

Reviews

Wittgenstein

James C Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (editors), *Movements of Thought: Ludwig Wittgenstein's Diary, 1930-1932 and 1936-1937*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2023, 144 pages, paperback ISBN 9781538163672, £16.99

The movements of thought which are revealed in Wittgenstein's diaries (1930-1932 and 1936-1937) consist of two parts. The first part is comprised of his work on philosophy of logic and the limits of language. He believed that logic is ineffable and so could only be shown. Regarding the limits of language, if they could be identified then it would be possible to purge philosophy of meaningless questions and therefore 'soothe the mind'. In this way many problems in philosophy would 'dissolve' and not plague us. Following on from the first part of his task, using clear thinking, is the movement towards moral decency, religion, sins and the meaning of life, which is the second part of his task. Bertrand Russell gave Wittgenstein the opportunity to devote himself to this single task and, although they pursued different paths later on, Wittgenstein hoped that this task would give purpose to his life.

In the 1930 diary Wittgenstein moves away from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, his first and only book published in his own lifetime. The book is comprised of compressed and mysterious propositions which, he believed, were a logical form of reality. This is referred to as the picture theory of language in which words connect with facts in the world. In this way, the propositions were 'psychological constituents' which made them a literal picture of reality and corresponded to the 'state of affairs'. Wittgenstein remarks in the 1930 diary that it is now difficult to fairly evaluate the book.

The movement towards ethics and the meaning of life comprises a great deal of work on himself. Wittgenstein shows a lot of self-hate throughout the diaries and views the chaos of his emotions as a fault in himself. He states that ethics does not add to knowledge. The meaning of an ethical statement is in the action that one takes. Therefore, he is concerned with his own actions.

Wittgenstein describes his dreams and views them as similes. He wants to understand what they mean to him personally and to learn from them especially regarding relationships with others and himself. In particular, he

recognises that he finds it difficult to love in a way that he can be prepared for it to be lost. He desires to have a relationship where he derives more satisfaction from what he can give. When he feels cowardly and tired in spirit he considers whether he should be alone. He also interprets dreams as warnings about vanity and if they leave a feeling of dread then this feeling means something. At times he says that he is aware of his smallness in goodness and cleverness yet he wants to feel like a master. His gaze at himself is blurred but he is fearful of vanity, which he regards as a sin. Many of his confessions concern vanity and his desperate need for a good opinion. He even asks if it is vain to try and discard one's vanity.

Confession is Wittgenstein's chosen method to strive to become a morally decent person. His biggest confession was to Ludwig Hansel, which appears in the appendix. Wittgenstein confesses to lying about his Jewish ancestry and allows this confession to be passed to close friends. He fears that this dishonesty and cowardice would disfigure his philosophical writing. He was forgiven, affectionately, by those who received the confession. [Later, Wittgenstein's ancestry caused problems during the *Anschluss* of Austria.] Wittgenstein believes that vanity interferes with the clarity and truth of his writing and so confesses regularly to 'clean up' his writing. He describes as weakness 'not to be the hero', but it is far weaker to play the hero, which shows vanity and dishonesty.

Throughout the diaries Wittgenstein displays much anxiety about his lack of ideas at certain times. He believes that his ideas can be withdrawn at any time and so this gift is not self-evident. He recognises his dependency on doing good work. However, he asks whether this dependency is a sickness. He fears madness but advises not to flee madness because it is the judge of a wrong or right life. When the darkness comes, he wants to burn all his writing. He describes ordinary life as being illuminated by a light that we are not aware of until the light goes out. When this happens there is only mere existence and the intellect can't help because life has been undermined. He feels that his mind is fragile and so it can break easily.

Wittgenstein suggests that the heart makes suffering and so we should not be angry at suffering and, as a believer, the suffering should stop. However, he states that 'believing' creates 'horrible havoc' in religion. It 'irritates' the intellect and so we should replace belief in Christ with love of Christ.

Wittgenstein works hard on himself in the diaries of 1936 and 1937. He is trying to know and recognise himself and strive to become a morally

decent person. He describes it as horrible experience because, at the same time, he recognises the living demand and cannot satisfy it. He struggles with what he perceives as his pride in that he has a tendency to base his life on the fact that he is much cleverer than others, even though he acknowledges that this assumption can break down. [Bertrand Russell described him as a genius and, accordingly, Wittgenstein claimed that Russell saved his life.]

Wittgenstein also expresses a fear of seeming ridiculous. He perceives his cowardice in that he relies on the good opinions of others in order to achieve moral decency. In his 1931 diary he states that ‘the movement of thought in my philosophising should be discernible also in the history of my mind, of its moral concepts and in understanding my situation’. This is the task that he set himself for the remainder of his life.

Pamela White

Working Women’s Champion

Cathy Hunt, *Righting the Wrong: Mary Macarthur 1880-1921, The Working Women’s Champion*, West Midlands History Ltd, 2019, 200 pages, paperback ISBN 9781905036684, £20

With a friend, I met Cathy Hunt at Wortley Hall in South Yorkshire, a stately home with recent historical connections to the Labour Movement. I knew her to be the mother of Tom Hunt, now the Labour Leader of Sheffield City Council. My friend mentioned a history book that Cathy had recently published, which she thought might interest me. I bought a copy and hugely enjoyed reading Cathy Hunt’s thoughtful, detailed and well-researched biography of such an important and significant woman and trade union activist at the turn of the previous century, about whom I knew very little.

It is clear from Cathy Hunt’s Introduction that she was herself inspired by Mary Macarthur’s life and achievements as she describes stomping around sites of industrial conflicts ‘*imagining Mary standing on a barrel outside the factory before going inside to confront the boss*’.

Hunt explains how, when asked by ‘History West Midlands’ to write a biography of Mary Macarthur, she thought she already knew a fair amount about the establishment of the National Federation of Women Workers, the all female trade union Macarthur was instrumental in founding in 1906.

Hunt writes that she became ‘*fascinated by what motivated a young*

woman of 22 from an affluent family in Scotland to leave her comfortable life and home and come south alone to work in London, at a time when middle-class daughters were not expected to strike out with such force or independence’.

We learn how Mary grew up happily in a family whose parents ran a successful drapers and tailoring business. Its flagship store was in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, where high-class jackets, trimmed with sable or beaver, would cost up to 10 guineas. Mr Macarthur was well known in Glasgow business circles and paid frequent visits to London. The family spent their holidays at Rothesay on the Isle of Bute. Mary and her sister Jean did well at their secondary school, Garnethill High School, where we understand its headmaster, James Milligan MA, tried to do all he could to attract and retain middle-class girls. In 1895, the Macarthurs sold the store in Glasgow and moved house and business to Ayr, where John Duncan Macarthur became a respected member of the Ayr Shopkeepers Association, a member of the Conservative Party, and eventually Lord of the Parish in Stair in East Ayrshire. Trabboch House, described as a substantial self-contained villa, was their home.

Mary was a bright and clever 15-year-old, a fluent writer who ran the school magazine. Like Cathy Hunt, I was left wondering how and where was the driven, feminist, and socialist radical she was to become? By the end of the book I understood how a combination of a wide variety of elements from her earlier years all came together to make up this extraordinarily competent and inspirational woman who was prepared to drive a coach and horses through any obstacle that stood in the way of any change she had decided to work for. Cathy Hunt’s biography goes on to develop this story. In that context, her relatively wealthy middle class family background gave her four attributes.

Firstly, confidence socially, seemingly unfettered by an absence of the more common misogyny of those years either at home or school – she had left school a year later and spent time abroad in Germany, connected very probably with her father’s drapery businesses. This experience can only have broadened her vision and outlook.

Secondly, an exceptional aptitude and enthusiasm for writing and speaking her mind with confidence, which had universal appeal, and grew ever stronger with experience which solidified her confidence.

Thirdly, a desire common in teenagers to do and be something different from their parents – so if her father was now a Conservative in Ayr’s public life, she would join the growing Left movements and support his shop workers through their trade unions.

Fourthly, through her new trade union links, she met two significant individuals, Will Anderson and Margaret Bondfield. Will was to be a friend, then a devoted husband and support, as well as a Member of Parliament. In due course, Margaret also entered Parliament and government. She had become a close colleague in all Mary's work to strengthen women's voices in the trade unions, as well as one of her closest friends.

Cathy Hunt quotes a story told by John Turner, an organiser for the National Union of Shop Assistants:

'Early in 1901, Mary aged 20 was trying to persuade shop workers to join the union, which at that time had no branch in town. Turner noticed 'an animated group of young ladies in the centre of the room with a laughing, vivacious fair-haired girl in their midst, who I could tell was their leader. He asked her whether he could persuade her to join the union. Her response to him was she imagined she was not eligible to do so because she worked in her father's business, She did however think that the women she was with (assistants at Macarthur's) should join.'

For Mary, this marked the beginning of the rest of her life.

Cathy Hunt is keen to emphasise the style and way in which Mary then used her skills as she built up her knowledge and activities within the growing trade union movement. She spent her time listening to women working as shop assistants in both large and small establishments to make their involvement easy and practical. Whether it was the provision of seating to make it less likely for women workers to faint from standing at their work too long, or the plight of laundry workers working themselves knee-deep in stale water, or abysmal rates of pay, she kept the demands simple. Her sharp focus on detail ensured that the next step was always waiting to be grasped and campaigned for.

'From the start, Mary did not assume control but instead placed her trust in the women workers she met, urging them to learn the ways of the union themselves so that branches could stand on their own two feet. In this I think we glimpse one of the qualities that made her stand out from many of those who had gone before her.'

Mary Macarthur's single-minded approach and straight talk meant that Queen Mary at Buckingham Palace got the same message as sweatshop garment workers and openly expressed her support! Mary was equally

unfazed by powerful antagonists and enjoyed winning an argument. It is no wonder that Lloyd George felt out of his depth and probably jealous of this lively, charming woman on the political scene. He disliked Mary Macarthur intensely.

In 1910, Mary's career hit the headlines as she gained notoriety and popularity in the West Midlands. She embraced the Cradley Heath women workers in the chain-makers industry and supported their long running strike to victory. They were arguing for a 'minimum wage', over 100 years before a legal minimum wage was eventually endorsed by the Blair/Brown administration to the dismay of the Conservative opposition at that time. By then, Will Anderson was chair of the Independent Labour Party, an outspoken activist for peace, and was seeking a political career, whilst Mary's place was on the picket line, in the factories, and on the march in Bermondsey, Birmingham and across the country.

Together they were living their politics. As important upcoming figures they were well known to Keir Hardie, Ramsay and Margaret MacDonald and others in the Labour Movement.

The First World War intervened. As an MP, Will avoided conscription into the army. He and Mary both received abuse. Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst distanced the suffrage movement from the National Federation of Women Workers, even though women were taking on many non-traditional jobs in the war effort, for little or no recognition, which meant that Mary and Margaret Bondfield in the trade unions were kept very busy.

By-elections were not held during the war, but in the General Election of 1918 there were cries of support for 'Our Mary' in Cradley Heath from men as well as women who remembered the chain workers' victory. Cathy Hunt describes the positive nature of Mary's grassroots campaigning to join her husband in Parliament and Mary herself felt that victory seemed inevitable. But it didn't happen, and Will also lost his Attercliffe seat in Sheffield.

Three years later, Will Anderson and Mary Macarthur were dead. Their inspiring influence was gone. Will died first. Mary, shattered and grief stricken by the loss, went to the United States to recover, but got little real rest and never regained her former energy. Their hard working lives were left unfinished, and we can only imagine what the inter-war years would have delivered in the Labour Movement had they still had their dynamism. Speaking with Cathy Hunt I was impressed by Cathy's own belief that Mary Macarthur was an early model of how radical reforms require practical and feasible action to be turned into major long-term improvements. I also realised that Mary's untimely death was partly the

reason I, in my own political life, had been unaware of her achievements.

The struggle for equality carries on. The hard work continues. Equality between men and women's pay is still unachieved. The wealth gap widens. Misogyny is widespread. In Afghanistan, education for girls is again restricted.

Mary's early death was a sad end to a very impressive book. The biography is inspiring and *Righting the Wrong* is a very apt title.

Helen Jackson

North Korea

Siegfried S. Hecker with Elliot A. Serbin, *Hinge Points: An Inside Look at North Korea's Nuclear Program*, Stanford University Press, 2023, 410 pages, hardback ISBN 9781503634459, £36

'Sig' Hecker was privileged. The former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory — responsible for the US nuclear weapons programme — for a period of time between 2004 and 2010 knew more about North Korea's programme than anyone else outside of Pyongyang. He almost certainly still does. Amongst seven visits, four times he toured the North's nuclear complex in Yongbyon where Pyongyang produces plutonium for its first arsenal of nuclear weapons. While on his last visit, in 2010, he saw the foundations laid for Pyongyang's prototype Light Water Reactor (LWR) and the spectacle of the Uranium Enrichment Plant's 2000 strong army of maraging steel centrifuges, capable of producing the fuel necessary for their Light Water Reactors and Highly Enriched Uranium for a second line of weapons.

This was all in a period when Washington was in denial and carelessly dismissive of North Korea's advances in nuclear weapons and missile technology. Kim Jong Il wanted to maintain a twin-track strategy of armed deterrence and diplomacy. Yet, in the wake of George W Bush's 'axis of evil' branding of the North in his 2002 State of the Union address, dialogue was dead. Pyongyang decided the only way to crack Washington's carapace of denial was 'show and tell' and allow a world renown US expert into the North's five megawatt graphite moderated reactor and associated complex. This would tell the world — or at least Washington — that Pyongyang's road to becoming a nuclear weapons state was a short one. It worked to a degree. The US moved from under-estimating the North's progress and turned it into a melodrama. The problem was the

politicians involved were innumerate, scientifically illiterate, and spurned the opportunity to master the detail. Evidently, Richard Muller's *Physics for Future Presidents* (2008) went unread in the White House and State Department. Intelligence was bespoke. Two plus two was only allowed to make four when it was convenient.

Hecker thrives and dives into the technical detail and, with the mastery of a medieval alchemist, transforms it into the gold of plain English. The intricacies of plutonium reprocessing, and the physical and chemical nuances of uranium's isotopes prove no barrier to understanding. This in itself makes *Hinge Points* worth the effort of close to 400 pages. Yet, what transits it up to the next level is the book's dissection of how Washington never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity, and how Pyongyang colluded in chaotic failure with defeat serially snatched from the teeth of victory as it failed to recognise the hidden tithe of US implicit red lines behind the formal language of agreements. For Hecker there was a sequence of pivotal bad choices by both Washington and Pyongyang that ushered the Peninsula's plight to where it rests today. In September 2017 the North conducted the largest nuclear test since China's in 1992, fifteen times larger than the bomb the US dropped on Hiroshima, while its military parade in February 2023 seemingly demonstrated a capability of overwhelming US missile defence, turning indirect deterrence with threats to Japan and South Korea and US forces stationed there into direct deterrence with a threat to the US mainland.

The first and worst bad choice was President Bush's murder of the Agreed Framework where Clinton had counter-traded two South Korean designed light water reactors for a freeze in the North's nuclear programme at Yongbyon. Florida's hanging chads in the 2000 US Presidential Election strangled the best deal the US ever had with Pyongyang. Using the excuse of a secret uranium enrichment programme, George W Bush reneged on the deal that had halted the North's development of plutonium weapons for a short decade at the cost of \$1 billion of someone else's money — all paid by Seoul, Tokyo and Brussels. They looked to John Bolton rather than to risk-benefit analysis to guide policy. The later Six Party Talks, brokered by China, were doubly sabotaged, first by the US refusal to contemplate Pyongyang having a civil nuclear programme — allowed for countries coming into conformity with the International Atomic Energy Agency Treaty demanded of Pyongyang — and secondly, but not mentioned by Hecker, Tokyo's refusal to move until the Abductee Issue was fully resolved. It was Bob Joseph, the thinking man's John Bolton, in the US corner who did that damage.

Obama did little better, with an effective policy of malign neglect. When he entered office the North had conducted one partially successful nuclear test and had enough plutonium for less than half a dozen weapons with no capacity for delivery. When he left, Pyongyang had a further four tests under its belt, plutonium and highly enriched uranium for 25 weapons, and a missile capacity founded on dozens of launches to enable strikes across the region. *Hinge Points* does get the 2012 Leap Day Agreement wrong in my opinion. Both sides heard what they wanted to hear and not what they were being told. The very idea that the North was going to give up all and more than in the Agreed Framework for less than two per cent of what was on offer with the Agreed Framework was the product of fevered imaginations in Washington.

President Trump broke the mould with his outreach to Kim Jong Un. Singapore, for all the skeletal nature of the declaration, opened a door to a deal. The problem was Trump had no capacity for deferred gratification and his sceptical subalterns played him. Kim offered a solid first step in giving up the Yongbyong complex to the tender ministrations of the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. Trump, unlike Oliver Twist, didn't just ask for more, but demanded it all, under advice from those determined to kill the deal. The two sides' positions were, in the end, incommensurable. Washington wanted denuclearisation now and on the cheap, while Pyongyang was looking for a strategic re-alignment to balance relations with Beijing.

Washington had long lost the plot. Kim was trying to escape China's clutches while the US constantly saw China as a go-between rather than rival for the North's affections. *Hinge Points* and Hecker offer to take our understanding further than before. Maybe Washington will look to its options. Hanoi may have been the last best chance for denuclearisation of North Korea, but there is still a game afoot. The current direction of travel suggests the next Republican Administration will trigger a nuclear arms race in North-East Asia as Seoul, Tokyo and Taipei fall like dominoes into initiating their own nuclear weapons programmes. The only antidote is serious arms control talks with Pyongyang. The danger is Washington will continue for fight the last war rather than the next, absent again any risk-benefit analysis as partisan politics takes point.

Glyn Ford

**Picturing the DPRK, Glyn Ford's photo essay of North Korea's people and their places, is published by Spokesman in November 2023. This dual language edition in English and Korean reflects the author's decades-long engagement with the Peninsula.*

Half Marx

Eberhard Allner, Hans A. Frambach, Norbert Koubek (editors), *The Life, Work and Legacy of Friedrich Engels: Emerging from Marx's Shadow*, Bloomsbury, 2023, 358 pages, paperback ISBN 9781350272675, £24.95

Various contributors are condescending towards Engels the 'autodidact', stressing that he prematurely dropped out of school and did not attend university. This overlooks his 1841 attendance at University of Berlin lectures and his concomitant articles on Friedrich Oswald, which gained him admission to the Young Hegelians Circle, known as The Doctors' Club, frequented by Marx himself.

This volume is not quite as trailblazing as the 'blurbs' claim. There is no mention of the very similar *Engels After Marx* (1999), another multi-authored compendium edited by Manfred B. Steger and Terrell Carver, making the identical boast of 'bringing Engels out of the shadow of Marx'. It comprises 14 chapters, multi-authored, leading inevitably towards considerable over-lapping, book-ended by Preface and Introduction, 1,198 endnotes frequently fleshing out the narrative, an 18-page Bibliography, to which I would add B. Krylov's *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art* (1976, transcribed online into English by Andy Blunden) and S. S. Prawyer's *Karl Marx on World Literature* (2011), and a serviceable Index. Also, 30 colour plates and 36 black-and-white figures, most interesting of which show facsimiles of Marx's draft annotations to *The Communist Manifesto* (p.13) and Engels' editorial work on volume 3 of *Capital* (p. 233).

The style is all too typically academic: leaden, prolix, much jargon, almost unleavened by humour, save the opening chapter by Jürgen Herres, who begins with Engels' self-mocking 'my immortal works' and dubbing his contribution as 'admittedly idiosyncratic'. This suits what Anjan Baru on the Wire website says about Engels' 'puckish sense of humour'.

Overall, the volume lacks what Graham Greene called 'The Human Factor'. For that, go to Tristram Hunt's delightful *The Frock-Coated Communist: The Life and Times of the Original Champagne Socialist* (2010), cited in this volume. This, though, was too much for the dour Marxist, Rob Sewell, editor of *Socialist Appeal*, who in an online survey of Engels biographies castigates Hunt's as 'particularly bad', adding 'But what more can we expect from such people? Bourgeois historians have their axe to grind, especially when writing about Marx and Engels. We

have nothing to learn from the gossip of such pseudo-intellectuals.’

In one respect, Engels is something of the odd man out in the Communist theocracy. How often is he quoted in groupuscule analyses and polemics? Many such sects dub themselves ‘Marxist-Leninist’, but are there any with the moniker ‘Marxist-Engelsist’? On a website called Talk: Engelsism, contributors queue up to deplore the label. I stumbled across a site entitled ‘The Mizoram Gazette EXTRAORDINARY Published by Authority’ (Issue 152, 1924) in which an outfit called The Marxist-Engelsist-Leninist Proletarian Health Commune is ordered to be deleted from the electoral register. No reason is given.

Apart from their ideological harmony, the friendship between Marx and Engels is distinctly odd — one thinks of Johnson and Boswell. Contrast Engels, ardent fox-hunter (Marx let him off lightly for this, whilst declaring hunting should be for food, not sport; see Louis Proyect’s online essay on this), a cultivator of ‘celebs’ and illicit hidden affairs with working-class girls, with Marx the ‘bookworm’ (his own word), pre-occupied in the British Museum and manifold health problems, an uxorious family paradigm — the ultimate pipe-and-slippers man.

One common link was facial hair. Veteran SWP member Keith Flett, organizer of the Beard Liberation Front, examines (online — see the heading ‘Communication in Marriage’) why Marx had his famous facial bush shaved off in Algiers in 1882. He wrote to Engels that ‘my crowning glory’ has been shaved off because it was too hot. Flett could find no picture of the clean-shaven prophet. Engels is frequently admired for his magnificent two-tone hispidity.

Jürgen Herres kicks off with a survey of Engels’ journalism. Valuable in its detail, it nevertheless raises a major overall question about this collection, namely its neglect of some of his major works. His *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* (1843 — ‘a brilliant sketch’, Marx) is analyzed at length by Heinz D Kurz (chapter 10). *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1842–44 in German, English translation 1887) is the lavishly-quoted backbone of chapters 7 and 8 by Werner Plumpe and Margrit Schulz Beerbühl. On the other hand, there are only four cursory allusions to *Anti-Dühring* (1878 – pages 10, 45, 203, 227) and *The Origin of the Family. Private Property and the State* (1884) does not even make the Index. In addition, Kurt Möser (chapter 5) on Engels and Warfare shows no apparent knowledge of Trotsky’s admiring review (March 19, 1924, online) of his sixty *Pall Mall Gazette* articles (1870–71, edited by Friedrich Adler, 1923).

Of the rest, Wilfried Nippel writes interestingly on Biography as

Politics, charting Engels on Marx, *inter alia* making (p. 264, n.67) the surprising point that *The Communist Manifesto* largely vanished after 1850. James M. Brophy's piece on Engels and the USA recalls Orwell's 1930s belief, preposterous as it now today seems, that America would be the crucible for socialist advance. Several somewhat overlapping chapters on the effects on capitalism of advances in industrial science and technology remind me of one of Marx's best aphorisms: Every Labour-Saving Device Means More Work, an observation nowadays vindicated by office e-mails. Some of Marx's ruminations on machines and their effect may be traced back to Psalm 115. 8. The atheist knew his Bible.

As Lindsey German points out, the essay by Margrit Schulte Beerbühl on the alleged apartheid of rich and poor districts in London is vitiated by her mistaken notion of the topography of St. Giles.

The final two chapters by Norbert Koubek and Jürgen Kocke survey historical and current trends in Engelsian scholarship and how he was viewed by contemporaries. Koubek (p. 244) stresses advances then and now on workers' participation in management, a major preoccupation of our Ken Coates. There follows what is called an 'Annex', a brief note on the history of editing the works of Marx and Engels, naturally concentrating on the multi-volumed Moscow-Berlin edition begun in 1975, commonly referred to as *MEGA*. Something might have been said about their more abstruse productions, for easy examples, Marx's schoolboy essay (in Latin) on Roman History and the sixteen-year-old Engels' poem in Greek hexameters based on Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*. I edited both of these, respectively, in *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 70 (1988), 101-07 and *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 33 (1989), 51-63. Both are now translated into English, as is Marx's celebrated and much-praised (by classicists) doctoral thesis on ancient Greek Atomism.

The most fascinating chapter (11) is Regina Roth's account of how Engels edited and published volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*. (The fourth was completed by Karl Kautsky, later much reviled by Lenin.) It was a nightmare job, thanks to the chaotic mess in which Marx's drafts and notes were scrawled in his often abominable handwriting, further complicated by the need to work on his many other concurrent projects, and by his deteriorating eyesight. Full of complex mathematical equations and often abstruse economic theorizing, these volumes require some hard slogging. And, *Capital I* was a tough act to follow, with its scarifying and poignant descriptions of the miseries of proletariat (as they were now becoming to be called) men, women, and children, contrasting with its bouts of coruscating humour. As C L R James observed, 'Marx is a very funny man,

very comic in a very profound way'. After all, what other economic treatise dismisses a rival's work as 'shit' and details an aristocratic lady's skills at fellatio? I inventoried all his comic jewels in the *Morning Star*, March 6, 2011. Further illumination is provided by David Large's online piece, 'Karl Marx's Shandean Humour: *Scorpion und Felix* and its Aftermath'.

Lindsey German concluded her generally disobliging review with the warning, 'If you want to find out about Engels, I wouldn't start here.' A bit unfair. There is much solid, albeit stolid, information to be had from the volume, and I learned a lot. But, if you want a fully-rounded picture of Engels the multi-faceted human being, the place to go remains Tristram Hunt's *The Frock-Coated Communist*.

Barry Baldwin

* Bibliographical Update: see also Christopher Clark's *Revolutionary Spring: Fighting for a New World* (2023), with the *TLS* review (April 28 2023) by Abigail Green.

Social Democracy

Colm Murphy, *Futures of Socialism: 'Modernisation', the Labour Party, and the British Left, 1973-1997*, Cambridge University Press, 2023, 326 pages, hardback ISBN 9781009278812, £85

'... this was not "Old Labour" looking back but already a "New" Labour case, based on recognizing trends in globalization and the loss of effective taxation through transfer pricing and other techniques adopted by multinational capital...'

Stuart Holland, Demythologising 'Old Labour' Spokesman 110, 2010

Colm Murphy has written an interesting and timely book. It spans the period from 1973, when Britain joined the 'European Communities', to 1997 and the election of the first Blair Government. Its purpose, in part, is to trace different threads of the British Left which argued for varying 'futures' of socialism and in so doing, according to Murphy, broadened the political argument for 'modernisation', which became New Labour's mantra. Murphy invokes Michael Meacher's espousal of 'modernisation', made in his 1992 book *Diffusing Power*, to buttress his argument. But the

roots go much deeper, to Labour's Programme of 1973 and earlier, which Stuart Holland has in mind when 'demythologising Old Labour'.

After a lengthy introduction, Murphy's opening chapter takes its title from Stuart Holland: 'Keynes Is Dead, Beveridge Is Dead', also written in 1992. Holland went on to explain

*'... the national economy of which they wrote has been transformed by a multinational trade and payments system ... The response cannot be simply national in the manner Bryan Gould assumes ... The days of British or French alternative economic strategies are over. What we need now is an Alternative European Strategy that can realise the principles of Keynes and Beveridge in the new multinational environment ... this should mean **yes** to Maastricht **but** subject to new joint action to control currency speculation, to create fuller and more useful employment, and to extend social rights and welfare.'*

By this time, Stuart Holland had already been working closely with Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, for several years. In 1993, Holland produced a detailed report on economic and social cohesion in the 1990s, which was published under the title *The European Imperative* (Spokesman Books). In his Foreword, Delors wrote:

'The interim and final versions of the report reinforce the case for the European Recovery Programme 1993-97 and the new European Investment Fund. The Fund now has been endorsed by the Copenhagen European Council and is due to begin operation in 1994. The report claims that if member governments endorse a significant expansion of the Fund, this could both contribute to recovery and make it more feasible for them to achieve the national budget and borrowing conditions for monetary union in the Treaty of Maastricht.'

Lamentably, no such expansion was forthcoming. Delors ten-year presidency ended in January 1995. Thereafter, borrowing conditions for monetary union were enforced rigidly, causing prolonged economic stagnation and suffering in most member states in the euro area, although Germany's economy thrived. The single currency was introduced in January 1999. Later, the euro zone crisis caused more economic suffering, particularly in smaller member states such as Ireland and Greece. These problems were compounded by unchecked malfeasance in the financial sector.

Murphy constructs much of his opening chapter around Stuart Holland's work from the 1960s onwards, when Holland worked in Downing Street

during Harold Wilson's Government. Holland argued for planning agreements with leading companies on the lines of those in France, Belgium and Italy. 'Harold claimed to be impressed,' according to Holland in 'Demythologising "Old Labour"', but Peter Shore at the Department of Economic Affairs did little or nothing to make such agreements happen. Holland duly resigned from No.10 in 1968. 'I little knew at the time that I would return with planning agreements backed by the Labour Party National Executive Committee, every major trades union and the Party Conference in 1973,' he writes in 'Demythologising "Old Labour"'. Nevertheless, Britain's opportunity to develop a sustained industrial strategy was ultimately missed.

During the decades that followed, Holland continued to collaborate closely with Ken Coates, who steered the Institute for Workers' Control from 1968, when it was founded, to the early 1980s and the democratic reforms of the Labour Party. Among other things, these made possible Neil Kinnock's election as Labour Leader by the electoral college of members, affiliated trade unions, and MPs. The IWC had long provided a platform for Tony Benn to engage with shop stewards and other party activists. In 1983, Benn was out of Parliament when Michael Foot resigned following the general election defeat by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The three candidates for Labour Party leader, Eric Heffer, John Silkin and Neil Kinnock, all claimed affiliation with the IWC when writing in *New Socialist* magazine.

During the 1980s, Holland collaborated closely with Coates on the European Nuclear Disarmament campaign to establish a nuclear-weapons-free zone in Europe. The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, which Coates chaired, circulated the END Appeal in April 1980. In 1979, Holland had been elected as Labour Member of Parliament for Lambeth Vauxhall. He was instrumental in bringing political support for the END Appeal from many European countries, and co-chaired sessions at the first END Convention in Brussels in 1981. In a nearby hall, Tony Benn debated with Rudolf Bahro, the German environmentalist who had been imprisoned in the GDR. Judith Hart MP represented the Labour Party at the Brussels Convention, which brought together hundreds of peace activists from many countries, including trade unionists and representatives of political parties. Audrey Wise, then out of the Westminster Parliament, argued successfully for support for European Nuclear Disarmament on Labour's National Executive Committee.

The Out of Crisis project for European economic recovery was launched in Paris in 1983, as Murphy records. Holland was instrumental in

making it happen. Under the auspices of the Forum for International Political and Social Economy (IPSE), this collective of Left economists and politicians from inside and beyond the then European Community charted a project for European recovery from mass unemployment. It prefigured Holland's later work during the Delors Presidency of what, in 1992, became the European Union.

An arresting crosshead, 'The Future of Socialism Is Industrial Democracy', catches the eye. In half a dozen pages, Murphy scratches the surface of industrial democracy, which underlay much of the industrial and political ferment of the 1960s and 1970s, as recorded in the annals of the Institute for Workers' Control, now archived at the University of Nottingham along with many of Ken Coates's papers. Coates's response to the 1977 Bullock Report on industrial democracy was more nuanced and measured than Murphy suggests. He and Tony Topham sketched an extensive balance sheet of the Report when it was published. In the *IWC Bulletin*, they wrote:

'There is a further objection to Bullock: as it stands, it is not going to be implemented. On the contrary, all its disadvantages are about to be systematically enlarged, and all its advantages reduced.'

Murphy acknowledges the 'dynamism' of the shop stewards at Lucas Aerospace in formulating, in 1976, their alternative workers' plan to produce socially useful products instead of military hardware, 'especially the irrepressible Irish Maoist Mike Cooley'. Ireland's President Michael D Higgins has a deeper appreciation of Cooley, having known Mike since they were boys in Tuam, County Galway:

'Mike Cooley may well be the most intelligent Irish man, the most morally engaged scientist and technologist Ireland has sent abroad.'

So the President writes in his Foreword to Mike's book, *Delinquent Genius: The Strange Affair of Man and His Technology*, which Spokesman published in 2018. Following his death in 2020, Mike Cooley's archive is now at the Waterford Institute of Technology, where it was inaugurated by President Higgins.

Futures of Socialism is timely on several counts. As the succession of hapless Tory administrations draws to a close, Keir Starmer looks likely to inherit the mantle. His radical youth and lawyerly public service led to a career change in 2015 when he became the Labour MP for Holborn and St

Pancras. Politically rather inexperienced, he nevertheless seized the Labour leadership when Jeremy Corbyn vacated it following the 2019 General Election defeat. Since then, Starmer has rarely missed an opportunity to shoo the Left out of the Labour Party. Many have gone, and those who stay probably have low expectations of an incoming Labour government. Certainly, Starmer regularly pours cold water on a Green New Deal and other necessary policies.

Britain's descent since the Brexit referendum in 2016 is evident. *Futures of Socialism* is also timely in that Britain is confronted with the economic, social and constitutional consequences of leaving the European Union, a move which Labour advocated in 1983. Some 40 years on, how will an incoming Labour government rise to the challenge?

A note on sources: the *IWC Bulletin* and pamphlet series chronicle many of the debates surveyed in Murphy's book. Some of these are available online. Subsequently, from 1995, the *Socialist Renewal* series of books and pamphlets continued the discussions. For the decade from 1989, *European Labour Forum*, a journal edited by Ken Coates MEP, developed the arguments at a European level. Stuart Holland was a regular contributor, as he is to *The Spokesman* journal, which has published several reflections on his political experiences. Spokesman Books published Stuart Holland's *Towards a New Bretton Woods: Alternatives for the Global Economy* (1994) and *Europe in Question and What to Do about It* (2015). Unfortunately, Murphy doesn't seem to have interviewed Stuart Holland as he did others such as James Curran, editor of *New Socialist*, in preparing his readable and engaging book.

Tony Simpson

Civil Wars

Jonathan Healey, *The Blazing World — A New History of Revolutionary England*, Bloomsbury, 2023, 492 pages, hardback ISBN 9781526621658, Ebook 9781526621672, Epdf 9781526660824, £30

The title *The Blazing World* is taken from a science fiction novel by Margaret Cavendish, wife of the Duke of Newcastle, published in 1667. She was a flamboyant, intellectual woman, a feminist in a very patriarchal age which the wars and revolutions of the 17th century did nothing to change, even though women played a significant role during those wars. It has to be remembered that the franchise, at best, extended to only one in six men. The other men had to wait until the 19th century and the women the 20th. Still,

like another frequent description of those turbulent times, 'a world turned upside down', 'the blazing world' is as good a description as any.

That century was probably the most dramatic in Britain's history until the Second World War. Is it worth another history of a time that has already been well covered? I would most certainly say 'yes'. Here was a time when the country was at war with itself and was a republic for 11 years, which was followed by the restoration of the monarchy, then the overthrow of another king and a foreign invasion, the so-called 'Glorious Revolution'. Nothing can compare for importance or drama, and these events bear retelling over and over again. Perhaps a bit like Shakespeare, each generation has to retell it and reinterpret it for itself.

I have read countless histories of this period and I still found *The Blazing World* a page-turner. For those coming to the period for the first time it is a welcome and useful guide because it is a roller-coaster trip. Readers need a good guide when one thinks of all the groups and sects: Dissenters, Presbyterians, Puritans, Covenanters, Levellers, Diggers, Whigs, Tories, Quakers, Independents, Fifth Monarchists, Muggletonians, Armenians. It is a heady and messy mix.

One has to take into account shifting and changing attitudes: people might be in agreement to limit royal power but how far should that go? We wouldn't want the lower orders to get any funny ideas and start getting too uppity, would we? How far should tolerance be taken? It should be extended to everybody ('let everyone find his own way to heaven', said John Locke) except Quakers and Catholics. Bishops who had been execrated in the first half of the century were hailed as heroes when they stood up against James II. There were splits amongst those on the same side, particularly between Parliamentarians and the Army. Members of Parliament would claim to be the People, the Military would claim to have made all the sacrifices of life and limb. Even in the Army there would be splits between moderates and radicals. (The Putney Debates between military men are among the most radical and stimulating scenes in British history.)

What is perhaps extraordinary is that very few actually thought in terms of creating a republic until the last minute. Even after the First Civil War, both sides were up for negotiating with the King. He could continue to be monarch but under more control, no more of this 'Divine Right of Kings'. His obduracy and double-dealing ensured his downfall and death (faults his son, James, also shared).

The Republic itself was something of a disappointment. The author indulges in a few 'what if?' moments, something historians are not

supposed to do. What if Lambert had come to power instead of Cromwell? What if Rainborough had survived? It was a chance missed and we are still living with the results.

'One of the great tragedies of Cromwell was that he prevented the Republic from being so much more. He was, at heart, a conservative East Anglian landowner...' writes Healey.

Readers will have their own sympathies but will find them challenged and upended all the time. Mine are with the Diggers but they advocated the death penalty for buying and selling goods — somewhat drastic and I am against capital punishment. And some real horrors were perpetrated in the name of The People, whether it was the self-righteous, outraged persecution of minorities or the machinations of their supposed representatives. Whatever you think of the Earl of Strafford or the insufferable Archbishop Laud, their executions were a disgrace. Both sides (let's call them Roundheads and Cavaliers for the moment for simplicity's sake) dug deep into old, even medieval precedents to justify the unjustifiable. Impeachment was one and, if that didn't work, a Bill of Attainder couldn't fail to do so — we don't like you, want rid of you, we can't put you on trial because we don't really have any evidence so we'll just say you are guilty and kill you.

These were hard times, especially at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries. And, although the big personalities of the times naturally dominate the stage, we are reminded of more ordinary people. Plague stalked the land; the weather was atrocious, mostly cold and wet; harvests failed, famine and starvation prevailed. There was even an energy crisis when coal from Newcastle was scarce and went up in price at the beginning of a cold winter because the coalfield was occupied by an invading Scottish army. Witchcraft was rife and witches (nearly always women) were regularly hanged.

Punishments were harsh everywhere: between 1580-1630, more people were hanged than between 1630-1967 when capital punishment was finally abolished. Juries and magistrates, sometimes out of sheer pity, reduced charges to avoid the death sentence. Hanging, drawing and quartering was a particularly barbaric form of execution. Edinburgh had its own form of guillotine called 'The Maiden', presumably because it got rid of so many heads.

Another shocking statistic in the early part of the century: 50 per cent of children didn't live to see their tenth birthday. I find this figure so shocking

it should surely be checked for a misprint. Things did improve, however. By the end of Charles II's reign, people were generally better off, better fed, better clothed, there was more glass in windows, and witchcraft, persecution of witches and hanging all declined. But the Merry Monarch's reign also hid a growing repression, especially against Quakers. The 'Killing Time' of the Covenanters in Scotland was likewise savage. An empire was growing and slavery was a fast-growing trade to run it.

Foreign wars were a constant background against all this: 1618-1648 saw swathes of Europe devastated by The 30 Years War. There were at least three Dutch Wars and there were the usual allying and fallings-out with the Spanish and French.

My only quibble with *The Blazing World* is the Index seems to be all over the place. But that is a very small criticism of what is an excellent book and essential reading for anyone with any interest in the period.

Nigel Potter

Out of the shadows

Javier Marías, Tomás Nevinson, Hamish Hamilton, 2023, 642 pages, ISBN 9780241568613, £22

Marías's imaginative response to Francoism, the Civil War and the Dictatorship, and their heinous legacy during Spain's transition to democracy, was long in coming. His earliest novels renounced *Realismo Social* as inappropriate for a generation who 'made a distinction between our writing and our duties as citizens', evolving instead into the elegant mastery of the self-styled *pensamiento literari*, densely psychological and philosophical and wilfully digressive, that cemented his international reputation in the 80s and 90s. In works like *A Heart So White* [1992] and *Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me* [1994], the 'timeless classicism, removed from current trends' of 'long garlands of sentences and clauses, following the complex paths and infinite detours of human thought' [*Le Monde*] is compounded in its rootlessness by constant scene-shifting – Havana, Oxford, Paris, New York, Madrid – and by the shadowy existences, forever hovering on the edge of any meaningful social or personal relationships, of the ghost writers, speech writers, interpreters, itinerant opera singers, ineffectual witnesses and voyeurs who make up the cast of his deracinated males. 'How tiring the real world is, I thought, with its demands to be filled', says one, and another, privy to one of the

instances of sudden or violent, excruciating death which inundate Marías's fictions from first to last, fearfully anticipates his own disappearance: 'who is going to hurl us over on to the reverse side of time, on to its dark back ... so many things happen without anyone realizing or remembering, everything is forgotten or invalidated. And how little remains of each individual, useless as slippery snow ...' This insubstantiality of the self and of others, and the novels' spectacular silence on the national tragedy, beyond isolated glimpses – two politicians modelled on Felipe González and Margaret Thatcher wishing they might, like Franco 'with impunity, on the slightest pretext', drum up 'a cheering, united nation'; mortar bombs falling on Republican Madrid in the 1930s, 'two and a half years of running down these streets, hands clutching hats and berets and caps, skirts flying' as if embedded in the collective unconscious — together suggest a view not incompatible with the cautious, non-confrontational healing process enshrined in the Pact of Forgetting and the Amnesty Law of 1977.

Margaret Drabble has commented on the 'high sexual tension which borders on the pornographic' in these texts, perhaps Marías's version of the messy, hedonistic freedoms embraced after the departure of the Generalissimo by *La Movida Madrileña* and exemplified by the films of Pedro Almodovar. They obsessively explore, and subject to a flashbulb scrutiny, an illicit world of the passions and its murderous outcomes whose victims are predominantly women, spied upon, fetishized and discarded: 'I can no longer stand my adoration of her. One day I'll have to kill her, don't you see?' one husband asks another in the story 'While the Women are Sleeping'. No wonder the objects of this fantasising – neither critiqued nor endorsed by Marías, simply held up for inspection as the determining pattern, tragic, farcical, inexhaustible, of all his characters' lives – are so frequently 'afflicted by a melancholy disposition' [*The Man of Feeling*, 1986] or driven to suicide, or share the primal fear contained in the African nannies' tale from a Cuban childhood in *A Heart So White*, with its conjugal horror of a 'huge snake coiled on the bloody, rumpled bed and not a trace of her [the mother of the bride's] dear, unfortunate daughter'.

For W. G. Sebald, Marías's earlier achievement – Sebald died in 2001 – was that of an 'anatomist ... lay[ing] bare the innermost secrets of that strangest of species, the human being': others see the preoccupation with a beleaguered male subjectivity, desire and eroticism in less universal terms, as a 'domestication (or elision) of uncomfortable historical truths ... [related] to the specific development of Spanish democracy' [Labanyi, *Modern Literatures in Spain*, 2023]. A third view, however, is that the conflict played out in the minds of the narrators, amid secrets, lies and

concealments regarding the dire acts carried out in middle class bedrooms, bears more than a passing resemblance to the post-War impasse – the skewed operations of memory — in the society as a whole. On the one hand a protective ignorance, ‘they forget that having found something out, everything changes, the skin opens, something tears’; on the other, atrocity’s permanent scar on the psyche, ‘The smell of the dead lingers when nothing else remains of them. It lingers for as long as their bodies remain and afterwards too, once they are out of sight and buried and disappeared.’

Tomás Nevinson is the end-product of, by contrast, a radical turn towards factuality, accountability and exhumation of the bloody past, an attempted settling of accounts, which Mariás’s novels from the magisterial Civil War trilogy *Your Face Tomorrow* [2002-7] onwards share with the turn-of-century ‘memory boom’ in the wider culture, the excavations and collecting of witness testimonies by the *Asociación para la Recuperación*, and the markedly interventionist Historical and Democratic Memory Laws of 2007 and 2022. The moral bewilderment of the opening sentence – ‘I was brought up the old-fashioned way, and could never have dreamed that I would one day be ordered to kill a woman’ – is familiar enough terrain, hinging the entire narrative on the state of mind of a single male protagonist. So too is the ensuing paragraph, the disingenuous gallantry, laced with menace, of its rapidly escalating discursiveness [‘You don’t touch women, you don’t beat them, you don’t do them any physical harm’] whose pieties leave one gender almost entirely dependent on the other to guarantee it a meaningful existence or, indeed, survival.

Meanwhile the self-proclaimed aficionado of Laurence Sterne, whose translation of *Tristram Shandy* was, he claimed, ‘my best text ... much better than anything I’ve written myself originally’, exercises his customary right to set the reader adrift on a sea of cogitation and spellbinding prolixity, until almost 600 pages later the anticipated event at last arrives, still clinging to a veneer of humaneness: ‘I left her lying [drugged] on the bed and turned on the taps, warm water, I didn’t want her to get too cold nor, of course, to be too hot. I intended, absurdly, to act as delicately as possible, when there was nothing remotely delicate about what I was planning to do.’ All this would be standard misogynistic fare, except for the factor that Nevinson is an MI6 agent tasked with tracking down and securing the elimination of an IRA/ETA terrorist, rather than a man with an emotional or sexual grievance. A passing reference placed strategically in that same opening paragraph – ‘When a group of people are about to be shot *en masse*, the women are sometimes spared ... left without

husbands, fathers, brothers’ – leaves the reader in no doubt as to the wider historical context inherited from the trilogy: the personal treacheries and indiscriminate slaughter carried out on all sides in successive conflicts and represented there by an assiduously detailed account of the POUM and CNT massacres; documents and photographs pertaining to the sorry fates of individuals in revolutionary Madrid (including that of the philosopher and propagandist for Republicanism, Julián Mariás Aguilera, the writer’s own father); and the ineradicable bloodstain on an Oxford don’s staircase, symbolic of his wife’s participation in the grisly covert operations of Sefton Delmer’s Special Operations Executive in World War Two. The story of her guilt-ridden suicide is so harrowing that the professor, himself a veteran recruiter for British Intelligence, can only deliver it after countless delays and detours, which include a bout of whistling and a distant rendition of *Lillibulero*, for Sterne’s Uncle Toby the ‘usual channel thro’ which his passions got vent, when anything shocked or surprised him’ – like the re-enacted sieges on the bowling green with Corporal Trim, a way of coming to terms with a century of Enlightenment militarism and the damage, comically and compassionately rendered, this has inflicted on his mind and body.

‘For him the world was in a permanent state of war’, Nevinson can likewise say of his remorselessly combative London spymaster, whose philosophy he shares of an ‘eternal vigilance ... in defence of the Realm’ and the everyday freedoms of its citizens, so blithely unaware of their fragility in a decade, the 90s, marked by a lull in the various fanaticisms. This is a rich vein for lengthy argumentation, but it’s a single photograph, of a bloodied child being carried from the ETA-bombed Hipercor shopping centre in Barcelona, that launches the novel’s long, unforgiving confrontation with the ‘unclean essence of a monstrosity’ that is its most pressing concern and that Mariás, writing for *El País* on the occasion of the final cessation of hostilities in 2018, characterised as ‘a web of terror in all areas, not very different from that woven by Nazism, Stalinism, the Stasi of the GDR or Francoism ... In addition to the [more than 800] dead ... countless wounded and maimed, those expelled, threatened and frightened, those who have lived with permanent fear ... the people of Madrid endured [this] daily, for over forty years’. While Nevinson, on the trail of his female ‘sleeper’, wrestles interminably with his conscience and his masculinity, the novel ploughs on relentlessly through the whole ignominious list of atrocities stretching from Hipercor and the Zaragoza barracks attack in 1987 to the assassination of Valiente, the kidnapping and execution of councillor Miguel Ángel Blanco with its game-changing

countrywide protests, the RIRA Omagh bombing, and the spate of killings in the new century. The carnage is meant to speak for itself: one must look elsewhere for any interest in the centuries-long case for Basque independence, or why it escalated into unbridled extremism after Franco, or in the conflicted roles played by women in that struggle, their real complexity as human beings with personal histories worthy of subtle fictionalising (Bernardo Atxaga's pioneering novella *The Lone Woman*, 1996) or documenting (Carrie Hamilton's extraordinarily wide-ranging interviews of the first generation of activists in her *Women and ETA*, 2007.) Mariás signs off, however, with – of all things – Yeats's 'When you are old', a poem addressed to the Irish nationalist and anti-imperialist Maud Gonne and a 'pilgrim soul' in full possession of her own agenda, politically and emotionally. Nevinson's attempt to woo his long-suffering, self-effacing wife by reciting this draws from her an ambivalent response, as if the gender dynamic might, after all, be shifting – 'Possibly. You never know', says Berta Isla.

Stephen Winfield

Absurdities

Pauline Melville, *The Master of Chaos and Other Fables*, Sandstone Press, 2021, 208 pages, hardback ISBN 9781913207540, £14.99

This collection of stunning short stories ranges over a wide area – the Syrian desert, Yarmouth, St. Petersburg, the Amerindian rainforest, Cornwall, an asylum, Guyana (from where the writer comes) and a metaphysical eternal waiting room where Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary discuss their suicides. 'It was vengeance' says Anna, 'to make him suffer'. 'Mine was debt' answers Emma. 'But why did he make me die so unattractively? I think it should have been more romantic. I don't think Flaubert liked me'. 'No' agreed Anna. 'I don't think Tolstoy liked me'.

Pauline Melville's writing relishes absurdities and irrationalities in human beings, and she seems at ease in many different places. Several of the stories are about the return of the protagonist to a former home. In *The Fable of the Missing Word* the speaker returns to the Amerindian village where he grew up, now with a degree in rainforest archaeology. In *The Dream of Ocalan* a man struggles through the Syrian desert, braving strong winds and bombing, to finish a conversation about society he had with a Kurdish friend years before, when they were young. *The Dark Photon* starts without hope, the teller thinks, as he writes of the time when

the pages will have turned to dust in a cold universe. ‘But I write anyway’. In this most grim of stories the speaker has returned to Buenos Aires (‘a city which thought well of itself’) to a science convention where he will present a paper on the dark photon – ‘the elusive portal into the world of dark matter’. He stays in his hotel room to avoid his younger life. But an old friend, Bernado, finds him with an urgent question – can he remember a teacher who, in the 1970s, magnetically attracted students and inspired them to become secretly politically involved, despite the military dictatorship? Bernado has photographic proof his teacher was involved in the disappearance of his students and was present when they were thrown out of the planes. ‘There were some 200 death flights between 1977-78. President Videla thought Argentinian society would never endure firing-squads’. The teacher was declared dead. But they suspect he is now living in London. The protagonist reluctantly agrees to identify him, and then returns to his paper – the dark photon, it cannot be seen and maybe cannot be known. Dark matter. Dark energy. ‘I have always been wary of sticking my neck out. I knew I would not carry out Bernado’s request when I returned to England’.

The title story *The Master of Chaos* sets the tone for the collection. That is how a gambler feels when he wins. His teenage grandson relates events. He is staying with them in Georgetown when his aunt loses everything they have. He must recover it – by gambling of course. As in Kipling’s *If*, he has to keep his nerve and be prepared to lose everything on a game of pitch and toss. *Fable of a Laureate* shows a writer convinced he can write nothing better so decides on suicide. But writer’s block prevents him from writing a suicide note, so he is stuck. *Let Me Out* — oh-ho, statues. We have become used to seeing them heaved joyfully into rivers, or sloshed with paint, committees convening to discuss whether to pull them down. This story asserts the statues want to be smashed. ‘All those equestrian bronze statues of kings and generals facing the Houses of Parliament, horses rearing in a wild cavalry charge against the living bastards’. The meticulous process of making a bronze statue is detailed – not to be lightly undertaken one would suppose. In spite of the physicality of this, it is a kind of ghost story.

The Dostoievsky House is my favourite story. In Petersburg a bunch of writers and artists see the EU is offering 70,000 euros to Russian artists who will promote moderation. ‘I think Pushkin would have wanted to join Europe’. ‘What! – the father of Russian literature?’ After much quarrelling and cracking dialogue, they apply. ‘We need something interesting but not too interesting, a sizeable helping of blandness in a moderate magazine’.

Madame Schulz from the EU arrives and plays a tinny rendition of Ode to Joy on her mobile. All goes well. They have vowed not to contradict her and to be moderate. She says the EU requires soul. They agree. 'We think business can have soul too. Our lovely Manuel Barroso proved it ... and now he has gone to Goldman Sachs to spread the word'. 'Long live Lenin! Communism will never die' suddenly shrieks the elderly parrot in the corner. Silence. 'He is a family pet. We cannot have him put down'. 'Bravo' says Mme Schulz, recognising this was tolerance. After she left: 'Bastards. They have ruined Beethoven's Ode to Joy. They should all be shot'. Madame Shultz decides they should get the grant and felt satisfaction she was maybe helping Mother Russia turn in a new direction. The story continues apace, with bizarre but by no means improbable ramifications. It ends happily – they make money as an oligarch has decided a spell in prison will boost his electoral chances, and the artists are commissioned to write his prison letters, which must contain intellectual and cultural references.

Sylvia Riley

