

# Reviews

## Suffrage centenary

**Jo Vellacott, *From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage: The Story of Catherine Marshall*, Second Edition, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal & Kingston, Chicago and Spokesman, Nottingham, 2016, paperback ISBN 9780773548022, £17.99**

The conventional version of the struggle for votes for women is of militant suffragettes, led by Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, who smashed windows, set buildings and post-boxes on fire, disrupted meetings and generally created chaos until intimidated politicians reluctantly conceded the principle of women's suffrage. This was implemented by law, for women over thirty, in 1918, partly in recognition of the work women did during the First World War in the absence of men away in the armed forces.

*From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage* tells a different story. It gives far more credit to the non-militant suffragist organisation the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and, in particular, to the work of one of its leaders, Catherine Marshall. She was unmentioned in most accounts – even *What I Remember* (1920), the autobiography of Millicent Fawcett, who chaired the organisation – and given only a passing reference in Sylvia Pankhurst's book, *The Suffrage Movement*.

Catherine Marshall was the daughter of a teacher at Harrow public school and his wife, who eventually retired to Hawse End, their former holiday home in the Lake District. Catherine became a Liberal, like her parents, and helped to win supporters for the cause of women's suffrage in northern Britain. From 1908 until the outbreak of the First World War on 4 August 1914, she was a key figure in the NUWSS with close links to the Election Fighting Fund for Women's Suffrage (EFF), and worked incessantly to lobby MPs, to raise the issue of women's votes in by-elections, and to win over ordinary electors to support the cause of votes for women.

Despite their admiration for the bravery and self-sacrifice of the militants of the Women's Social & Political Union (WSPU) led by the Pankhursts, the leaders of the NUWSS were convinced that militancy helped the opposition to women's suffrage. In 1912, Catherine Marshall stated:

‘Militancy is not, now, an unfortunate accident; it is one of the definite obstacles – and the most formidable one which we have got to set ourselves to surmount ... it alienates support in the country and makes it possible for an MP to think he can vote against us without incurring any very serious displeasure on the part of his constituents’ [From *Liberal to Labour*, page 174].

As a result of years of experience of the reluctance of Liberal MPs, including the Liberal Prime Minister, Herbert Henry Asquith, to support the suffragist cause, Catherine Marshall gradually changed her allegiance from Liberal to Labour.

In the period after 1908, the Election Fighting Fund for Women’s Suffrage assigned workers and funds to the support of Labour Parliamentary candidates who supported votes for women, in a number of constituencies. This produced problems. The secretary of the Labour Party, James Ramsay MacDonald, had reached a secret agreement with the Liberal chief whip, Herbert Gladstone, to avoid putting up rival Liberal and Labour candidates in seats which could be won by one or the other, and he did not welcome intervention by the EFF which threatened this. In fact, in a number of by-elections Labour candidates supported by Catherine Marshall split the progressive vote and let in the Unionist (i.e. Conservative).

However, probably partly as a result of Catherine Marshall’s efforts, the Labour Party was the only party to include votes for women in its programme. The outbreak of war in August 1914 put off the expected general election and any hope of a Bill coming before Parliament to grant women the vote as long as hostilities continued. Catherine and her colleagues had been convinced before this that their objective was about to be achieved.

When the war came to an end, women over thirty were granted the right to vote, along with men who were not householders, and this was attributed by many historians to a recognition of the part played by women in taking over the work usually done by men who were away in the armed forces. Jo Vellacott argues, however, that it owed much more to the work of the NUWSS and Catherine Marshall, which has never been recognised. It would have remained unrecorded but for the survival of Catherine’s papers in four hampers in a dilapidated garden shed at her former home, Hawes End, which were saved from destruction by the Cumberland county archivist, Bruce Jones. He was called in by the county education authority, which had taken over the property and wanted the shed to be demolished. Jo Vellacott, then a student visiting from Canada, heard about the papers, inspected them, and agreed to sort them. They have since served as the

main source for her book, which throws a fascinating new light on the struggle to achieve votes for women and adds to our knowledge of the early history of the Labour Party.

Although some adherents of the conventional version of the struggle for votes for women may have some doubts about aspects of Jo Vellacott's thesis, *From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage* is a valuable and important addition to our knowledge of a crucial struggle to achieve women's rights.

*Stan Newens*

## Pocket Pasionaria

**Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: The Life of Ellen Wilkinson, Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist*, Harvard, 2016, 532 pages, hardback ISBN 9768074971523, £23.95**

Two things I have in common with Ellen: mathematical ineptitude and losing the school mock election for Labour. Best of the online and YouTube cornucopia about her is the BBC talk by *Silk* actress Maxine Peake, nicknamed 'Red Max'. Plus, the Middlesbrough (Ellen's constituency, 1924-1931) vote to honour her with its first female statue. Ellen reminds me of her longer-lived Welsh contemporary, Annie Powell (1906-1986), red Rhondda councillor and mayor, who went the other way: from Labour to the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). No mention in Beers. Did they ever meet? Annie deserves her own biographer.

Beers is best, although hers is not the first biography. That was by Betty Vernon (1982). Then, Bartley and Perry (both 2014). Beers draws heavily on Vernon (the only indexed one), sometimes in sharp disagreement (for example, pages 454-5). The rarely mentioned Perry is likewise taken to task (p. 507, note 10). Bartley receives neutral short shrift.

*Red Ellen* is clearly, sometimes wittily, written, mercifully jargon free, well annotated. No Bibliography, though, and a very spotty index, perhaps suggesting anti-communist bias. For easy instance, unlike other newspapers, the *Daily Worker* (frequent in the text) is left out. So are, for example, Wal Hannington (prime Jarrow organiser) and Phil Piratin, who usurps credit for opening Tube stations as shelters. Both get their due in Francis Beckett's CPGB history, *Enemy Within* (1995).

Ellen's Middlesbrough statue requires little material. Standing only 4' 9", she was the source of such nicknames as 'Mighty Atom', 'Elfin Fury', 'Five Feet of Pugnacity', 'Pocket Dreadnought', 'Pocket Pasionaria'. Then

there's her famous red hair (a newspaper obsession), a trait shared with long-time lover Herbert M, prompting an additional label, 'Morrison Shelter'.

Morrisonian mention cues the never-married Ellen's private life, as controversial as her public. Beers calls her 'exceptionally pretty'; given to promiscuity – woman's sexual freedom was the topic of her Moscow conversation with Alexandra Kollontai. Ellen also met Krupskaya – preferred to Vladimir – and heard both Lenin and Trotsky. Unspoken speculations collide with a paucity of dossiers. Beers rightly accepts (against Doubting Thomases) the Morrison liaison. Ellen unquestionably romanced with fellow journalist and socialist, Frank Horrabin. Another notable lover was Comintern-fixer and spy, Otto Katz ('the man who knew everything' – Arthur Koestler). Beers lengthily wonders about her first Marxist mentor, John Newbold, giving him a rotten press, albeit other sources (cf. Trotskyist Harry Wicks, *Keeping My Head*, 1992, p.38) are more kindly, plus he was an influence on the young A. J. P. Taylor. Had Ellen's personal papers escaped the flames, we might or might not know more.

All biographers face the same problem: conflagration of Ellen's papers by brother Harold, likewise destruction of her MI5 file. They (Beers included) don't always make best use of her own words. The Commons speeches (3,458 between 1925-1947 – Hansard statistics online) reflect her omnivorous causes. Also, there are innumerable, ubiquitous articles. Then, her own nine books, most famously the Jarrow one (1939), *The Town that Was Murdered*, three on fascism, *Plan for Peace*, spun-off from the 1945 Labour election manifesto, which she helped write, plus her history of the General Strike, re-told in the passionate novel *Clash – Spokesman* readers will be glad to know that Nottingham Trent University produced the first critical edition (2004 – online description by co-editor Ian Haywood).

Finally, Ellen's one excursion into crime fiction, *The Division Bell Mystery* (1932), enriched by her insider Parliamentary knowledge, disparaged by Beers ('far-fetched, to say the least'), the more sympathetic Bartley observing, 'not good, but her autobiographical topicality made her novels very appealing'. Contrariwise, crime fiction expert Martin Edwards' blog highly commends it.

Beers took over 500 pages. How to encapsulate this human dynamo in brief review? Ellen owed much to her father's staunch Methodism. So did Margaret Thatcher – there the resemblance ends. Her ascent via High School to University shaped her post-war ministerial education policies.

She cut her teeth on working women's problems, her descriptions of their conditions as harrowing as those of Marx and Engels. Quickly involved with the Suffragettes, she (surprisingly?) deplored Emily Pankhurst's 'extremism', an issue updated by Mavis Curtis' recent study.

'The most difficult lesson that men have had to learn is that no class or nation can rise above the level of its women' (*Plebs*, 1929); a claim guaranteed to upset men in all parties. Ellen, of course, always spoke in extremist terms. As do all other women, especially as the sole female Labour MP, she had much to endure from hidebound males – Beers quotes an especially odious slur by Newark MP, the Marquess of Tichfield (pp. 198-199).

Still, Ellen did not waste her life in misandry, nor would she have cared a jot for political correctness. Humour (her motto, 'No authority can discipline anyone with a sense of humour') was an effective weapon. I best like her characterisation of the Bloomsbury set: 'an exclusive circle who bestowed fame on themselves for writing reviews of each others' books'. Nor did she fear upsetting women, notably when supervising fire-fighting in the wartime cabinet she demanded they do their dangerous bit. One woman who answered her call was Iris Murdoch.

Beers well defends Ellen against charges of 'trimming', for example, in debates over contraception, eliding from the CPGB (which she helped to found), and supporting a wartime ban on the *Daily Worker*. Quite simply, she was a pragmatist, agreeing with Churchill's 'I'd rather be right than consistent'. This unlikely coupling persisted. Ellen supported Churchill against Chamberlain; he praised her patriotism. As Orwell (more recently, Billy Bragg), Ellen sought to reconcile patriotism with socialism, moving from Great War pacifism (though disparaging conscientious objectors) to all-out support for the fight against fascism/Nazism.

As well as raging against Labour Party indifference to women's rights, the General Strike, and her co-operative *The Brown Book's* analysis of the Reichstag Fire, Ellen was frequently prescient, lamenting the Labour Party eschewing the word 'socialism', demonstrating the need for extra-parliamentary action, putting her finger on nationalisation's fatal flaws – the list goes on.

After flirting with guild socialism and Fabianism (under the Webbs' influence), Ellen was caught up in revolutionary Bolshevik fever, accused by some of naivety, as later in Spain by Orwell – did they ever meet? Only speculation from a single diary entry (28 August 1939), dismissing her as an 'extremist'. But such excitement is understandable, and Ellen came to acknowledge Stalin's enormities, unlike her CPGB friends Palme Dutt and

Pollitt, now fully embracing Labour instead, despite reservations over its timidities. *Spokesman* readers will see affinities here with Bertrand Russell (no 137, 2017, pp 94-106).

Reverting to Orwell and Ellen, both commendably avoided mindless America-phobia. Despite the Depression's food lines and poverty, also deeming the New Deal inadequate, Ellen admired and enjoyed many novelties, whilst at the same time her orations to striking autoworkers went down a treat. Internationally, her great causes were Spain, which she frequently and dangerously visited; India (some suspicion of an affair with Krishna Menon) – Ellen did not live to see its independence and consequences; and, of course, anti-fascism.

Final laurels bestowed by Attlee's appointment of her to the Ministry of Education (some thought she'd have preferred Health), sole female in his cabinet, a magnanimous gesture considering how she'd supported (for public and private reasons) Morrison against him to replace Lansbury as Labour Leader. Beers well surveys the British educational scene 1902 to 1945. Its past, plus Ellen's own background are context to her passionate defence of grammar schools as best vehicles for working-class advancement, for which I most revere her for personal reasons, against the follies of Crosland and Williams and current left-wing stupidity. For the full argument, see my review (*Spokesman* 137, 2017) of the Reeves-Carr biography of Ellen's very different contemporary colleague, Alice Bacon.

Ellen Wilkinson died too young, in 1947. There was some loose talk of 'foul play', also of suicide. Beers rightly will have none of this. An accidental overdose of pills is the simple answer. Ellen was notoriously careless over self-medication. She had long suffered chronic ill health (asthma, bronchitis and related problems), had been in serious aeroplane and car crashes, and was basically worked out beyond exhaustion point from her hectic physical, ideological and emotional life – the Pocket Pasionaria's batteries had finally run down.

What if Ellen had lived in our times? Imagine her Commons clashes with Thatcher, then Blair with his abandonment of her true faith. Sobering thought: might she have suffered like Jo Cox?

Many people have quotably summed up Ellen. Beers provides plentiful examples, plus her own Voltaire-like compliment with this last sentence:

'Although Ellen Wilkinson did not have all the answers, her career is a testament to the importance of questioning the existing system and striving to create a more peaceful, prosperous and equitable future for the generations to come.'

My own envoi is the mediaeval compliment bestowed on Remigius, Bishop of my native Lincoln:

‘Small in stature, great in heart.’

*Barry Baldwin*

## **Desire and abuse**

**Graham Caveney, *The Boy with the Perpetual Nervousness: A Memoir of an Adolescence*, Picador, 2017, 320 pages, hardback ISBN 9781509830671, £14.99**

Reverend Kevin O'Neill of the Society of Mary sexually abused Graham Caveney, an adolescent school student in his charge, during a two-year period in the early 1980s. O'Neill was principal of St Mary's College, Blackburn, in the north of England, where the grooming and abuse started. It continued during trips to the theatre, a visit to O'Neill's mother in Middlesborough, and on a school trip to Greece, when Caveney, perhaps emboldened by the company of two other boys, told O'Neill to stop.

In 2008, the 'Fr Kevin O'Neill Performing Arts' building was opened at St Mary's College. Yet the Marist religious order already knew of O'Neill's abuse of Caveney, as he had informed them several years earlier, via a Catholic priest called Fr Phillip. Caveney, upset by this public tribute to his abuser, was stirred into action. His Catholic parents, who were great admirers of O'Neill, had died. Caveney overcame his own abuse of alcohol and drugs, and set about writing what has become *The Boy With The Perpetual Nervousness*.

Caveney recounts out-of-body coping mechanisms as he watches his abuser ejaculate over his adolescent body. 'Fucked' by O'Neill, Caveney futilely seeks anew his virginity. He tells us there aren't the words to convey the personality fractures caused by O'Neill's abuse. 'Why did he desire me? Were there others?' O'Neill died in 2011, before Caveney had the opportunity to ask him face to face, although O'Neill had admitted he abused the 15-year-old boy. 'It takes two to tango,' O'Neill reportedly said, when confronted by his superior in the Marist order.

Written with zip, some humour, deep anger, and much love, *The Boy with the Perpetual Nervousness* is a most compelling read.

Meanwhile, as 2017 drew to a close, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) held two public sessions about abuse of children and vulnerable adults committed within the English Benedictine Congregation. These 'case studies' of abuse within the Roman Catholic

Church in England and Wales focused on Ampleforth and Downside, monasteries with private boarding schools attached, the first in North Yorkshire, the latter near Reading in Berkshire in the south of England.

Abuse at Ampleforth sometimes began across the valley at Gilling Castle, the preparatory school for Ampleforth College, later called St Martin's. Small boys, some as young as six years old, were placed in the 'care' of one particularly abusive and violent monk, Piers Grant-Ferris, during the decade beginning in 1965. 'Pervy' Piers, as he was nicknamed, insisted on taking a boy's temperature rectally. Many endured this abuse, whatever their ailment. When he was not wielding one of his smelly thermometers, Grant-Ferris would find cause to thrash the bare bottoms of his young charges, fondling as he did so. Masturbating beneath his cassock, Grant-Ferris was heard to lament sin.

In December 2017, one or two of Grant-Ferris's victims gave testimony in person at the Inquiry, while statements by others were read out. One man recalled how, when Grant-Ferris eventually pleaded guilty in court, he had to listen to testimonies of the good character of his abuser. Graham Caveney might well understand the victim's anger when he heard such claims.

Abuse in the Roman Catholic Church is one of a number of strands pursued by the Independent Inquiry. Transcripts and other documentation are available online. They make harrowing reading. But that is small suffering by comparison with the lifelong impact on victims of sexual abuse which, in a different but similar setting, Caveney's feisty book recounts.

*Tony Simpson*

[www.iicsa.org.uk](http://www.iicsa.org.uk)

## Commons

**George Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage: A new politics for an age of crisis*, Verso, 2017, 224 pages, hardback ISBN 9781786632883, £14.99**

At a launch of his new book *Out of the Wreckage*, jointly organised by Five Leaves Bookshop and the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ) at Nottingham University, George Monbiot reflected on the possibilities for a new politics in an age of crisis. It is big narratives, Monbiot has argued, which decisively shape reality as a generally accepted common sense. 'Stories are the means by which we navigate the world. They allow us to interpret its complex and contradictory signals.' While

Keynesianism ruled supreme in the so-called ‘Thirty Glorious Years’ after World War Two, neoliberal economics has taken over as the new master narrative from the late 1970s onwards. The global financial crisis of 2007/2008, however, made clear that neoliberalism does not work. Not only does it not work economically for people around the world; it has also moved our planet to the brink of collapse as a result of environmental destruction, an ‘apparently inexorable slide towards climate breakdown’, according to Monbiot. How can we not despair in such a situation?

A return to Keynesianism is impossible, Monbiot points out. Partly because, politically, any return to a previous situation is difficult, partly because national regulatory mechanisms, necessary for a Keynesian economy, have been dismantled by neoliberalism and, partly, and perhaps most importantly, Keynesian economics built on continuing economic growth can provide no answers in view of climate breakdown. Instead, we need a new restoration narrative, Monbiot asserts, allowing us to move beyond neoliberal economics and Keynesianism alike.

And there is hope, he points out. A human being is not the individualistic, utility-maximising ‘economic man’ that economists want us to believe. We are much more prone to altruism, to caring for our fellow human beings. It is on this basis that more generous, inclusive communities can be established, providing a sense of home. ‘Through restoring community, renewing civic life and claiming our place in the world, we build a society in which our extraordinary nature – our altruism, empathy and deep connection – is released. A kinder world stimulates and normalises our kinder values. I propose a name for this story: the Politics of Belonging’. Provided more resources and power are transferred to communities, much more participatory cultures can emerge, which in turn will provide fertile ground for this new type of politics.

To some extent, I am sceptical about the idea that it is grand narratives which shape the world. There are always material interests behind these narratives, which sustain and disseminate them. Neoliberal economics is a case in point. When the post-war compromise around Keynesian economics had broken down, in the 1970s, capital and here, in particular, large corporations invested heavily in the dissemination of this new narrative. It is they who have benefited most from an integrated global economy, with production organised on a transnational scale, supported by a globally integrated financial market.

Moreover, in my view it is not correct to argue that neoliberalism does not work. It works perfectly well for the interests of capital underpinning the narrative. While austerity implies misery for countless people in

countries such as Greece and the UK, it has facilitated the opening up of public services as profitable investment opportunities for private capital. In other words, any new grand narrative will require a material basis able to contest and confront capitalist interests directly. It is not just narratives which bring about change, but the social class forces putting them forward. It is the people who implement and fight for them.

And yet, George Monbiot implicitly acknowledges this inevitable confrontation. It is his emphasis on reviving the ‘commons’ as a core of the new grand narrative which directly challenges capitalist private ownership of the means of production. Commons, which are jointly owned and administered by the community to ensure reasonable returns to everyone in a sustainable way, provide a very different understanding of how the economy should be organised. Commons cannot be bought and sold, commons cannot be traded. A move towards the commons will inevitably imply the expropriation of assets, currently held in private ownership.

In short, although not explicitly mentioned in Monbiot’s presentation, there is clear understanding of the need to challenge capitalist exploitation, and the shift to the commons entails a way of bringing this about. Wider regime change is possible, he asserts, provided we combine Bernie Sanders’ big organising model with this novel narrative around a new politics based on communities and the commons.

This was a hugely stimulating event, not only because of Monbiot’s excellent talk, but also because of the large number (around 300) people present from all walks of life. It is clear that there is a strong appetite for drastic change. Ultimately, it may be large groups of people like this who will actively develop the new narrative which allows us to construct a path *Out of the Wreckage!*

*Andreas Bieler*

## Waiting for Emilie

**Emilie Morin, *Beckett’s Political Imagination*, Cambridge University Press, 2017, 266 pages, hardback ISBN 9781108417990, £31.99**

‘Romania begins new life after Ceausescu’ – ‘Beckett: a muted hurrah for humanity’. On 27 January 1989, the front page of *The Independent* carried, like many newspapers, accounts of two lives ended, which seemed to enjoy only a grotesque, discomfiting proximity. The image of the executed dictator’s glacial death mask might have made some ponder just how far Beckett’s fabled compassion – ‘he leaves no stone unturned and

no maggot lonely’, as Harold Pinter put it – might have extended. Otherwise, the customary stand-off between literature and politics, which for decades had plagued, and continues to dominate, mainstream academic or critical responses to Beckett, was scrupulously adhered to in each of the many tributes running through the day’s edition: on the one hand, social convulsion, on the other, the master of existential solipsism. Only Donald Davie, perhaps, darted a glance at the fundamental commitment – the lived embeddedness in historical events and processes – informing Beckett’s writing at every stage of his seven-decades-long career. ‘If he seems to withdraw into a sheerly verbal universe, it is not thereby to evade the miseries and troubles, as well as the glories, of experience outside language.’ The proof of which, nearly thirty years later, Emilie Morin’s thrilling, assiduously compiled study has at last delivered.

Whereas the standard biographers, Bair, Knowlson, Cronin etc., all toe the party line, or what she calls the ‘establishment consensus’ of the political Beckett, losing out to the ‘high priest of failure’ within the cultural economics of neoliberal capitalism, Morin shows how every major social convulsion through which he passed or with which he came into contact, from the Communist-Catholic riots and electoral agitation of the Irish Free State in the early 1930s to the Generals’ Putsch and Parisian State of Emergency in April 1961, or the Algerian crisis more broadly, left an indelible mark on Beckett’s development as a man and as a writer. The record of his affiliations and interventions isn’t blemish-free: this is no hagiography, but Beckett emerges as more deeply informed and discriminating about the world historical currents on whose margins his tramps and moribunds enliven their torpor than few, with honourable exceptions, have realised or acknowledged.

Adorno’s essay on *Endgame* (1958) remains essential reading for its contention that the play, indeed Beckett’s whole aesthetic, is premised on the recognition that social commodification and its obverse, fascism, have become so endemic only an art as dismal and asphyxiated as the world itself can have any ethical substance. But there he leaves it: Adorno never condescends to leave the realm of gnomic philosophical abstraction, and it has been up to others down at the coalface to dig for the local socio-historical connections. Morin, of course, isn’t alone here – one might cite, for example, Andrew Gibson’s recent, ground-breaking work on Beckett and the Occupation, the Fourth Republic and the Cold War. Overwhelmingly, though, ‘Samuel Beckett in Context’, as demonstrated by the very weighty – purportedly comprehensive – volume of that name, published by Cambridge in 2013, still connotes a trawl through the

humanities, literary, philosophical, or linguistic, with any social dimension relegated to tinkering on the sidelines.

With Morin the social is full frontal from page one. She sets herself two daunting tasks. The easier, arguably, is to steer a path through the thicket of personal encounters, experiences and commitments that begin with Beckett's student days at Trinity College and abortive teaching stints at the École Normale Supérieure in the late 1920s. There his lifelong habit of befriending (and remaining loyal to) leading activists and polemicists across the political spectrum, from the international left to the sometimes virulently anti-semitic radical right, is first manifest. However, in a period in Dublin, where the links between Marxism, republicanism and Moscow were subjected to fierce public scrutiny, Beckett's toying with the possibility of an apprenticeship to Eisenstein in documentary cinematography, and the political satire on British colonialism and German militarism, *Le Kid*, co-written with future Vichy propagandist Georges Pelorson, are only two among many clear, early indicators cited by Morin of his abiding, left-leaning humanist sympathies. The extended tour of German art galleries he undertook in 1936-7, which exposed him to the bludgeoning rhetoric of National Socialism and the anguish of individuals marked for persecution, as recorded in his diaries, the rise of the Irish Blueshirts and the violent animus towards his Jewish relatives and himself during the Gogarty trial, herald the start, in her account, of a thoroughgoing transformation in Beckett's estimate of the contemporary political situation and the need to respond to it. Gone, then, is the baroque ribaldry of a novel like *Murphy*, its characters at the mercy of the 'quid quo pro' of the exchange mechanism, and of 'vested interests' such as the 'colossal league of plutomantic caterers', an Adorno-like summary perception at best. At this point the harder task begins, of demonstrating how, from wartime onwards, the particular horrors of French history – resistance, the *épuration*, the deportations, the occultation of Jewish survivors, colonial normalisation (torture, internment, censorship, the techniques of pacification employed in Algeria, including those inherited from Indochina) – eat everywhere into the fabric of Beckett's mature writing, and Morin does so with devastating aplomb.

Not that the long line of textual examples she assembles begins or ends with France. Already in 1932, Beckett planned a satire on the economic wars attending the Anglo-Irish Treaty, populism and agricultural piety ('Trueborn Jackeen', 'Cow'); the one completed Act of *Human Wishes* debunks the Ascendancy. His translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro anthology and of Mexican poetry for UNESCO, teeming with anti-

colonial and anti-capitalist embellishments, and willingness to rewrite Rimbaud and Gide in the same spirit, exhibit a burgeoning internationalism that finds its ultimate expression in the fictions and plays of the Algerian period, which Lindon at Éditions de Minuit published alongside first-hand accounts by detainees and dissidents in his Documents series. Morin pinpoints how *Fin de Partie*, *Comment c'est*, *What Where*, the *Shorts* for theatre and radio, and the prose pieces *As the story was told* and 'On le tortura bien' (unpublished) utilise racist epithets, political euphemisms, Arabic, idioms drawn from interrogation training manuals ('*la gégène*', '*la schlaque*'), and more broadly clear situational parallels whose moral implications, for a French audience/readership, would be irreducible (the anti-Vichy and anti-Gaullist texts of the 1940s, from *L'Absent* to *Malone meurt*, bristle with similar specificities).

Morin concludes with Beckett's sudden flurry of public interventions in the 1980s – petitions, donations, gifts to individuals and struggling artistic ventures, an intensification of his lifelong defence of freedom of speech, but here especially focused on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Those front page juxtapositions turn out to have been singularly apt. The well-known case of *Catastrophe* is revisited, however, for the scathing light it casts on artistic activism generally, the dictatorial stage director concerned above all to 'have them [the audience] on their feet' while the actor he victimises can only, like the caged Havel, to whom the play is dedicated, raise his head in silent, ambiguous compliance. Beckett was always ready to scoff at the pretensions of a mere writer: asked in 1977, as Morin recalls, 'whether he "was [...] ever political", he reportedly answered, "No, but I joined the Resistance".'

*Stephen Winfield*