have a clue that this was their history. They knew nothing about it. Some Spanish film-makers said that is now

the benchmark, and that now it's time that we dug into our own history.

This is a very healthy response.

It has been shown in lots of cinemas in France, Germany, Italy – it has done very well. But in this county it's the old, old story. The film was released on 5th October. And up to two weeks ago all we had was up to seventeen cinemas showing it throughout the United Kingdom ... and half of them were art houses ... we cannot break into the mainstream cinemas where the workers go. That's terrible, terrible.

*Why?*

The resistance of the distributors. The distributors don't spend enough money to distribute the film. But it's mainly big theatre chains – the bloke at Salford Quays [cinema complex] ... he made a statement to the press that in his opinion it is an 'art film'. They want to pack the cinemas with the pop-corney American movies: *Pulp Fiction*, Arnold Schwarzenegger and stuff like that.

Our answer is that wherever we've shown it, it's been packed. At the Cornerhouse [Manchester] you couldn't get in. In Cardiff there were at least two hundred people turned away. So there is no evidence that it hasn't been packing them in. It's done very well elsewhere – like France, in Germany, and Spain of course.

*Did some of the money for the film come from Germany?*

Yeh, yeh, Spain, Germany and a tiny amount from England. A bit from the BBC, and British Screen. But not much!

*Explaining his reasons for doing the film, on Radio 4 last Friday, Ken Loach said: 'I don't think you can understand twentieth century history unless you can understand what happened in Spain in 1936'. Isn't that a bit of an exaggeration, Jim?*

I didn't know he'd said that, but it would be an old recording because he is in Nicaragua. I suppose what he meant was that the signal was Spain, it all happened in that period of time.

*He said the fog cleared in 1936, and you could see what the score was.*

Right! The crucial thing was Spain revealed Stalin's hand. Three years later he signed a pact with Hitler. It was a kind of dress rehearsal for World War Two ... It was probably a kind of defining moment. If you understand the lessons of Spain, then you understand the lessons of today with Tony Blair – the Social Democrats, who'll always betray

you; the role of the Communist Party; the role of the West, who refused arms to Spain. Everything was there in that framework.

*You said this film was done on a shoe-string, and that this influenced the final structuring of the story. Didn't this work to your advantage and make for a shorter, more strikingly forceful and emotional film?*

Yeah, it could be argued that the device of seeing the story through the grand-daughter's eyes was maybe better than what we had originally intended. But having written the script I know what would have gone out [in the original version]. Budget determines content ...

There were huge chunks, like Barcelona, which would have included fantastic scenes of the revolution in action.

There were huge scenes with the women – representing the role of women. A lot missed out on that ...

In one of the drafts there was a man who I have a lot of admiration for: Durruti. He was a power-house. In fact if Durruti had lived I don't think the Stalinists would have got away with it in Catalonia. That's a personal opinion.

So all this had to be taken out, because there is so little money, and it can't be over two hours long.

The reason I used the device of the grand-daughter is because using the voice-over of the grandfather's letters: these were describing scenes we couldn't afford to put on the screen. Instead of seeing Barcelona, we talked about it. So I was pushed into that and had to create that device to save money. It could be argued that a leaner picture was better than the one I envisaged, but there were many elements there which I thought should have gone in but which couldn't go in because of the time, the budget.

### ***Scenes of struggle in town and country***

*That brings me to another question. George Orwell in, his essay 'Looking Back on the Spanish War', said: 'The backbone of the resistance to Franco was the Spanish working class, especially the urban trade union members'. Now apart from the Barcelona telephone exchange conflict between the anarchist CNT and the communists, you seem to concentrate on the rural struggle in Aragon. Hugh Thomas in El Pais called the film 'Homage to Aragon'. In a way the film is almost a portrayal of a guerrilla war, a peasant war.*

Think about it. What we show in the film happened. In the collectives, in the countryside, that happened. Yes, in the factories in Barcelona

we couldn't afford to shoot there. We would have had to take a section of Barcelona and take the television aerials down. We couldn't afford it.

*But with the £5 million you could have done it?*

We would have got into the industries; we would have got some strike meetings. But it was impossible. In the countryside we showed what happened. The Stalinists did smash up the collectives. They did murder individuals: anarchists and POUM members and so forth. So that was correct. The other dimension was what happened in the industrial areas, but that was not even considered when we had two and a half million quid.

And of course there was the commune scene with the peasants discussing in that long, long scene ...

*Well yes. And you say that is the core of the film?*

A very important scene.

*That's what it's all about, you say. But some critics have seen this scene of the peasant's debate with the POUM militia as an aesthetically sterile interlude. What do you have to say to them?*

They don't know their arse from their elbow some of these critics. The most serious critics singled that one scene out as the most important scene in the film. This broke the mould. I mean a Hollywood film would never dare have two minutes, the scene lasts two or three minutes, in the way that this one did. That was the root of the issue, that was the question. It was about land. So the peasants had to discuss it, to argue. And you got the backward ones and the others. To me that scene is vital.

*It's been said that: 'A revolutionary army, like POUM or Durruti's anarchist iron column, can sometimes win by enthusiasm, but a conscript army, like the Republican Government and the communists were trying to set up, must win with weapons – superior weapons.' How could the Left have won Spain?*

It's a myth. It's a myth which the Stalinists have put out that these [the POUM and anarchist militias] were well intentioned, very brave, but militarily speaking they were a rabble. There was no discipline. There was no organisation. There were elements of that, yes, but both Durruti and POUM believed in the blueprint of an organised military army with orders being carried out with discipline. What they did not want was to let a military hierarchy take-over, which was what the 5th

Brigade of the Communist Party did.

So they used that as an excuse. Of course enthusiasm will never win anything. It's got to be there, but you need the arms. And of course the reason why there were no arms is because, on Stalin's orders, the arms only went to units controlled by the Communist Party. And no way to Catalonia. No way. So there were no arms because Stalin made a point of making sure that the arms didn't reach Catalonia. Orwell pointed that out in *Homage to Catalonia*.

*Some people, like José Peirats the CNT and anarchist historian, have argued that by fighting a guerrilla war they could have won the battle in the countryside rather than by trench warfare. Later examples have been Vietnam.*

Yeh, yeh, but Vietnam was a mass mobilisation of Vietnamese people, it was organised militarily. Guerrilla warfare in that type of terrain is a very important element. But there had to be an organised military structure. One doesn't cancel out the other.

But they were getting pounded to pieces. You were getting Italian planes, German planes, you had all the modern warfare, and at the same time you had Stalin refusing them arms.

The main reason it failed, in my opinion, was the betrayal of the Communist Party. The last thing Stalin wanted was victory in Spain of a social republic. The last thing he wanted was a revolution in Spain. He wanted to cosy-up to the West; to say to Britain, to France, that there is no danger here. I'll hold it back. It [a social revolution] would have spilled into France. It could have spilled into Italy. All kinds of dangers. A social republican government would have declared the independence of Spanish Morocco, and that would have inflamed French Morocco. It would have escalated. He [Stalin] had to control it.

Had the workers won in Spain, and set up the social republic, it could have gone anywhere. There was an International Brigade there that would have been infected. Even the Soviet Union itself. These are all speculations. There is no certainty that what I'm saying would have happened, but the situation was there.

But Stalin wanted a capitalist social democracy. I think Durruti coined the slogan 'War and Revolution' at the same time ... so everywhere the Durruti column went they set up collectives in every village. And they left these 'soviets' behind. Now that was death to Stalin. The first thing Stalin's men did, like General Lister, was to smash up the collectives.

*Through working class eyes*

*David is presented in the film as a kind of Scouse bumpkin – a kind of innocent abroad. Right?*

Not a bumpkin. I would reckon in 1936 the average type who went to Spain, he was representative of that.

Apart from the die-hard communists who had been around, lots of them went over there with the vaguest notions, like 'I'm a communist, I'm going to fight a fascist', and that's it. So it was seeing it through his eyes as he developed the experience. So at the end of the film you can say I stand on higher ground, I can see further.

*Yes, that's realistic, and it was noted at the time that there was immense ignorance in England about the Spanish situation.*

A kid from Oldham who went, he'd never been out of Manchester. He didn't even know the Pyrenees separated France from Spain. He went in his galoshes to climb the Pyrenees. Tremendous ignorance! He nearly lost his feet. Only the middle class went abroad.

*But since you have done the film, do you think we have got a good grasp of what happened in Spain, even among the chattering classes?*

All the film can do is focus attention, not just on Spain but on betrayal and on the possibilities. It's relative to today. There's a link between today and Spain because again we've got a rising fascism, we've got mass unemployment. And the further to the Right the Tories go, the more to the Right Labour goes.

I've done meetings ... in France, Switzerland, Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff, and always the discussion after the film is contemporary. It's about saying to this generation: look, don't give up, it can be done. There is a way out of this mad-house, but certain conditions are necessary ... and if it happens again, don't make the same mistakes. And it's an answer to the Thatcherites and Tony Blair, who say, pointing to the Soviet Union: 'There you are, the great experiment failed'. So it's got a number of knock-on effects.

*There was a strange silence from John Smith House, from the Labour Party and the official trade union movement during the recent strikes in France against the welfare cuts. They seem to lack an internationalist perspective.*

Absolutely! They never had one. They are terrified of it, just as they were terrified of the miners' strike. They want a parliamentary game, a talking shop. Any mass pressure outside Parliament is anathema.

And France terrifies the shit out of them, where workers have gone out on the streets and so forth. Of course they detest that. You know they have a nice life in Parliament.

***'I will not vote'***

*I gather from what you've said that you won't be voting at the next general election?*

True. First time ever I've never voted. I cannot, and I will not vote for Blair's Party. I cannot! I cannot!

The sad thing that in the trade unions and in the Labour Party there's not ever a left-wing, and I'd put that in quotes too. There's no opposition in the Labour Parliamentary Party, or in the TUC.

You've got that strike in Liverpool – the dockers. It's been going on for weeks, and only last week did Bill Morris [leader of the Transport & General Workers' Union] go to Liverpool. But that was because of the Americans – the international unions in America agreed that they would block any ship that picked cargo up from Liverpool. And they contacted him, so he felt compelled to go and show his face.

There is nothing. There's no Bevanite wing, there's only Denis Skinner – a kind of parliamentary clown. We all have a laugh at good old Denis. I don't doubt his personal integrity.

Tony Benn's a spent force now. Benn's too old. Scargill has been completely marginalised.

I just won't vote. That's it, I abstain for the first time ever.

*But when you declared your determination not to vote at the Cornerhouse, the applause was a bit hesitant wasn't it?*

It's bound to be. It takes some kind of digesting. What's this bloke saying here? I have always voted for the Party, because I believed if it's going to create a mass party where the workers are it can change things.

But today there is no avenue. No road. No position. There's nowhere you can go to organise something.

Ken Loach made a film about Clause 4, and he contacted Noam Chomsky. Chomsky sent a message, etc., etc. He made that film because an organisation sprang up overnight – spontaneously, if you like – against the Clause being dropped. It was only about twenty minutes long. And when Transport House heard he was making that film, the spin-doctors came out with statements, lies, that he is not even in the Party [Labour], which he is.

He [Ken Loach] contacted Transport House and Labour branches saying that 'Blair is doing a hop around the country speaking to meetings. Can we also attend these meetings and let the delegates see the alternatives?'

We were completely frozen right out. And this to a man who is probably one of the most famous directors in Europe – with some kind of clout. In the end there was a discussion on the BBC with one of Blair's suited bother-boys – and he just insulted Ken, saying 'You're a wild-eyed Trotskyist ...' and this and that, and that was the level of discussion. So their methods just tell me that there is nowhere to go inside the Labour Party.

*Why do you think it is that your and Ken's work is so highly regarded abroad in France, at Cannes and now in Spain, but receives less acclaim in Britain?*

Well maybe because we're home-grown. I don't know. It's strange. Germany, France, they're all capitalist countries. Perhaps it seems more palatable over there.

But among the masses, among the workers our work is popular.. We had a film on about a month ago called *Raining Stones*, on television, and that got a tremendous response. But that again got very few showings in the cinema. Very few. It appeared in Manchester at the Odeon theatre, only because they were involved in the thing. We did a deal with them – the first night we had the premiere there and all the money from that night goes to them. But that was the exception.

We got mass [viewer] response even in television for films like *Days of Hope* and stuff like that. They had an enormous following.

*But that 1984 documentary – I don't know if you were involved – that Ken did on the trade unions, 'A Crisis of Leadership',\* I think it was called. That's never been seen.*

That was banned because ... the so-called balance was wrong. You had him at the ETU [Electrical Trades Union] – what's he called, that vicious little gangster? You know who I'm talking about, he became a Lord. In one incident Ken went to interview him and he got very violent. He wouldn't talk to him. So the ITV watchdog said to Ken: 'It's balance! If you can't get his side then we can't show yours'.

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\* *Actually called Questions of Leadership* and about the trade unions. Not broadcast after ITV took legal advice.

But he wouldn't talk to Ken. So it was just banned for technical reasons. He made that with Chris Menzies, I think.

So that was never shown and it never will be shown.

*Ken Loach has represented himself as being an alternative to the perpetual consensus of media broadcasting. He says he wants stories to reveal conflict and drama about why we live and how we live. What does this mean to you?*

Well, that kind of hidden truth in society that a film-maker must reflect. Must deal with these issues – pose alternatives, open debates. And if you think about it, there are very very few film-makers who do that. They are concerned with the froth of society.

Ken is a man who has nailed his colours to the mast. You know exactly where he stands. And so when we examine, like in *Days of Hope* or whatever we make, we examine basic fundamental problems involving the working class. We state there is a class struggle and it's got to be resolved – one way or the other. And that's the kind of recipe few film-makers deal in. Which is probably one reason why we scare the pants off them!

Like with *Hidden Agenda*, we didn't go as far as it could have gone, or wanted to go, because the lawyers stopped us. But we were the first film-makers to look at Northern Ireland in that particular light. No one else had done that. And so even though it wasn't totally satisfactory, because of the limitations imposed on us, we took it as far as we could. Even though that too won the Cannes award.

Awards don't mean a thing as far as this country is concerned. Awards to me and Ken are baubles. They should, in theory, give you clout. But this *Land and Freedom*, about a month ago in Berlin it won the 'European Film of the Year', so what more do you want? So while we look upon awards as a useful lever to get work done, it doesn't necessarily mean anything.

*But does it mean more in France and Europe; does it mean more there?*

It seems to, yes.

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## Ken Loach and Richard Porton

### The Revolution Betrayed

[Richard Porton interviewed Ken Loach, director of the film *Land and Freedom*, on behalf of *Cineaste*, 'America's leading magazine on the art and politics of the cinema' (PO Box 2242, New York, NY 10009-8917, sample copy \$5). The transcript is reprinted here by kind permission of Richard Porton and the publisher.]

*Cineaste*: Was *Homage to Catalonia* the departure point for Jim Allen's screenplay for *Land and Freedom*?

**Ken Loach**: It wasn't exactly the departure point, although obviously it's a very important book. Several books were very important and that was one of them. We also looked at a book called *The Red Spanish Notebook* by Juan Bréa and Mary Low, two kids who were there. In addition, we looked at Gabriel Jackson's study, Victor Alba's history of the POUM, and Hugh Thomas's *The Spanish Civil War*. We also talked to a lot of eyewitnesses to fill in the details. The story of the Spanish Revolution is part of the folklore of the left, so it's always been in the back of our minds to do something about it.

*The subtitle of the film – 'A story from the Spanish Revolution' – is key, since, although documentary films have dealt with these events, fiction films have generally not dealt with the betrayal of the left by the Communist Party.*

We were very concerned with this. We put the subtitle in because, immediately, from the start of the film, we wanted people not to start thinking of the Civil War but to think of the social upheaval as well. Part of the mythology of the war is that the left was united against fascism. Another part of this mythology is that all of the so-called democratic countries were against fascism. Both those things weren't true, as we now know.

*Would you talk a bit about your collaboration with Jim Allen on the script? I understand that the flashback structure wasn't originally part of the script.*

The film took a very long time to develop. We started with a very broad canvas. The story just kept breaking down. All the effort was

to find a set of relationships that would put the political conflict into a personal framework. There's no use making a film where everything says the 'right on' thing when you have no personal drama. It took a long time and many false starts to find a group of people and conflicts which would mirror the political conflict. We tried very hard not to make it seem like a mechanical acting out. We wanted it to be an emotional story as well, with people who had the limitations as well as the hopes of their times.

*How many drafts did the script go through?*

Hundreds, I would think. I couldn't tell you. It just kept evolving. And it was evolving while we were making the film.

*How did you decide to make the character of Blanca an anarchist? Was it thought that there should be some representation of the anarchist position in the film?*

Yes, partly that. There was also the fact that a lot of the women we talked to in Spain were anarchists – terrific people, particularly in Barcelona. One woman who, at least until a year ago, was operating a stall in the Barcelona market told us about fighting on the front with her boyfriend. We didn't want everyone to be stamped out of the same political mould. We wanted to reflect the confusion of the time and all the varied personal stories, because a lot of it was haphazard and people ended up fighting along with others for merely accidental reasons. It all happened in a great hurry where everyone rushed off to the front.

In some ways, it was chaotic. But it was also a great, spirited, popular movement. And, of course, Blanca goes along with the POUM because of her boyfriend. I know a man who lives near me in England who went and fought for the POUM. He was very young – seventeen or eighteen – but he just went because he had a good heart.

*Is Jim Allen's position close to the POUM?*

Well, that was, in general, the position we identified with, since they were anti-Stalinist Marxists. I hesitate to use the word Marxist, because it can be used as a kind of weight around your neck. They don't see the film, they just see the label. So I try to avoid using the word. People think they know what you mean, but they hang you before they see what you have done. In a way, what concerned us much more than the finer points of the politics was the great amount of human spirit, energy, and potential that was betrayed. Those

people had enormously affirmative, heart-warming qualities. People were brave and strong and full of ability – that's the optimism, and the tragedy, of the film.

*These qualities are especially evident in the sequence dealing with the collectivisation debate. How was this sequence planned? I understand you used a mix of professionals and non-professionals. This is one of the film's high points.*

Well I hope so. It was a question of finding people who still felt passionate about this issue. Spain's still quite a political place – Franco at least did that. He was quite politicising. You can find anarchists who still have a very strong position. It was very possible to find people who were full of passion from the nearby town. All the villagers were non-professionals, with the exception of the guy who chairs the meeting and the man who is the main opponent of collectivisation. He was an actor because I needed someone who had a bit of grit, to get something going. All of the positions taken by the actors did correspond to their actual positions, except for Tom Gilroy, the actor who plays Lawrence. We didn't want to make him a caricature, but to make his position against revolution as strong as possible. What was very important was that we didn't want to undervalue this argument, it was an honest dilemma, so we wanted to entrust that argument to someone who was an honest and intelligent person. And ideally, the audience might go along with him for a time. It's quite good if, at the end of that debate, some of the audience is with Tom.

All the time it suits the purposes of our politicians to talk about how cynical people are, how they don't like politics and how it will never get any better. It suits the status quo to say this because it leaves power in the hands of the people who already have power. Nobody gets challenged. The more this myth of cynicism and just look after number one and don't care about anyone else is perpetuated, the more people lose power. The more you can say, 'Look, people have great potential', the more volatile things will get.

*Would you say there are parallel themes in some of your other films written with Jim Allen, particularly Days of Hope, which deals with an analogous betrayal of the left during the 1926 British general strike?*

Well, yes. It's obviously a common theme. I think it's the story of the century, really, that there is this great force which is capable of change but it doesn't always lead to something effective. There are other similarities, of course, such as the question of fascism, although it

didn't call itself that in Britain. But there was the need to undermine workers' organisations. And there's the support for fascist regimes when they can deliver a compliant working class or deliver a convenient space for the placement of Western capital. You don't have to look much further than America to see that. There's this hypocritical claim that the West is democratic, when it's only encouraging fascism to do the work that democracy can't do.

*Did you talk to many of the POUM veterans?*

Yes. There were a few memorable days when we went round many of the battlefields with a man named John Rocaber who had fought with the POUM. He took us around to places where he had fought and told us exactly what had happened. He was an extraordinary man and what he told us was very vivid. Much of what we recounted in the film had actually happened to him. He was arrested a few miles away from the front by the new detachment from the Popular Army. That was very dramatic – or should I say traumatic – for him. After we had taken that journey we incorporated many of his experiences into the film. This was a great help, especially with the last scene.

*And of course we now realise that the Soviet Union was behind the purge of the left.*

Yes. There were orders from Moscow. It was the time of the purge trials. The same line used to go after the POUM was used against Trotsky and the Old Bolsheviks. It was exactly the same language and around the same time; the Moscow trials were in 1936. This was the Stalinist way of dealing with opponents.

*Of course, the odd thing about the POUM was that, although labelled 'Trotskyist', Trotsky himself was quite critical of them.*

Yes, and they were critical of him. Although, perhaps they had more in common with Trotsky than they were prepared to allow. They both represented anti-Stalinist Communism. The epithet of 'Trotskyism' is also used in Britain against anyone who is a militant or a radical. It is a term of abuse which has stuck for sixty years; it's rather ironical.

*Was there a conscious attempt to construct affinities between what is happening in Britain today and the situation in Spain during the '30s?*

No, not really a conscious attempt. We just tried to tell the story as directly as possible. We just tried to pare it down to the bone – to inform the audience of the struggle for people to take power and the

political forces that opposed them. If there is a pertinence to the British situation, we shouldn't talk just of Britain but of the whole Western world. The issue today is all about democratic control of resources, democratic control of capital. That's a demand which can't go away, because we're driving civilisation over the precipice. The drive for production and new technologies are increasing poverty, unemployment, and over-production. It's an accelerating spiral; control is in the hands of the big corporations. It's even beyond anybody's control, beyond the state even. The multinationals are operating according to the laws of their own markets. So the question is: Who controls? Who controls land and technology? Who controls markets?

*I've heard about some screenings of the film where people who fought with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade have had heated arguments with those who espouse the position of the POUM.*

People who fought with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade have a huge emotional investment, like all of the veterans of the international brigades. In many cases, their lives have been based on what they did in Spain. So it's very reasonable for them to disagree and find fault with what this film is about. That's okay. As Jim Allen says, they were the cream of their generation. The last thing we would want to do is not acknowledge and admire what they did.

*I read that Santiago Carrillo, the former head of the Spanish Communist Party, attacked the film.*

Oh, yes. He wrote an article, but his criticisms weren't as strong as I thought they would be. Basically, he reflected some of the arguments used in the film – the POUM were irresponsible adventurists, and so on. He thought that the people who talked of revolution at the time were splitting the left – you know, the usual arguments. I don't think they can now assert that the leaders of the POUM were fascists. I think they now have to admit that this was a terrible lie. It did make a good discussion in Spain between Carrillo and the general secretary of the POUM. They battled it out; that's okay. The response from people in the international brigades has been varied. Obviously, some of them have been quite antagonistic, but others have been very supportive. They're all very old now. The important thing is not to let it be merely an argument between old men. That's fine, but there are more important things involved than digging over the fine print of the politics of '36.

## *Donald Rooum*

### **Fictitious anarchists in The Secret Agent**

*The Secret Agent* by Joseph Conrad<sup>1</sup> is a thriller which did little for Conrad's popularity or pocket when it was first published in 1907, but has been a literary classic, with both critical acclaim and a popular following, ever since Conrad made his name with the now largely forgotten *Chance* a few years later.

It has four anarchist characters (in addition to the secret agent of the title who pretends to be an anarchist but is not), all of them either villainous or ridiculous or both, who still exercise a baneful influence on the image of anarchists in popular imagination.

Karl Yundt contributes to the stereotype 'anarchist' of comic drawing.

... Karl Yundt remained standing, one wing of his faded greenish havelock thrown back cavalierly over his shoulder ... The old terrorist, raising an uncertain and clawlike hand, gave a swaggering tilt to a black felt sombrero shading the hollows and ridges of his wasted face An extraordinary expression of underhand malevolence survived in his extinguished eyes.

A big black hat and a short cloak had been used by European illustrators for some decades to represent 'terrorists',<sup>2</sup> which was probably why Conrad gave this costume to Yundt. But as a result of *The Secret Agent*, it has been seen by cartoonists as the 'anarchist' uniform.

However, Yundt does not carry a bomb under his havelock. Although "the all but moribund veteran of dynamite wars" constantly talks of bloodthirsty terrorism:

The famous terrorist had never in his life raised personally as much as a little finger against the social edifice ... he took the part of an insolent and venomous evoker of sinister impulses ...

To make the cartoon anarchist bomber, Yundt must be conflated with another anarchist from *The Secret Agent*: the Professor, "frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable – and terrible", loaded with explosives.<sup>3</sup> If anyone tries to arrest him, the Professor is ready to squeeze a bulb in his pocket which will cause, after a twenty seconds

delay, a massive explosion destroying himself, the arresting officers, and anyone else within fifty yards.

'Twenty seconds ... You mean to say you could face that? I should go crazy.'  
'Wouldn't matter if you did.'

Both Sherry<sup>4</sup> and Seymour-Smith point out that the Professor is not an anarchist, since the aim of his endeavours is not the free society but the perfect detonator. Conrad, however, calls him the Perfect Anarchist, and has him 'sententiously' proclaiming "My device is: No God. No master".

Another anarchist character, the obese and pallid Michaelis, presents a ridiculous caricature of anarchist ideology. Innocent and gentle, Michaelis has spent fifteen years in solitary confinement, avoiding suicidal despair by thinking up an exact vision of 'a world planned out like an immense and nice hospital, with gardens and flowers, in which the strong are to devote themselves to the nursing of the weak', and convincing himself, unshakeably, that such a world must inevitably come into being. The anonymous writer of the Introduction to the Wordsworth edition<sup>4</sup> calls him a 'Utopian Marxist'.

The remaining anarchist, Alexander Ossipon, "ex-medical student without a degree", is robust and physically attractive. He lectures "to working-men's associations upon the socialistic aspects of hygiene" and is "principal writer of the F.P. pamphlets". He lives by sponging on "silly girls with savings-bank books" and turns out to be perhaps the most treacherous villain in the whole of fiction.

It is urged by some that *The Secret Agent* is not anti-anarchist, since the fictitious anarchists are no more unlovely than the policemen, diplomats, and other characters. Conrad's biographer Frederick Karl presents Conrad as having "anarchist tendencies" himself. But Conrad inserts some anti-anarchist comments which have nothing to do with either plot or character, and may be described as gratuitous:

Obviously one does not revolt against the advantages and opportunities [provided by society], but against the price which must be paid for the same in the coin of accepted morality, self-restraint, and toil ... There are natures to whose sense of justice the price exacted looms up monstrously enormous, odious, oppressive, worrying, humiliating, extortionate, intolerable. These are the fanatics. The remaining portion of social rebels is accounted for by vanity ...

In his author's note to the 1920 edition of his book, Conrad describes the end of his tragic heroine, "in utter desolation, madness, and despair", as an "anarchistic end".

In 1920, Conrad was a literary lion, on his way to being offered a knighthood (which he declined) in 1924, and he seems to have found it advisable to deny even the remotest acquaintance with anything anarchistic. The plot of *The Secret Agent*, he says, came to him "in the shape of a few words uttered by a friend in a casual conversation about anarchists or rather anarchist activities". He mentioned the incident (of 1894) in which a bomber blew himself up in Greenwich Park, and the friend said "Oh, that fellow was half an idiot. His sister committed suicide afterwards".

Conrad claims that the unnamed friend had no connection with anarchists:

I am sure that if he had seen once in his life the back of an anarchist that must have been the whole extent of his connection with the underworld.

But Professor Sherry has established that the friend was Ford Maddox Ford, not himself an anarchist but the cousin and friend of the anarchist Rosetti children, and occasional contributor to their anarchist publication *Torch*.<sup>6</sup>

There is no firm evidence that Conrad knew the Rosettis personally, though his short story 'The Informer' betrays knowledge of them. But Ford Maddox Ford certainly visited them frequently, and borrowed anarchist literature from them which Conrad read.

Much research has gone into finding sources for Conrad's fictitious incidents and persons. The bomb in Greenwich Park was of course reported in all the newspapers at the time, but Conrad uses details not generally reported, taken from Henry Seymour's journal *The Anarchist*. The adventure which put the innocent Michaelis in gaol for so long actually happened, not to an anarchist but to a Fenian called Conlon.<sup>7</sup> His obesity is said to be that of Bakunin, and his simple-minded ideas to caricature those of Kropotkin. The language and opinions of Karl Yundt caricature those of Johann Most.

The Professor is thought by both Sherry and Seymour-Smith to be Conrad's entire invention, but Paul Avrich has found a probable origin in an obscure periodical from Oregon.<sup>8</sup>

*The Secret Agent* is full of witty descriptions of every character's inner motivations, which somehow do not hold up the action. Adaptations of the novel, as a play or a film, perforce omit some of the most exciting incidents (for instance a tense conversation at cross purposes), because we could not understand them without knowing what the characters are thinking.

We must regret that this great novel is so unfair to anarchists and anarchism. But this should not stop us reading and enjoying it.

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**Notes**

1. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* with an introduction by Martin Seymour-Smith (Penguin, 1984). Seymour-Smith takes Louis-Auguste Blanqui to be an originator of anarchism, though Blanqui, originator of the phrase 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', advocated not the abolition of the state but the seizure of power by a revolutionary elite. The same error occurs in the article on 'anarchism' by Leopold Labedz in the *Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (1977), from which Seymour-Smith may have taken his information. Thanks to Charles Crute for the research for this note.
2. According to Peterson (*Freedom*, November 1987, translated from *Trafik*), the costume originally depicted a member of the Carbonari, the secret society which terrorised for the unification of Italy.
3. The Professor's bombs are not, however, spherical. Hollow cannonballs, filled with explosive and shot, were invented by the English General Shrapnel for artillery use, and apparently used by Carbonari as terrorist weapons. Cartoonists like them because they are instantly readable as 'bombs', and these days more comic than terrifying.
4. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993).
5. Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Western World* (Cambridge University Press, 1971).
6. Other contributors to *The Torch* included Camille Pissaro and Emile Zola. The Rosettis, nephew and nieces of the poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, printed the first few numbers in their nursery, then set up a press at 127 Ossulton Street, Somers Town, later taken over by the *Freedom* group. Two of them wrote *A Girl Among The Anarchists* 'by Helen Meredith'.
7. The relationship of the Conlons, victims of the recent 'Guildford Four' and 'Maguires' injustices, to the nineteenth century victim Conlon is not known.
8. See next page.

## Paul Avrich

### Conrad's Anarchist Professor: an undiscovered source

[This article first appeared in *Labor History*, Summer 1977, and was reprinted in *Freedom* on 17th September 1977, and recently in *Drunken Boat*. We are grateful to Paul Avrich for permission to reprint it here.]

Among the most striking characters in Joseph Conrad's body of fiction is the anarchist Professor in *The Secret Agent*. When the novel was published in 1907, a reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* in a short but perceptive notice, found the Professor, Chief Inspector Heath and Adolf Verloc to be its most interesting portraits, but "it is the Professor who principally increases Mr Conrad's reputation, already of the highest".<sup>1</sup>

The Professor, whom Conrad calls 'the perfect anarchist', is the only character in the book without a name. His motto is 'No God! No Master!' He walks the streets of London with a bomb in his pocket to discourage the police from approaching. He need only press a rubber ball for an explosion to take place after an interval of twenty seconds. This, however, does not satisfy him, and he works fourteen hours a day in his laboratory to construct the 'perfect detonator'. "Madness and despair!" he exclaims in what are perhaps the most famous lines in the book. "Give me that for a lever, and I'll move the world". Lost in the crowd, "miserable and undersized", he meditates confidently on his power, keeping his hand in his trouser pocket around the rubber ball, "the supreme guarantee of his sinister freedom". At the end of the novel, he is the last one off the stage, prowling the London streets while "averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable – and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men."

As a literary character some have found the Professor grotesque and unconvincing. To Irving Howe, for example, he is so far-fetched a

monstrosity as to constitute a serious weakness of the novel. "Seldom did Conrad miscalculate so badly as in his view of the bomb-laden 'Professor'," writes Howe, and "it is difficult to regard this grimy lunatic as anything but a cartoon".<sup>2</sup> Yet, as will be seen in a moment, the Professor was based on a real person. Moreover, Conrad himself meant him to be a serious portrayal of an actual revolutionary type from the late nineteenth century. "I did not intend to make him despicable", he wrote to R.B. Cunninghame Graham shortly after the novel was published. "He is incorruptible at any rate, In making him say 'madness and despair – give me that for a lever and I will move the world' I wanted to give him a note of perfect sincerity. At the worst he is a megalomaniac of an extreme type. And every extremist is respectable".<sup>3</sup>

Conrad, in fact, though he tried to conceal it, went to a great deal of trouble to fashion his characters and story after actual personalities and events. The subject of *The Secret Agent*, he remarks in the Author's Note to the novel, "came to me in the shape of a few words uttered by a friend in casual conversation about anarchism or rather anarchist activities". The friend (whom Conrad does not identify) was Ford Maddox Ford, who a decade before had belonged to the anarchist circle gathered in London around the precocious Rossetti sisters and had contributed to their paper, *The Torch*. Ford's conversations with Conrad, however, were much more than 'casual'. And not only did he supply Conrad with anarchist literature, but he also introduced him to Helen Rossetti, the driving force behind *The Torch*. Conrad became deeply interested in the subject and, despite his later disclaimers, read everything about it that he could lay his hands on. Besides *The Secret Agent*, moreover, he wrote two short stories dealing with anarchism 'An Anarchist' and 'The Informer', the latter being a kind of work in progress in which we first encounter the Professor of the novel. In all three works, he betrays a knowledge of anarchism of the 1880s and 1890s based on a careful study of contemporary pamphlets and journals, of memoirs of anarchists and police officials, and of press reports of incidents involving anarchists.

Conrad always tries to conceal the research, which was considerable. In his Author's Note to *A Set of Six*,<sup>4</sup> which contains both, "of 'The Informer' and 'An Anarchist' I will say next to nothing. The pedigree of these tales is hopelessly complicated and not worth disentangling at this distance of time. I found them and here they are. The discriminating reader will guess that I have found them within my mind; but how they or their elements come in there I have forgotten

for the most part; and for the rest I really don't see why I should give myself away more than I have done already."

Professor Norman Sherry of the University of Lancaster, in his meticulously detailed study of Conrad's *Western World*, has done an impressive job of tracing the sources of Conrad's characters and plots<sup>5</sup>. Thus 'An Anarchist', as he shows, was based on an actual mutiny in the penal settlement on the Ile Saint-Joseph, French Guiana, on 21st October 1894, accounts of which appeared in the anarchist press.<sup>6</sup> By the same token, the source for *The Secret Agent* was an actual episode, the famous Greenwich Park explosion of 15th February 1894. Despite his pretence of ignorance, Conrad's data for this incident came from a whole array of pamphlets, from which, as Sherry writes, "specific details of revolutionary activity, attitude and character were derived".<sup>7</sup>

So deeply, indeed, did he immerse himself in this literature that, after the novel was published, "a visitor from America informed me that all sorts of revolutionary refugees in New York would have it that the book was written by somebody who knew a lot about them" Conrad tells us in his Author's Note to the book.

But on whom did he model his character of the Professor? No such person figures in the actual incident, about which much has been written. The scholar must therefore look elsewhere. Professor Sherry suggests a number of possibilities, including the German-American anarchist Johann Most and a British anarchist doctor named John Creaghe, or a composite drawn from features of both men and possibly others. Yet neither Most nor Creaghe, for all their affection for dynamite, possessed what Sherry rightly considers the most startling characteristic of the Professor, namely his habit of always carrying an explosive in his pocket. This idea, says Sherry, Conrad may have derived from an Irish terrorist named Luke Dillon (known as 'Dynamite' Dillon), or perhaps it was simply "an imaginative invention of Conrad's, since no such explosive-carrying person existed in anarchist circles in spite of the melodramatic and sensational image which anarchists had in the minds of the general public".<sup>8</sup>

Professor Sherry, however, is mistaken. For all his ingenuity in ferreting out sources, he has neglected to follow up a clue provided by Conrad himself. In the window of Adolf Verloc's shop, writes Conrad in *The Secret Agent*, were "a few apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like *The Torch*, *The Gong* – rousing titles". *The Torch* is clearly the journal of the Rossetti sisters mentioned above, and *The Gong* Professor Sherry takes to be

*The Alarm*, another anarchist paper published in London in 1896.<sup>9</sup> What Sherry has overlooked, however, is a similar reference in 'The Informer' to *The Alarm* and *The Firebrand*, the latter being an anarchist weekly published in Portland between 1895 and 1897. *The Alarm*, accordingly, would seem to be not the British journal of 1896 but its American predecessor and namesake, edited in Chicago during the 1880s by the Haymarket martyr Albert R. Parsons. A search of its files confirms this supposition. On the last page of the 13th January 1885 issue, the bomb-carrying Professor springs into life. Here, by all appearances, is the original of Conrad's character:

DYNAMITE: Professor Mezzeroff Talks About It. And Other Explosives; A Good Word for Tri-Nitro-Glycerine. A New and Vigorous Child. He Carries a Bomb in His Pocket; How the Professor Carries Explosives Around with Him in Street Cars. Collated from the N.Y. 'Voice'.

There has a great deal of discussion in the newspapers as to my nativity. I was born in New York. My mother was a Highlander, my father was a Russian, and I am an American citizen. I have diplomas from three colleges, and have devoted my life to the study of medicine. When I was a boy I fought in the Crimean War, and I bear the scars of five wounds. The wholesale massacre disgusted me with autocratic rule. I determined to devote my life to the welfare and elevation of humanity. I have kept my word, and no man or woman or child can today say that he or she has been wronged or injured by me. I am going to tell you some secret statistics which I have. I belong to two secret societies, and get some state secrets from Europe forty-eight hours after they have have transpired. Russia has 3,000,000 men under arms today, exclusive of the police, the paid spies and other civil supporters of the government. Germany has 2,500,000; France has 2,000,000; Austria 1,000,000; England 800,000, counting the militia; Turkey half a million; the rest of Europe 2,000,000. In all there are over 10,000,000 soldiers who are supported by the laboring men of the Old World. Yet, when I propose to use a bomb costing \$25 in place of a Krupp gun costing \$150,000, I am called a fiend. If we want to kill each other let us do it on business principles. Gunpowder kills at the rate of 1,200 miles a minute, dynamite at 200,000. If you use my explosive you can defend yourself against the armies of the world.

When I went to Boston the other day three detectives, one a woman, followed me and tried to find out where my college is where I teach how explosives are compounded, in order to put a stop to my career. Now, I have the same right to educate men in chemistry as Professor Chandler has, and I won't stop until every workingman in Europe and America knows how to use explosives against autocratic government and grasping monopolies. I have the receipt for forty-two explosives in a burglar proof safe, and should I die, they will be published to the world in order that all may know how to deliver themselves from tyrants and those who wrong them. I can take tea and similar

articles of food from the family table and make explosives with them more powerful than Italian gunpowder, the strongest gunpowder there is. I will [the next few words are illegible] do with ten pounds of pure tri-nitro-glycerine, of whose composition England knows nothing, because the only men there who knew about it were blown up by it. I take it through the street in my pocket; carry it about in the horse cars.

Not long ago I was travelling with some friends in a car, and an old woman come and sat down on the two bombs I had with me. A good little nitric and sulphuric acid, with pure glycerine, such as ladies use, mixed in the proper proportions, and five or six pounds of it, such as could easily be carried in the pocket, would destroy the big post office down town. No confinement is necessary for tri-nitro-glycerine. In the open air it will make 1,300 times its own size at the rate of 200,000 feet a minute. You can learn to make tri-nitro-glycerine, and if you carry two or three pounds with you people will respect you much more than if you carried a pistol. But don't use dynamite till the government becomes autocratic, and you cannot obtain your rights at the polls.

Professor Mezzero<sup>10</sup>

#### Notes

1. *The Times Literary Supplement*, 20th September 1907, page 285, reprinted in Norman Sherry (editor) *Conrad: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1973), pages 184-85.
2. Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (Cleveland, 1957), page 97.
3. C.T. Watts (editor), *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham* (Cambridge, 1969), letter of 7th October 1907.
4. Volume XVIII of Conrad's *Complete Works*, century edition (New York, 1924).
5. Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Western World* (Cambridge, 1971), pages 205-334. See also Eloise Knapp Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad* (Chicago, 1963), pages 219-63; Ian P. Watt (editor), *Conrad: 'The Secret Agent'* (London 1973); and Avrom Fleishman, *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (Baltimore, 1967) pages 187-214.
6. See, for example, 'The Massacre of the Anarchist Convicts in French Guiana' in *Liberty* (London) April 1895.
7. Sherry, *Conrad's Western World*, page 205.
8. *Ibid.*, page 283.
9. Eloise Knapp Hay in *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad*, page 237, wrongly surmises that *The Torch* refers to Lenin's *Iskra* (The Spark) and *The Gong* to Herzen's *Kolokol* (The Bell).
10. Compare C.W. Mawbray, a militant English anarchist and member of William Morris's Socialist League: "General Sheridan of the American army said 'arms are worthless', and that dynamite was a lately discovered article of tremendous power, and, such was its nature that people could carry it around in the pockets of their clothing with perfect safety to themselves, and by means of it they could destroy whole cities and whole armies." *The Commonwealth* (London), 29th November 1890.

## Jean Pollard

### Emily Bronte – Anarchist?

Emily Bronte is one of the outstanding authors and poets of the nineteenth century. Her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, is one of the few books to incite intense feelings of revulsion or praise – there is no mid-way approach to the story. There has been much speculation on how an isolated woman, with little connection outside her literary family, could write such a powerful, disturbing book. This article seeks to show that Emily's life and work indicate an empathy with anarchist ideals and that, had she lived, her work would have clearly shown her radical leanings.

Anarchism has always been attractive to literary, artistic people because in a free society where people can become more social and individual, then they will be able to develop their full range of artistic and intellectual abilities. Some literary figures with Anarchist leanings were William Morris, dismissed by G.K. Chesterton as “a sort of Dickensian anarchist” and Oscar Wilde, a great admirer of Kropotkin. Wilde referred to himself as “something of an anarchist” and concluded that only in a free society without government could an artist be able to express himself fully. He often quoted the Taoist Chuang Tzu to the effect that “there is such a thing as leaving mankind alone; there has never been such a thing as governing mankind”. Wilde wrote “all modes of government are wrong. They are unscientific because they seek to alter the natural environment of man: they are immoral because, by interfering with the individual, they produce the most aggressive forms of egotism ...”

Other literary anarchists include Leo Tolstoy and J.B. Priestley, who described himself as a ‘gentle anarchist’. William Godwin wrote *Caleb Williams*, subtitled *Things as they are*, about which William Hazlitt wrote “No-one who ever began *Caleb Williams* that did not read it through; no-one that ever read it could possibly forget it”. It was Godwin's daughter, Mary, who wrote *Frankenstein*, the story of a man-made creature driven by lack of human affection to become a murderer.

So where is Emily Bronte in all this? Born in 1824 in Yorkshire and moving with her clergyman father, later novelist sisters Charlotte and

Anne and brother Branwell (other siblings died), to Haworth, where she spent many hours walking on the Yorkshire Moors. She left Haworth only three times, once to school at 6, where she pined for home; again to school at 16 to Roe Head, Halifax, where Charlotte was a teacher, but where, after three months, she left, again because of homesickness; and at 18 to Brussels with Charlotte to train as a teacher of languages with a view to the women opening their own school at home. The school never came to fruition but in 1847 *Wuthering Heights* was published and she died in 1848 aged 30, having apparently refused all medical help.

Information about Emily is scant, probably because it was deliberately destroyed (see later). One of the family servants described her as "having the eyes of a half-tamed creature and [she] cared for nobody's opinion, being happy with her animal pets". Charlotte described her as being "stronger than a man; simpler than a child – her nature stood alone". Freedom was important to her and Charlotte said she was unhappy at Roe Head because of it: "liberty was something Emily flatly refused to be deprived of. The change from her own very noiseless, very secluded but very unrestricted life to one of disciplined routine was what she failed in enduring".

For a daughter of a clergyman, she had little time for religion. Her father, who appears to have been tolerant of her, gave her a bible in 1827, but the family noted she made little use of it and, unusual in that day and age for her position, she did not teach at Sunday school. Her poems mention 'God', but a closer reading of them will show a universal, natural phenomenon, rather than a man-made creation. Her contempt for religion is shown in extracts from two poems:

Around me, wretches uttering praise,  
Or howling o'er their hopeless days,  
And each with Frenzy's tongue –  
A brotherhood of misery,  
With smiles as sad as sighs; ...

and

Vain are the thousand creeds  
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain  
Worthless as withered weeds  
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

Echoes of Shelley's work can be seen here and it is not surprising to discover that he was a major influence on her. Shelley's poetry and connection with Godwin is too well told to repeat here, but it is not

known how much, if at all, Emily would have known of their views and ideas. It is known that Emily and her sister Anne read Tom Moore's *Life of Byron* published in 1830 and which contains the Curran portrait of Shelley. She also read his poem 'Epipsychidion' with Anne. This poem, addressed to the prisoner Lady Emelia V ... is at one level a feminist protest at the repression of women passing from fathers to husbands as pieces of property and shows two ways of living: one repressive and ultimately imprisoning and the other loving and imaginative. Part of the poem which may have impressed Emily is this:

I never thought before my death to see  
Youth's vision thus made perfect. Emily,  
I love thee, though the world by no thin name  
Will hide that love from its unvalued shame,  
Would we two had been twins of the same mother!

Emelia is seen as a poor captive bird and the inferences Shelley drew are the one-ness of humans with nature, which is likely to have appealed to Emily.

Emily never mentions Shelley by name but his influence is not that of a teenage girl's adoration of a dead hero: in 'My Comforter', written in 1844, she may be making reference to Shelley:

Well hast thou spoken, and yet, not taught  
A feeling strange or new;  
Thou hast but roused a latent thought,  
A cloud-closed beam of sunshine, brought  
To gleam in open view.

The quiet backwater of Victorian Haworth was not a literary or radical centre and it is unlikely that Emily found anyone else with whom she could share her ideas. Shelley's writing was probably a revelation to her and, as she says, it did not teach her, only roused the thoughts she already had but possibly without an outlet.

Another poem is believed by one of her biographers, Edward Chitham, to be a reference to Shelley:

Deserted one! Thy corpse lies cold  
And mingled with a foreign mould –  
Year after year the grass grows green  
Above the dust where thou hast been.

I will not name thy blighted name  
Tarnished by unforgotten shame  
Though not because my bosom torn  
Joins the mad world in all its scorn –

Shelley, of course, died in Italy generally attacked in England for his perceived immorality and his atheism, which consisted of a kind of pantheism consistent with Emily's known views on such matters. She will not join in the general condemnation.

By the age of 14, she is noted by one of Charlotte's friends, Ellen Nussey, to have strong views of her own and she apparently shocked both Charlotte and Ellen on a shopping trip to Bradford when she insisted on buying material described as "white stuff patterned with lilac thunder and lightning" – apparently too risqué for the other two!

Two years later, Emily is at Roe Head, Halifax and Chitham suggests this could have been because she was showing signs of rebellion and seen to be having too much of the dangerous radicalism of Shelley. It may have been an attempt to get her to conform under the auspices of Charlotte as a teacher there.

By 1841, at the age of 22, she is writing poems such as 'The Old Stoic' given below in its entirety, which has a clear vision of freedom:

Riches I hold in light esteem  
 And Love I laugh to scorn  
 And Lust of fame was but a dream  
 That vanished with the morn:

And if I pray, the only prayer  
 That moves my lips for me  
 Is, 'Leave the heart that now I bear,  
 And give me liberty!'

Yes, as my swift days near their goal,  
 'Tis all that I implore  
 In life and death, a chainless soul,  
 With courage to endure.

There is scant evidence of Emily's approach to others, although Charlotte does describe her as "full of ruth [compassion] for others" and in one recorded incident when an invalid cousin of one of the servants came to visit, Emily brought her own chair to the kitchen for the cousin to sit on – in those days not something the daughter of a clergyman would do for the relative of a servant. She clearly had much more sympathy for her brother Branwell than did her sisters, particularly when he became addicted to opium and alcohol. She often used to bring him back from the pub and put him to bed when her sisters, particularly Charlotte, were disgusted with him.

As mentioned Emily went to Brussels with Charlotte and in their tutor, M. Heger – the 'Professor' in Charlotte's book of the same

name – Emily finds someone who empathises with her intellectual views. He seems to have had a strong attachment to her. Praising her strong intellect, saying “Emily had a head for logic and a capability of argument, unusual in a man and rare indeed in a woman” and went on “she should have been a man – a great navigator. Her powerful reason would have deduced new spheres of discovery from the knowledge of the old”. He also recounted an incident which shows Emily was not going to conform: he had suggested they read some French extracts, analyse them and use the models to express their own thoughts. Emily rejected this, saying she saw no good in it and they should lose all originality of thought and expression.

She also wrote two essays whilst in Brussels. One of them is about King Harold of Hastings in which she pictures him in peacetime, no longer a king but a hero and a captive in his own palace, deceived by flattery and lost in a labyrinth of folly and vice. Coming through this is the Shelleyan view of the court as a place where kings are corrupted. Harold only becomes himself when he leaves the court, climbs a hill and is overcome with anger at all that has been spoilt. In the other about a cat, she attacks hypocrisy and blames cats’ deviance on humans and that nature would be harmless if it were not for the intervention of the human race – an anarchist approach to life being left alone.

This, then, is a brief background to the author of *Wuthering Heights*. More than one critic has said that the two outstandingly great poems of Western literature may well be Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* and *Wuthering Heights*, which is an interesting comparison when we know Tolstoy was an anarchist.

The story itself revolves around the characters of Heathcliff and Cathy Earnshaw. He is a waif of unknown origin brought by Cathy’s father to join the family, including Cathy’s brother Hindley. The two characters are inseparable, growing up wild and free on the moors. By accident, Cathy stays with the Lintons, the local gentry, and Edgar Linton becomes infatuated with her. She is seduced by the lifestyle he offers and as Hindley, who never liked Heathcliff and has now inherited the family home of *Wuthering Heights*, degrades Heathcliff, treating him as the lowest servant and banishing him from the house, she feels it would be beneath her to marry him. In a fit of passion, she tells the housekeeper Nelly Dean this and Heathcliff disappears, having overheard the conversation. However, he misses the crucial part of her speech when she says “I am Heathcliff” and explains “my love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it,

I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary". Heathcliff returns some years later, sophisticated and rich, and wreaks revenge on all those who have severed him from Cathy. She dies young and, twenty years later, he also dies as master of Linton's estate and Wuthering Heights. He takes no pleasure in his wealth and is only happy when reunited with Cathy – the two ghosts seen wandering the moors.

It is a dramatic and disturbing book and Heathcliff has often been described as a monster. There are some violent scenes in it, such as when Heathcliff attempts to hang the pet dog belonging to Linton's sister, Isabella. But he does this to show to her what he is like, as she becomes infatuated with him and eventually marries him. However, if he is compared to Frankenstein, he is no more than a victim of his circumstances and the corruption which has ensnared Cathy, also corrupts him in seeking his revenge, which eventually destroys him. The theme of twins – 'I am Heathcliff' – finds echoes in Shelley's 'Epipsychidion' (see above). It appears to be a story of man severed from nature. These two are happiest when they are running wild and free on the moors, as nature intended, and she rejects heaven and embraces nature, as can be seen in this passage when Cathy says to the housekeeper, Nelly Dean, that she has had a dream where she went to heaven but was miserable:

... heaven did not seem to be my home and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights, where I woke sobbing for joy.

And she mocks bible-bashers in the bigoted character of Joseph, the dour servant at Wuthering Heights, when she has Nelly Dean say of him:

He is most likely the wearisomest self-righteous Pharisee that ever ransacked a bible to rake the promises to himself and fling the curses on his neighbour.

There is also an equality about the characters. Emily does not favour either Cathy or Heathcliff; Cathy can be as cruel as Heathcliff. None of the servants 'know their place' – Nelly Dean interferes with all the main characters, often acting as a catalyst in some of the incidents. The bigoted Joseph likewise says what he thinks and lives and eats with his masters at Wuthering Heights.

There are many other examples in the book which reflects Emily's personal views, of those that can be gleaned, with many Shelleyan overtones.

Contemporary views of the book differed. The *Examiner* of 8th January 1848, seems to have been looking for a light romantic frothy piece, describing the book as 'strange' and criticising the author who should "not drag into the light all that he discovers of coarse and loathsome ..." – many people do not like the corruptions which exist to be held up for them to view. However, Douglas Jerrold's *Weekly Newspaper* of 15th January 1848, says:

It is impossible to begin *Wuthering Heights* and not finish it; and quite as impossible to lay it aside afterwards and say nothing about it.

Which is amazingly similar to the comment Hazlitt made about *Caleb Williams*.

Virginia Woolf said of Emily and the book, "She looked out upon a world cleft into gigantic disorder and felt within her the power to unite it in a book ... She could free life from its dependence on facts ..." and a modern writer, Steven Vine, suggests "throughout the novel, Heathcliff's unquiet presence articulates and exacerbates the internal instabilities of the world he invades" which could well describe an anarchist!

And where is Emily now going? Her relationship with Charlotte had deteriorated: her sister's chocolate-box view of the world found no sympathy with Emily who had also, against her own wishes, been persuaded by Charlotte to have her poems published. In a letter written by Charlotte in the year of Emily's death, she says of her sister, under the male pseudonym of Ellis:

Ellis, I imagine, would soon turn aside from the spectacle [meaning London] in disgust. I do not think he admits it as his creed that 'the proper study of mankind is man' – at least not the artificial man of cities. In some points I consider Ellis somewhat of a theorist: now and then he broaches ideas which strike my sense as much more daring and original than practical; his reason may be in advance of mine, but certainly it often travels a different road.

We will probably never know what her 'daring and original' ideas were, but quite clear anarchist views come through in the following fragment, which is all that remains of her last, untitled, poem:

Why ask to know what date, what clime  
 There dwelt our own humanity  
 Power-worshippers from earliest time  
 Foot-kissers of triumphant crime  
 Crushers of helpless misery  
 Crushing down Justice, honouring Wrong ...

After her death it is likely that Charlotte destroyed much of Emily's remaining work. Ever the conservative, it is clear that she did not share her sister's views and is likely to have destroyed any work which was radical or revolutionary. General opinion seems to favour the idea of a second novel in preparation and if so, then it must have been offensive to Charlotte, who was keen to foster a good image around Emily, thus spawning one third of the Bronte legend. No trace has been found of another book, although Charlotte was keen to publish Emily's poems posthumously and perhaps did not understand the more radical ones, hence their survival.

So, was Emily Bronte an anarchist? We will never know for sure, but her work has all the hallmarks of a free-thinker, seeing in nature a better way of living than 'the artificial man of cities', but living a lonely isolated life apart from her family.

Finally, the theme of liberty and freedom which Emily craved can be seen in another poem with no title, although many years later it was given the name 'The Caged Bird':

And like myself lone, wholly lone  
It sees the day's long sunshine glow  
And like myself it makes its moan  
In unexhausted woe

Give we the hills our equal prayer  
Earth's breezy hills and heaven's blue sea  
We ask for nothing further here  
But our own hearts and liberty

Ah, could my hand unlock its chain  
How gladly would I watch it soar  
And ne'er regret and ne'er complain  
To see its shining eyes no more

But let me think that if today  
It pines in cold captivity  
Tomorrow both shall soar away  
Eternally, entirely Free.

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## Richard Kostelanetz

### Anarchist Art

Art with anarchist themes and anarchist forms is not the same as art containing anarchist slogans. The latter includes certain poems by Kenneth Rexroth, Jackson Mac Low, or even Jenny Holzer, who write phrases that can be understood, or interpreted, as anarchist but are formally no different from newspaper headlines, which are not art – just newspaper headlines. Emma Goldman's *Living My Life* (1930), is no collection of slogans, but nor does it convey anarchist themes; it is the story of individual accomplishment over severe adversities. Instead, let us consider art that is distinctly anarchist in plot, anarchist in image, and anarchist in form.

An example of the first is Henry Miller's multi-volumed novel, which portrays self-liberation from society and the discovery of an instinctual self that cannot be socialised by outside forces, whether they be institutions, bureaucracies, employers, or marriage. I read Miller while in college and completed an honours thesis on his work in 1962, just as his best books were becoming commonly available here; his book certainly affected my continued resistance to all those socialising antagonists.

A less familiar example of anarchist plot appears in Clayton Patterson's great videotape about the Tomkins Square Riot of 1988. Using an extremely portable video camera, held on his hip, and the natural lighting of a hot summer New York night, Patterson portrays the police attempt to disrupt a people's protest against the closing of a Lower East Side park that had become the last refuge of the homeless. As more and more cops come, Patterson's camera portrays them looking anxiously at one another, visually revealing the truth that officials later made public – that the policemen did not know what they were supposed to do. After many taunting screams and some violent exchanges, all intimately portrayed, a tall man in civilian clothes arrives, surveys the scene, and with a flick of his head instructs the police to retreat back into the buses that take them home. The film ends with the people retaking the park as the sun comes up.

Another unfamiliar example of anarchist plot is Lee Baxandall's play *Potsy* (1963), which tells of the local power monopoly's attempt to

electrify an outhouse over its owner's objections. In collusion with the state, which has authorised that all man-made constructions be electrically serviced, Consolidated Incorporated intimidates a reluctant customer. In response, Baxandall's protagonist Potsy lays his body on the pot, so to speak:

Pay yet some attention, workmen. Loka! Pizok Baika loka! Brudy! Mykja mykja! Skita. Cacones cacones. Alhorre zulla szenny! Szenny! Saasta bagla gailca, vaika. Lort, plehna. Lort lort lort lort lort lort! Kunya suka zumllo! Suka! (*The gestures grow more anguished.*) Szar ulosteet! Oosee oosee oosee cacoties! Sprosnosc mcconio. Mykjaa each cauch, ossee oosee. Caakaaaaaaaaaaaaah! Track smuts. Aolachl Inneir, teyl fegradh schijt, men. Gaou, salachar. [etc.]

Though Baxandall thought himself a Marxist at the time, even compiling a bibliography of Marxist aesthetics (and later editing the mostly Marxist *Radical Perspectives in the Arts*, 1972), it seemed to me clear at the time that the thrust of *Potsy* was anarchist, saying that society has no right to invade a human being's throne. So I was scarcely surprised that Baxandall went on to write guides to nude beaches, another kind of outhouse that authoritarians and their ally the state want to shut down.

An example of art with an anarchist image is the Living Theater's *Paradise Now* (1968). It is structured as a series of challenges to the audience, in which the performers scream slogans that are not ends in themselves but provocations designed to make the audience respond. "I'm not allowed to travel without a passport". "I'm not allowed to smoke marijuana". When they scream, "I'm not allowed to take my clothes off", some spectators respond by undressing and others not, creating an image in which some are liberated and others not. A second anarchist image so vivid in my head has audience members leaping off the stage into the crossed arms of several men. Both nudity and leaping into the air are images of liberation, which is what the paradise of *Paradise Now* is all about. (The leaping image resembles a famous Yves Klein photograph of himself, but without the context that, for the Living Theater, makes leaping political.) It is indicative that when the Internal Revenue Service closed the Living Theater in the fall of 1963, they were rehearsing a production of Baxandall's *Potsy*!

The master of anarchist form was John Cage, who from early in his career made sound pieces without climaxes, without definite beginnings and ends, without boundaries. Another characteristic is that they were perforated by individuals functioning as equals.

Looking back over his entire work, to the beginning of his career in the 1930s, you'll find him never employing a conductor who makes interpretative decisions. (His conductors, instead, merely keep time, not even beat.) Nor does Cage allow solo performers to stand out from the background group. His pieces are customarily characterised as chaotic, but in their chaos is their politics. On the floor of *HPSCHD*, performed in a humongous basketball arena, were seven amplified harpsichordists each with different scores. Two had different collages of harpsichord music from Mozart to the present; three had differently fixed versions of Mozart's "Introduction to the Composition of Waltzes by Means of Dice". One more harpsichordist played "computer print-out for twelve-tone gamut", while the last keyboard operator had nothing more specific than blanket instruction to play any Mozart he wished. Around the arena Cage distributed fifty-two tape machines, each playing tapes of computer-composed sound in fifty-two different scales (ranging from five tones to an octave to fifty-six tones). With so many disparate sound sources the result could only be microtonal din. If you listen to the recording made of this piece, that is what you hear. For the original performance Cage added a profusion of images from both slides and film. What is portrayed in this and in other Cage pieces is individuals working together and apart, each acting on his or her own authority, in concert with others, all without a conductor. In these respects, *HPSCHD* and other Cagean pieces become models of an anarchist society.

He was always anarchist. When Cage was first invited to write music to accompany a text, back in the early 1940s, the writer he first approached was Henry Miller. Since Miller's obscenity proved problematic, Cage chose another writer whose politics were likewise anarchist, Kenneth Patchen; and when setting writers' texts, Cage frequently favoured the poetry of E. E. Cummings, whose politics were, to my mind, mostly anarchist as well. Consider not only *The Enormous Room* (1922), which is easily available, but the prose masterpiece that has long been out of print, *Eimi* (1933), which is a critical report of his 1931 trip to Russia. In the recently published collection of letters between Cage and Pierre Boulez in the late 1940s is Cage's charming proposal for "a society called Capitalists Inc (so that we will not be accused of being Communists). Everyone who joins has to show that he has destroyed not less than 100 disks of music or one sound recording device; also everyone who joins automatically becomes President". Making every member a king, Capitalists Inc would, of course, be another anarchist community.

Not unlike other anarchist art, Cage's work is essentially comedic; for whereas tragedy portrays what should not happen, comedy is about possibilities, not only in life but art. If you say, as I do, that nothing is more politically profound than anarchic comedy, then you could expand the canon of anarchist art to include the art of the Marx Brothers, Spike Milligan, and even Bugs Bunny.

If a work of art is to be truly anarchist, its means corresponding to its ends, it must be anarchist in its plot, anarchist in its images, or anarchist in its form.

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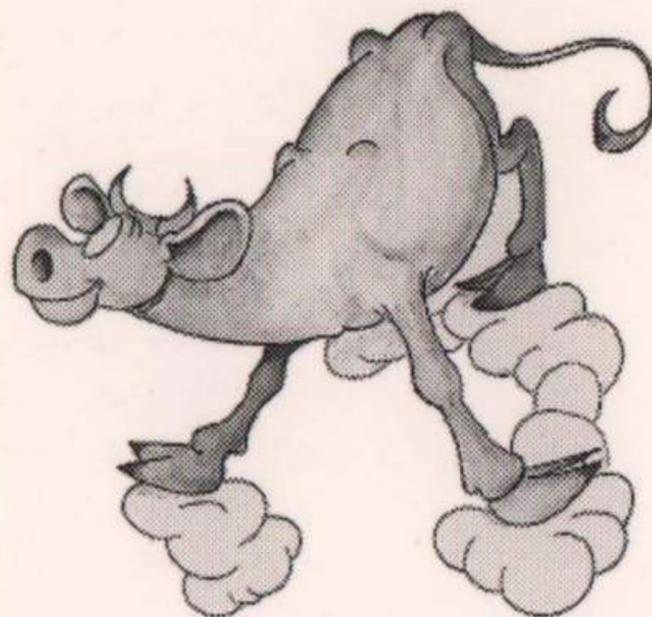
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