

## Reviews

### More lasting than bronze

**Robert Henderson, *The Spark That Lit The Revolution*, I.B. Tauris, 2020, 280 pages, hardback ISBN 9781784536620, £25**

As former curator of the British Library's Russian collections and author of multiple related articles, Henderson was the right man for this book, written in a clear, breezy style, jargon-free, enlivened by frequent susurrus of humour. The hard-core political narrative is enlivened by observations on Lenin's dislike of English food (except muffins), enjoyment of London's multifarious attractions from its architecture to its music halls, albeit with his characteristic reference to everything as belonging to 'THEM'.

Content: six chapters book-ended by Introduction and Postscript; Appendix on Lenin's use of Reading Room collections and book donations to it; twenty-one pages comprising 392 end-notes supplementing the narrative text; eleven-page Bibliography, quadrisected between magazine/newspaper list, mainly Russian primary sources, secondary books/articles, and a single website which category (see below) might have been much enriched; twenty-nine plates, ten figures; serviceable nine-page Index.

Not the first such study. Henderson singles out Helen Rappaport's 'excellent' *Conspirator: Lenin in Exile* (2010) — she digests it lengthily on line, distributes regular updates ('Footnotes of History'), and lists the 'Ten Best Books on Lenin' (*Guardian*, September 2, 2009). She appends details of the Lenin bust unveiled (London, 1942), soon removed because of Mosleyite vandalism — shades of latter-day statue-toppling. Happier sequel: a memorial plaque displayed (2012) at Lenin's Bloomsbury address by Henderson and Bill Fishman, veteran socialist and East End historian.

Other notable websites include Martin Rosenbaum's contribution to the BBC's 'British Road to Bolshevism', Richard Cavendish on the Bolshevik-Menshevik split, and Peter Frost's *Morning Star* reflections on the main events and personalities.

A further YouTube treat for *Spokesman* readers is Bertrand Russell recalling his conversation with Lenin (Russia, 1920). Although impressed by his good English (Henderson recounts his understandable linguistic struggles), Russell deprecates Lenin's unquestioning belief in Marx, his

intransigence on, for example, the ‘correct’ agrarian policy, and deliberately promoting ‘un-socialist’ hatred: for Russell, Lenin was a second Cromwell.

Henderson’s archival researches yielded two scoops. He found a Lenin application for Reading Room ticket under the alias ‘Oulianoff’, plus the first-known photograph of Yakubova. Of the many Russian sources Henderson draws most from the diaries/memoirs of Krupskaya and Appolinariya Yakubova-Takhtereva, to whom Lenin may or may not have once proposed marriage. He also had an eye for another beauty, Inessa Armand, plus a London suffragette, Winifred Gottschalk (p.192). Yakubova haunts the book, its Postscript dedicated to her.

Henderson rightly muses over whom to believe about what. For obvious reasons, the two women were wary of each other. Eventually, Lenin and Yakubova ideologically split, the end-result being her ‘airbrushing’ out of the Bolshevik story, a technique Stalin would perfect, especially with photographs. As Steven Lovell, reviewing a fresh clutch of Stalin biographies (*TLS* December 11, 2020), remarks: ‘Memoirs composed years after the fact raise tricky questions of interpretation’.

Henderson has a blind spot for Stalin — only one indexed reference (p.155, missing another on p.157) regarding his attendance at the 1907 Congress in London, supposedly a delegate though he seems to have been a non-voting attendee, never speaking. Henderson mentions only his complaints about unsatisfactory lodgings. He omits a more colourful anecdote, detailed by Frost via Fishman. Strolling by the Thames one evening, Stalin accosted a young Irish girl. Her male companions assailed him with fists and clubs, Stalin being saved by the intervention of Maxim Litvinov whom he may (dispute continues) later have thanked by arranging his murder in a car accident orchestrated by KGB. More oddly, Henderson ignores Stalin’s own account (online) of his delegate role in the Congress as Lenin routed the Mensheviks, dutifully praised as ‘active’ in the online Marx-Engels-Lenin account (ch 2).

Stalin’s role is equally minimized by such biographers as Edvard Radzinsky and Robert Service. It is given full measure by Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (2008, p169-177).

Chapter One describes the efflux, consequent upon the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II, from Russia, led by Kropotkin. The latter with Lenin and many others gravitated to London, desperately evading the highly efficient Okhrana (Tsarist Secret Police) and Metropolitan Police Special Branch. Some local left-wing eyes did not view these newcomers in the spirit of *From Russia With Love*, William

Morris a notable case in point, though Hyndman was more welcoming.

Lenin's prime concern was to find a place where he could write for and publish *ISKRA* ('The Spark', a title copied by the Romanian *SCINTEIA*). From choice or necessity, Lenin was forever on the move. Henderson havers over one address, citing both 16 and 23 Percy Street. Both are conceivable, but 16 has the blue plaque. Best guide is the YouTube tour of Lenin's abodes hosted with fascinating commentary by Rob Sewell, editor of *Socialist Appeal*. Cognate clips display the revolutionaries' favourite pubs such as The Three Johns (founded 1791) and The Water Rats (formerly The Pindar of Wakefield, 1517), where Marx is said to have lodged, and where they met posing as The Anglers Club or The League of Foreign Barbers.

Lenin's other priority was a ticket to the British Museum's Reading Room, first obtained under the alias Dr Jacob Richter. He always spoke admiringly of the Room and its collections, working (probably) from seat L 13.

Marx, by contrast, is claimed in a silly article by Colin Higgins (*Library and Information History* 33, 2017, 81-96 — abstract online) not to have been as assiduous a user as generally believed, his sole argument being that Marx referred to Library or Museum, never Reading Room. For we others, seat G 7 remains hallowed.

'The Spark' was lit in London, but had been kindled years before in St. Petersburg, a major theme of Chapter Two along with Yakubova and husband Konstantin. Not that she and Krupskaya were the only women of note. Many played their Congressional parts, not least Rosa Luxemburg.

Naturally, at the endless meetings, plagued by sectarian quarrels with Plekhanov and others, Lenin, despite an alleged speech impediment, thunderingly dominated, some comrades deploring his rudeness (elsewhere, he is depicted as patient and polite), and 'verbal debauchery'.

For his modern worshippers (SWP, WRP, *et hoc genus omne*) a key moment was the sudden arrival of Trotsky, dramatized in a YouTube clip, soon notorious for getting lost in London's streets.

Key dates: 1903/05/07. Initially, things did not go well for Lenin. Factionalism bedevilled *ISKRA*; the first key vote was lost. 1905 was held under the shadows of a Jewish pogrom in Russia, the St. Petersburg massacre, and the somewhat mysterious Russian naval aggression at Dogger Bank, a place better known for meteorological shipping forecasts. The meeting was further complicated by East End inter-Jewish violence. There was Farce, 'le fileur', working for the Russian government, and farce in the shape of Special Branch's Herbert Fitch taking notes while

concealed in a cupboard. Some historians ridicule this meeting as a time-wasting talking-shop. Henderson (p.123) demurs, seeing it as an important stage in Lenin's incipient dominance and as seeds of the decisive rupture between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks at the final three-week Congress, with Lenin (recently saved from arrest by Kropotkin) having his way on virtually all key matters of ideology and action.

Lenin probably looked back to the final Congress in 1921 with his famous crystallization of history: WHO WHOM? — adopted by both Stalin and Trotsky. This final Congress, blazoned as a 'scoop' by the *Daily Mirror*; also ushered in playwright Maxim Gorky, whose *The Bourgeois*, banned in Russia, had its première on May Day 1907 at a Whitechapel Road theatre.

Henderson's final chapter has Lenin back in the Reading Room. His last oration on British soil (November 11, 1911), on the arid theme of 'Stolypin and Revolution', went unreported. Henderson hesitates between a harangue delivered to a minuscule audience and policeman Edwin Woodall who recalled witnessing 'a very large crowd', coming into contact with Kropotkin, who contrived to have his hand shaken by 'The future Dictator of All Russia'.

The Postscript concludes the largely melancholic story of Yakubova and Konstantin Takhtarev. She suffered long, painful illnesses (as did Krupskaya, causing Lenin costly travel and other expenses) leading to her death in 1914. Konstantin (who once met Ramsay McDonald in London) was dismissed from his Russian lecturing post, his books banned — Henderson (p. 212) notes their recent re-printings to considerable acclaim. He would die of typhus a year after Lenin.

Henderson's book is the product of thirty years of research. Time well spent. Pending future openings of Soviet archives or chance discoveries of unpublished diaries of memoirs, this gripping narrative bids fair to remain the definitive version, in Roman poet Horace's words, 'a monument more lasting than bronze'.

**Barry Baldwin**

**‘If there was hope, it must lie with the proles’**

**Matthew C. Klein and Michael Pettis, *Trade Wars are Class Wars: How Rising Inequality Distorts the Global Economy and Threatens International Peace*, Yale University Press, 288 pages, hardback ISBN 9780300244175, £20, paperback ISBN 9780300261448, £12.99**

Trade disputes are presented as struggles between nations and their competing interests. Here the argument is stood on its head in that these fights are portrayed as civil wars between each country’s (super) rich and poor. It’s class rather than nation. It is these phantom wars that drove the rebirth of ‘left-behind’ politics that has given us Donald Trump, Brexit, and the fellow-travelling satellites that lurk in their orbits. The Trump victories of 2016 in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin were the fruit of trade induced radicalisation.

The underpinning argument goes back more than a century to J.A. Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) and the toxic impact of the oligarchs’ surplus capital. Surrendering enough inequality for income distribution to approximate supply and demand erases any need for new foreign markets. But tycoons voting for taxes is like turkeys voting for Christmas. Thus, the hunt for secure external markets and investment opportunities bore Imperialisms as sinks for exports. It was this analysis, that the economic cogs of capitalism, not nationalism, generated Empires and their wars, that so influenced Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) as he tried to understand the political and economic roots of the First World War.

*Trade Wars are Class Wars* brings this all up to date in a late capitalist world metamorphosed by Malcolm McLean and globalisation, abetted by Washington’s victory over Moscow – not Beijing – in the Cold War. McLean was the Newton who invented and popularised the container shipping that broke the dockside unions, accelerated transport times and slashed transport costs. Low-cost, dependable shipping shattered any necessity or preference for domestic production. Proximity lost leverage. Now complex production processes could be smeared across the world — Adam Smith’s division of labour jumped from product to process on a World Tour to seek and find lower wage, higher skill workforces. Global value chains grew like topsy. One unintended consequence of which has been to turn trade data into so much junk as everything comes from everywhere and national borders and national sovereignty evaporate.

Today, the stage for world manufacturing has three central players, the US, Germany and China, with a small walk-on part reserved for Tokyo. Trade in intermediate inputs is more than 50% of the whole, with finished goods scarcely a third. There has been a growing market for 'live machines' as an increasingly rootless higher management, alongside qualified scientists and engineers, become moveable factors of production. Rising productivity — often as much driven by machines as labour — has cheapened production and created a manufacturing glut. The extent of the process has taken the world's top 10 per cent into the changing rooms of throwaway fashion where single use clothing threatens the environment.

The result is that all three of our main actors have indigent money that seeks succour. Beijing, even while holding down wages to preserve competitiveness and accumulating reserves as a financial prophylactic to protect the renminbi (RMB) from contamination after the scare of the Asian financial crisis, has promoted as its 'big idea' the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Here Beijing offers to do for Eurasia, and beyond, what the railway boom did for mid-nineteenth century America. There, new infrastructure in a virtuous circle saw physical opening drive market penetration that, in its turn, drove industry and, again, the market to create industrial hegemony that lasted a long century.

The Belt and Road Initiative answers the fiscal, industrial and political questions facing Beijing. It also explains China's recent signature of a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with Brussels. With a population that consumes less than 40% of domestic output, BRI provides a home for China's surplus money, enhances market access for the products of Chinese industry and construction services, and puts in place a carapace of compromised 'buffer states' to act as protection against Biden's plans for containment via an emerging 'Asian NATO' in the Indo-Pacific. The timbre and cadence will be milder and use a less strident lexicon, but Jake Sullivan's perception of Beijing's threat to the US is not fundamentally different from that of Trump's John Bolton.

Germany — and the EU — were collateral beneficiaries of America's victory. Since 1989, 100 million Europeans have been inducted into capitalism. It had its costs as Germany's version of Trump and Brexit are scarcely hidden in the Nazi-lite *Allianz für Deutschland*. East German women went west and East German men stayed at home; unemployed, or under-employed, and wifeless.

The long-term problem and present solution is American exceptionalism. While the rising tide of inequality has been higher there than anywhere else, the dollar as global reserve currency provides

Washington with its ‘Get Out of Jail Free’ card for now. The dollar’s position as premium international reserve asset allows the US to absorb consumption and savings at the price of goods gluts, job losses and spiralling debt. Yet the threat after the Trump fiasco is that the rest of the world’s ways of seeing change. Seventy years ago, the US controlled more than half of global trade. Today, it is less than a quarter and shrivelling. America is living a lie. Once the Emperor is seen to be naked, it is the beginning of the end. China and the EU will no longer be able to export their problems and will need to look to domestic solutions.

How is the investment over consumption model to be broken? It is far from easy. Japan tried with ‘biodegradable money’; vouchers handed out to the population with an expiry date. The public subverted the plan. They were sold on at a discount to those with planned purchases and the cash put in the bank. Germany could lead the EU out of austerity by returning EU economies to the default settings of the immediate post-war era. China could abolish its *hukou* system that makes a hundred million Chinese citizens illegal migrants in their own land, with all the social and economic consequences that follow, and America’s billionaires could pay their taxes.

*Trade Wars are Class Wars* takes no prisoners. It’s heavy going for those not schooled in economics. It awaits its *Idiot’s Guide*, for Klein and Pettis carry an important message. Yet they are naive in believing that the ruling class is collectively sane enough to disinvest itself of its power and wealth. I favour George Orwell. As Winston closed *1984*, ‘if there was hope, it must lie in the proles ...’

**Glyn Ford**

### **It can’t go on like this**

**Diana Johnstone, *Circle in the Darkness: Memoir of a World Watcher*, Clarity Press, 2020, 436 pages, paperback ISBN 9781949762136, £20, ebook ISBN 9781949762143, £10**

Diana Johnstone was born during the New Deal period in Minnesota to a comfortable, but by no means affluent, family background. When she was 12 years old her parents divorced, and custody of Diana was given to her father, which probably accounts for her adventurous spirit and willingness to embrace new vistas and ideas. At that time Minnesota was solidly pro-Democratic and there was even a Socialist party and a Farmers-Labor party presence. The population of Minnesota then consisted of emigrant



Scandinavians and Germans plus 'hard-working' Northern Yankees. For most of her life the author worked in Europe and lived in a city she loved — Paris. She returned several times to Minnesota for family reasons, and to attend Minnesota University where she gained a PhD in French literature (prior to this she received a BA in Russian Area Studies). After her PhD, she took a teaching role at the University which she found most rewarding.

Johnstone's first steps into Europe and international politics, described at the beginning of *Circle in the Darkness*, were not free from the odd bizarre occurrence. Sleeping in a dormitory at Belgrade University and making lots of Yugoslavian friends, she became embroiled in a fracas with the Communist youth leader about her leaving a demonstration half-way through. The demonstration was about Trieste, which Yugoslavia and Italy both claimed. In fact she left the march so as not to incur the censure of the US embassy, who already thought she had 'gone native'.

Back on home ground she threw herself into the anti-Vietnam War campaign (she was a leading light in *US Women Strike for Peace*), convinced of the need for the truth about the vicious and barbaric nature of the war being waged against the Vietnamese people to be heard. Whilst teaching at the University of Minnesota, in 1970, she was an organiser of a campus strike against Nixon's invasion of Cambodia and the killings of students at Kent State University. Determined that the US public, who were nurtured on a diet of lies, should know the truth, she helped to establish a Community Contact scheme to get the message across. Marching and protesting against the war through the various urban centres of Minnesota, she lost what she refers to as her 'timid steps'.

By this time Johnstone was convinced that she wanted to be a foreign correspondent. She was rejected by Associated Press, but took a job in AP's library. It was at AP she met her future husband, Herb Altschull, who was appointed foreign correspondent to Berlin. Travelling alongside Herb acquainted her with the knowledge and experiences necessary for the role of foreign correspondent.

Returning to Paris, Johnstone continued her campaigning against the Vietnam War. Vietnam was a big issue in France, unsurprising given its history in Indochina. There she joined *'The Paris-American Committee to Stop War'* (PACS) and was arrested by the police at a demonstration against the war. She relates a pithy conversation with her arresting gendarme, who questioned the effectiveness of her actions. She replied that she did not know, but she knew it was the right thing to do. The degree of her involvement in PACS was rewarded by her appointment to the executive committee. She was also an originator of the scheme to have Vietnamese



speakers at Paris meetings, bringing together ordinary citizens of the two nations. Now domiciled in Paris but reporting on many other European states for such journals as *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Johnstone was kept busy as an independent commentator. She became the foreign correspondent for the American left publication *In These Times*.

While working in Paris during May 1968, Johnstone witnessed the commencement of street fighting between the Parisian students and the highly militarised riot police, the CRS. The fighting lasted several days, with strategic intervention from the trade unions. The mainly communist dominated unions joined the revolt, striking for better pay and conditions. President de Gaulle fled to a military base and it looked as if a revolution could be on the cards. But a huge pro-Gaullist march, and an agreement between striking workers and employers, promising better pay and conditions, placated the unions and pulled the rug from under the feet of the student revolt. The May Events continued to encourage a generation of young people to think more radically, although the author paints a picture of young 'revolutionaries' who had to attend to their shopping needs as a priority rather than join the demonstration. They must have had some effect on the composition of the new European Parliament, as the Greens formed a significant faction and allied with some small left parties, which made the Parliamentary debates more interesting. Johnstone applied to be press officer for the Greens and was successful, but it was not easy work given the quarrelsome nature of the group.

In Paris Johnstone was an acute observer of the Left's intellectual theorising and squabbling and she has quite a lot to say about what she calls 'the pendulum philosophers'. Freedom of speech and the right to publish material that questioned some of the facts associated with fascism sparked a fierce debate. In 1978, Robert Faurisson, a professor at Lyon University, wrote a letter to *Le Monde* in which he claimed that none of the Nazi concentration camps had gas chambers. There was such an uproar that a petition was circulated saying that academic freedom of speech must be upheld, however abhorrent the views expressed. Some 500 eminent signatures, including Chomsky's, led to another bout of mutual recrimination and criticism.

It is impossible to mention all the themes of Johnstone's reportage, but one that merits particular attention is her overarching opinion that there was a general decline of the Left from the 1970s onwards, partly due to the general voluntarism of some of the Left but also the willingness to be swept away by the rise of neo-liberalism and the consequent slavish adherence to policies emanating from the White House. In 1974, what Johnstone calls

'the last gasp of the revolutionary Left' occurred in Portugal with the demise of the Salazar/Caetano fascist republic. Perhaps events in Portugal illustrate the Left's ineptness with its factionalism, but the threat of NATO intervention validates the secondary reason to some extent – namely, a Communist Party which was a little too willing to accept the wishes of the Soviets, who had no desire to upset the strategic apple cart. In Europe the exposition of extreme left ideas and their failure to entice the working class led some to seek the avenue of violence as a way of provoking a response from the political and corporate élite. They thought this would in turn cause the populace to espouse 'revolution'. But, of course, it did the reverse. Johnstone notes the tragic killing of Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades, which ensured the failure of the 'historic compromise' between the Italian Communist Party and the Christian Democrats, and was perhaps the most destructive act of what the author refers to as 'The Hegemony of Revolutionary Romanticism'.

December 1979 saw Russian intervention in Afghanistan, the accession to power of Reagan and Thatcher, and Mitterrand's failure to enact the industrial democratisation of the 'Common Programme'. The period 1979 to 1987 was a time of acute superpower tension and could easily have started a nuclear war. At the time, organisations campaigning against nuclear weapons seemed to be the only ones aware of the dangers, but their message struck a chord amongst the young and the feminist movement in particular. In the end, however, it was superpower diplomacy which led, at least, to a temporary lull in the arms race. The problem for the Soviet Union was that competing in the arms race was having a severe impact on the standard of living for the Soviet population. Reagan, having commenced his relationship with the Soviet Union by branding it the 'Evil Empire', ended it with the withdrawal of cruise and SS20 missiles from Europe. Reagan still wanted to develop the 'Star Wars' initiative, which has further escalated the arms race: but, on the other hand, he was nearly bowled over by Gorbachev's plan for a nuclear-free world.

Johnstone makes it clear that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the accession of most of the former Warsaw Pact countries to its membership, NATO's role was really defunct. The solution was to give NATO licence to work outside its original remit and shoulder some of the 'burdens' of the United States' world empire. By this means NATO could strengthen further Washington's grip on global power. If required, NATO could interfere militarily in the affairs of states that were not members of that august body and who did not pay due reverence to the all-embracing power of the United States. A nation that could serve as a vindication of the

strategy conveniently arose in the shape of crumbling Yugoslavia and, in particular, Serbia, which still retained some old socialist and democratic embers from the Tito regime. Serbia was the largest state with the largest ethnic group and possessed a charismatic leader in the shape of Slobodan Milošević. All the details of this Balkan tragedy are eloquently and thoroughly researched and appear in Johnstone's monumental and forensic study, *Fools' Crusade*. On publication the book met with universal opprobrium from some of the usual defenders of the establishment: David Aaronovitch in *The Times* and Ed Vulliamy in *The Guardian*. But it was defended by Arundhati Roy, Tariq Ali, Ron Paul, and John Pilger. Civil wars are notoriously murderous, but in this case NATO had no cause to attack Serbia, which had done nothing to provoke aerial bombing of mostly civilians. The Kosovo outrages were held up as an example of Serbian violence, but time was to show them to be largely manufactured. Serbia was not the last to be shown the benevolent hand of NATO: Libya continues to receive the treatment.

There is much more in *Circle in the Darkness* about Diana Johnstone's personal life and achievements, for example her close relationship with her father and the book that they wrote together, *From Mad to Madness: Inside Pentagon Nuclear Planning* (see *Spokesman* 137). She has also written about Hillary Clinton in *Queen of Chaos: The Misadventures of Hillary Clinton*, a blistering attack on her politics and action in Libya, recalling her deplorable remarks on the death of Gaddafi, revealing a callous side to her personality.

Diana Johnstone has shown her bravery in facing up to the savageness of our present leaders and masters — she points out that the 'darkness' is closing in and that it needs the light of truthful reportage to push it back. *Circle in the Darkness* will stand as an historic explanatory text recording far too many failures of the Left. However, any criticism is meant to be constructive: she has much to say about how to put things right. On the environment she is hopeful that the movement led by Greta Thunberg can make a difference. As the running head on the final pages says, 'It can't go on like this'. Diana Johnstone has shown throughout her life that truth matters, and she must surely be an inspiration to all those journalists and readers who refuse to become the minions of the global and corporate élite.

**John Daniels**

## A tale of two cities

**Jenni Fagan, *Luckenbooth*, William Heinemann, 2021, 338 pages, ISBN 9780434023318, £16.99**

**Douglas Stuart, *Shuggie Bain*, Picador, 2020, 430 pages, ISBN 9781529019278, £14.99**

‘Social inequality is nowhere more ostentatious than at Edinburgh’, Robert Louis Stevenson claimed in 1878, and his *Picturesque Notes*, with their vertiginous backstairs descent from Parliament Close and the Judiciary to Cowgate and the Irish Quarter, from ‘neat clothes and conscious moral rectitude’ to ‘palsied houses on the brink of ruin, a crumbling human pigsty fit for human pigs’ faithfully distil some of that horror, although they flinch from entering into it too closely.

The same note of outrage at Scotland’s blighted urban spaces, in ‘Auld Reikie’ and elsewhere, the squalor and poverty of the working class ghettos and, increasingly, their dismal new town replacements, is one that has been struck, sustained and inhabited by wave upon wave of modern fictionalisers, inseparable in recent decades from the question of national identity and a long-delayed moral reckoning, and from which few of those in the vanguard of this latter day literary renaissance have cared to avert their gaze.

Even Miss Jean Brodie’s ‘crème de la crème’, passing in loose, Mussolini-inspired formation through the Grassmarket, have to contend with the sudden, implacable reality of unemployment and its attendant dehumanisation, a scene eerily reminiscent for this reviewer of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*:

‘It was Sandy’s first experience of a foreign country, which intimates itself by its new smells and shapes and its new poor ... She saw the slow jerkily moving file [outside a labour exchange] tremble with life, she saw it all of a piece like one dragon’s body which had no right to be in the city and yet would not go away and was unslayable.’

What separates the Brodie Set and Stevenson, with their mix of intellectual and creative pretensions, from most of the characters in *Shuggie Bain* and *Luckenbooth* is that they *can* go away, if only as far as the barred window of a nunnery, deluded martyrdom in the Spanish Civil War, or three hundred acres on Samoa, that second Scotland beset by its own

imperialisms. Extraordinary and fascinating as the paths taken by these individuals may be, Douglas Stuart has described the effect he was determined to achieve as the absolute antithesis of any kind of ‘poverty safari’, rather a sustained immersion in the deprivation, misogyny and homophobia of post-industrial Glasgow, and Fagan’s century-long conjuring trick – her fantastical nine-storey Edinburgh tenement, home to every species of predatory social power and anarchic resistance – is similarly, furiously dedicated to a stripping bare of systemic atrocity: ‘All the structures are guilty and built on beds of bones’. The system’s carceral spaces bore down hard on Fagan from the outset. ‘I was born here, / then a little while later I died’ is how she begins her desolate recreation on film and in the extended poem ‘Bangour Village Hospital’ of the psychiatric apartheid administered by the Edinburgh and District Lunacy Board, a history of institutional brutality, one-way trains (incoming only) and 566 unmarked graves, and precursor to the endless succession of social workers, care and foster homes whose sixteen year ‘experiment’ on her childhood is recounted as dystopian, quasi-totalitarian horror – ‘they grow me from a pinprick, an infinitesimal scrap of bacterium, study me through microscopes while wearing radiation suits and masks’ – in *The Panopticon*.

Fagan specialises in suprahuman feats of endurance and overcoming: her debut novel is a raw, unblinking testimony to the State’s remorseless surveillance of those the care regime has failed to bring to heel, a swelling, traumatised subclass of chronic young offenders its narrator Anais must detach herself from to avoid the fate spelled out, suddenly, as a counter to her raging energy, in the flat prose of a support worker’s report: ‘... the reality is that up to seventy per cent of residents leaving care do end up either in prison, or prostitution, mentally ill or dead’. The moment passes; the savageries multiply; whether or not Anais finds her way to a faerie land of Parisian bohemianism, the ‘daughter of an Outcast Queen ... on a flying cat’, the final page of the text won’t tell us but her mesmerising portrayal, like Stuart’s of Agnes Bain, the way both writers sing the primacy of character, however precarious, over circumstance, calls to mind Elena Ferrante’s contention that ‘The as yet unsurpassed force of literature lies in its capacity to construct vibrating bodies from whose veins anyone can drink’.

No-one in *Luckenbooth* or *Shuggie* falls prey to the kind of devouring melancholia and inertia that make James Thomson’s *City of Dreadful Night* so interminably defeatist: Fagan’s warrior caste of Gothic daemons, sexual outsiders and avengers vibrate so ferociously with anti-

establishment rage and transgressive desire they threaten to spin off into another world altogether, from which some of them indeed come, while Stuart's crippled communities resonate with the antagonisms and solidarities that somehow keep them afloat, tethered as they are by the weight of his scrupulous social realism – and by the wrecking ball of Thatcherism – to earth.

'Always find the place in each city with views – know the escape routes at all times', Fagan advises every aspiring 'Natural Born Itinerant' in the poem of that name. Glasgow's South Side in 1992, where Stuart's journey back to Shuggie's and his own childhood begins, offers scant prospect of such a vantage point, mired as it is in socio-economic degradation and the sickening materiality of the everyday. 'That morning his mind had abandoned him and left his body wandering down below' is a line that could come straight from Beckett's *Murphy*, except that Shuggie *has* escaped the ritual humiliations of the jobpath, at least as far as the rotisserie in Kilfeather's [sic] grocery and sexual exploitation by his decrepit fellow boarders. Stuart initiates the universal conflict by having his sixteen-year-old protagonist, 'pale and vacant-eyed under the fluorescent strip lights' strike back against the prospect of a lifelong captivity with a murderous intensity that would not be out of place in *Luckenbooth*: 'He pushed industrial skewers through each cold, dead bird and lined them up neatly in a row. They sat there, with their stubby wings crossed over their fat little chests like so many headless babies'. Nor does Shuggie's subversiveness quite stop there, remarkable in a figure of such enduring stoicism. 'On particularly low days he folded all types of his bodily discharge into the taramasalata', in direct retaliation for the condescension of the better-off and their progeny at the local hairdressing college whose elevation to something like economic entitlement has effectively barred the way to his own.

The novel never loses sight of the wider, tribal implications of a topography and a landscape wrenched into appalling new shapes by capitalism's and its local apparatchiks' contempt for human abjection – 'The black slag hills stretched for miles like the waves of a petrified sea ... Each street was a scarred field of burnt-out off-licences, dirty canals, and cars on bricks ... anything that kept the complaining masses from filing through the chamber doors was welcome' – and is tireless, never mawkish or pitying or gratuitous, in its recreation of the abysses of daily life, the desperate monetary calculations of women on weekly benefits shopping for their households, ripping coins from gas meters, retaining like Shuggie's mother at least a vestigial hold on outward appearances. 'The

matted mink coat gave her an air of superiority, and her black strappy heels clacked out a slurred beat ... The rubber tip had worn away from around the right heel, and although she had coloured the shoe in with an old bingo marker, the sharp metal nail scraped the floor with the screech of hard times.' Above all, though, it's the small, innumerable, often hopeless acts of defiance like Shuggie's that engage our compassion and optimism – a glue-sniffing hideaway in a pallet factory, replete with obscene anti-Thatcher graffiti; miners' sons launching bottles of piss, lighter fuel and branches at the Glasgow-Edinburgh train ('when the driver left fly his angry horn, they felt seen by the world, they felt alive'); an elderly woman mounting her morphined husband on his hospital deathbed. Sometimes, as in the Raymond Depardon photographs of '80s Govan and Maryhill that inspired Stuart, it's enough just to have the prowess to *exist*, each desolate, struggling human figure a reproach to the lowering *grisaille*. Shuggie, too, ends as he began, with a little Chaplinesque flourish of self-possession – 'He nodded, all gallus, and spun, just the once, on his polished heels'— before heading off with his unlikely moll into the sunset.

Earlier, Shuggie is found disconsolately exploring the North Side high rises where 'he would sit with his legs and arms through the breeze blocks and look out over the sandstone city all the way to Sighthill'. The 'black line on the horizon', where his dying mother is, conspires like everything around him to 'pin ... the heavy winter sky in place', just like her alcoholism pins her. Fagan by contrast announces from the outset that the fabulous monsters of her imagination, empowered as she has the guru-like William Burroughs – fresh from a legendary triumph at the '62 Edinburgh Writers' Conference – tell us by the 'relentless octopus of free thought', biologically, sexually and ontologically undaunted, will have no truck with captivities of any kind, although like the deathwatch beetles that bring down 10 Luckenbooth Close they must enter them to demolish them. Real power structures must indeed fall, those of the corrupt modernisers and philanthropists and 'psychopaths' of the housing associations responsible for terrorising whole sections of the population, decade after decade, their murderous impulses represented in the novel by the ubiquitous Mr Udnam, a child-killer possessed of every mechanism of social control and 'the serenity of a man entirely without conscience' – but who falls all the same. Retribution without remorse: the process begins with a patricide, and Fagan's opening image of the devil's corpse, abandoned to the elements on the storm-wracked sea front of his island lair while his daughter sets sail for the metropolis, horns at the ready, suggests anything is now possible.



## Outstanding record of resistance

**Cyril Pearce, *Communities of Resistance: Conscience and Dissent in Britain During the First World War*, Francis Boutle Publishers, 2020, 556 pages, hardback ISBN 9781838092825, £30**

In the 1960s, Cyril Pearce began a study of the First World War anti-war movement in his native Huddersfield, resulting in the publication of a book entitled *Comrades in Conscience: An English Community's Opposition to the Great War*. This led him to consider whether Huddersfield was unique in its opposition to that war, or if there were other places in Britain that had manifested as great – or greater – opposition. The result is the volume under review here, which is based on a vast amount of research into the anti-WW1 movement throughout Britain.

Cyril Pearce sought to ascertain whether the anti-war movement was significant, or a minor activity limited to a few areas, and to examine what occurred at a local level in the country as a whole. Although he constantly refers to the fact that the sources of information are sometimes defective, he has assembled a comprehensive account of the anti-war movement which is unlikely ever to be surpassed. He selects four particular hotspots of anti-war activity: Bristol, Croydon, Aberavon and Briton Ferry, and Letchworth. He considers London and Birmingham as Britain's biggest cities. He surveys Scotland. He then studies three heartlands of activity: Lancashire, Middlesex and the West Riding of Yorkshire.

In every district of Britain in 1914 there was majority support for the war, which, in many cases, took the form of mass fervour. Men rushed to enlist in the army. Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter, Christabel, abandoned their militant campaigns for women's suffrage and acted as recruiting agents for the armed forces. The opposition to war expressed by some Labour and Liberal MPs and their organisations was furiously rejected. James Keir Hardie, MP, was shouted down when he spoke out at Aberdare Market Hall and, after the meeting, was pursued by a hostile crowd to his lodgings.

*Communities of Resistance* focuses on two aspects of the opposition to war: the attitude adopted by organisations at meetings and in campaigns against taking up arms, and the stand taken by conscientious objectors.

It is clear that religious organisations and some political groups were at the heart of the anti-war movement: Quakers; millenarian Christian sects (bible students, Christadelphians and Plymouth Brethren); non-

conformists (Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists); the Independent Labour Party, some British Socialist Party branches, and some women's organisations. These were the main centres of anti-war opposition and were also the inspiration of many of the 20,000 conscientious objectors known to have taken a stand throughout Britain.

The number of conscientious objectors boomed when conscription was introduced in 1916. Men engaged in work essential to the economy and the war effort – miners, steelworkers, shipbuilders, engineers, farmers, etc., were not subject to call-up. This may explain why there were comparatively few conscientious objectors in mining areas and in centres of industry like Glasgow.

In order to ascertain the part played by political organisations in hotspots and heartlands of anti-war activity, Cyril Pearce has researched the state of political activity in much of Britain both before war broke out and in the post-war period. This is of interest not only in connection with anti-war activity but also in studying grass-roots political development in the country as a whole. Agricultural regions generally remained dominated by the Conservative Party. In cities and towns, where industry took off in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Liberal Party tended to take root.

In the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, a socialist movement began to develop – initially under the auspices of the Independent Labour Party (launched in Bradford in 1893) and offshoots of the Social Democratic Federation. *Communities of Resistance* records their growth or non-development in most places where they were significant.

Some of the hotspots, based on the considerable number of conscientious objectors who came forward, had only minimal left-wing development prior to the war. In Croydon, for example, most conscientious objectors were black-coated office workers who commuted to London. In Letchworth they were idealists attracted by the development of Britain's first garden town. In most areas the conscientious objectors were not, in the main, unskilled workers; they were men with skills, often middle class, and deeply influenced by religious beliefs.

The author richly fulfils his original objectives. He shows that there were many places in Britain that were equal to, or even surpassed, Huddersfield in anti-war activity. He makes it clear that, despite majority support for the war, the anti-war movement was not an inconspicuous minority activity but a significant feature of the history of the First World War. *Communities of Resistance* provides at the end a number of

appendices, listing anti-war activists who spent time in prison and had notable political careers thereafter; the number of conscientious objectors in every county; hotspots of activity; and maps showing where conscientious objectors originally lived.

The author has assembled an incredible amount of information on the anti-war movement and *Communities of Resistance* must become the outstanding record of the anti-WW1 movement in Britain. The individual experiences of numerous conscientious objectors are told, together with the threats and punishments that many suffered. This is a magnificent book, which is a tribute to the author's energy and skills – and an important record of a significant aspect of twentieth century British history.

*Stan Newens*  
February 2021

## Russell v. Russell

**Ruth Derham, *Bertrand's Brother: The Marriages, Morals and Misdemeanours of Frank, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Russell*, Amberley, 2021, 352 pages, hardback ISBN 9781398102835, £25**

John Francis Stanley Russell was born in 1865, nine months after his parents married. Both the Stanley and the Russell families were acknowledged, as were his father and grandfather, John Viscount Amberley and Lord John Russell respectively. His was an aristocratic lineage. Francis was a family name in both houses. Rachel Russell, Frank's sister, was born in 1868. Bertrand followed in 1872. By that time, the family were installed at Ravenscroft, a fine house in the hills above Monmouth in South Wales. One exquisite photograph reproduced here sees the young family taking tea on the veranda, prior to Bertie's arrival.

Tragedy struck in May 1874, when Frank, his parents Kate and John, and tutor, Douglas Spalding, were returning from Italy, where they had passed much of the winter in an attempt to improve John's health. On the way home, Frank complained of a sore throat. He had contracted diphtheria. Treatment at the hands of Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson restored young Frank to seemingly good health, but he was still infectious when the party returned to Ravenscroft. Rachel soon became ill, and Kate also. Two-year-old Bertie was sent away to protect him from infection. By early July, both Kate and Rachel were dead. John was heartbroken. He

struggled on for 18 months or so, succumbing in January 1876. Young Frank and infant Bertie were orphans.

John Amberley had made a will which left Frank and Bertie in the guardianship of Spalding, who was given 'sole control of their education and religious training'. He was to continue as the boys' tutor, paid £300 per annum, until Bertie reached 21 years of age. Spalding conducted some pioneering research into animal behaviour, in which Kate had assisted him. She also apparently consented to a sexual relationship with him, with her husband's agreement. Lord John, the boys' grandfather, took advice and, under threat of legal action, Spalding and Thomas James Sanderson, his co-executor, renounced probate. Lady John, the boys' formidable grandmother, and two other relatives were appointed guardians, and the young brothers came to live with her family at Pembroke Lodge, amidst the open spaces of Richmond Park, close by the River Thames.

Ruth Derham briefly outlines Frank's troubled childhood before moving on to his more positive experiences as a boarder at Winchester College, where he found supportive teachers *in loco parentis*. He progressed academically, albeit slowly in classics. When he was 17 or 18, Frank seems to have had a homosexual encounter with Lionel Johnson, fellow Wykehamist. In due course, his sexual appetite apparently contributed to his sending-down from Balliol College, Oxford. Ruth Derham probes at some length what scant evidence there is about this particular 'misdemeanour'. It wouldn't matter very much, except that allegations about Frank's appetite for young men would pursue him through a long and wretched legal campaign to free himself from his unfortunate marriage to Mabel Edith Scott, whose mother had an eye for Frank's wealth if not for the young man himself.

*Bertrand's Brother* focuses extensively on Frank's legal travails, recounting in detail the comings and goings in court. The popular press had a field day with Frank Russell, shortly after Oscar Wilde had been dispatched to Reading Gaol for 'gross indecency with certain male persons'. Eventually, after several appeals, Frank won against Mabel Edith at court and in the House of Lords. But his patience with the protracted proceedings to free himself from marriage to her was exhausted. He had established a steady relationship with Mary Morris, whose family worked for him, but that was cast aside as he disappeared to the United States with Mrs Mollie Somerville, the wife of a successful businessman and mother to three sons. Frank and Mollie sought divorces under the rather permissive laws of Nevada, and thus commenced Frank's steady descent to Holloway and imprisonment for bigamy, via trial by his peers in the

House of Lords. Ruth Derham recounts the story in careful detail, with all its elements of music hall and farce, as suggested by the book's sub-title.

Meanwhile, Frank pursued careers in business, law and London politics. Politically, he was not afraid to take on controversial causes, such as reform of the divorce laws. Despite sustained and hostile opposition in the House of Lords, Frank continued to argue his case, bearing out his brother's dictum: 'do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric'. Frank's political views and achievements merit more attention, which Ruth Derham plans to address in a separate volume.

Frank Russell was much more than Bertrand's brother, and we should be grateful to Ruth Derham for showing us why.

*Tony Simpson*

## Hammers, nails and big bullies

**David Vine, *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State*, University of California Press, 2020, 426 pages, 28 maps, paperback ISBN 9780520385689, £23**

History is littered with big bullies. Many of these ambitious men built, or inherited, empires. Whole nations can be bullies too – it's called imperialism. Paradoxically, often the loudest of the strongmen are the ones who fear most the rebellion of the weakest opponent, or the upstart rival. Enter the paranoid bully – the worst of the type, and found in many parts of the world at the present time. In their hands defence morphs into attack, even systemic aggression – which then provokes the very attack that justifies the military build-up. The hostility is often dressed up in ideological clothes (wrong religion; anti-democratic; terrorists; and so forth) but in the western world at least, the imperial urge is usually (mainly) a framework to promote, support and prolong the making of large sums of money.

There are of course many ways of writing about empire: from the strictly theoretical (Hobson, Lenin, Marx), the long-view historical (Gibbon) to the more literary, cultural even psychological approaches (Fanon, Said). While reading David Vine's excellent survey of the

American (ie US) empire, I've also been absorbing Jan Morris's three-volume masterpiece *Pax Britannica*, which is in a quite different vein, and makes a useful comparison. Beginning in 1837 (the accession of Queen Victoria), it takes the reader *up* to the very summit of British imperial intoxication (the 1897 Jubilee) and then *down* the long decolonising decline to Churchill's funeral in 1965. It's not even half the imperial story, yet such is the richness of the period detail, and the geographical breadth, that you feel you have lived inside it, witnessing both the atrocities and the arrogance, and the strangely theatrical performances (durbars, military processions...) enacted by an elite slice of a truly eccentric nation.

The *United States of War*, on the other hand, is an altogether drier survey: a telling of the whole history of America as an imperial nation, from its very cradle in 1776 (with its roots in the predecessor empires since 1492) to the present day. It makes sobering reading. The endpapers are entirely covered with a list of wars fought, invasions imposed and territories controlled.

Vine's approach is to look at the US's imperial reach through the lens of its military bases – both at home and abroad. The book builds on his own previous publications, notably *Base Nation: How US Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*, and *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the US Military Base on Diego Garcia*. In addition, he draws on important work by scholars such as Catherine Lutz, Chalmers Johnson, Joseph Gerson, Nick Turse and Andrew Bacevich. The astonishingly extensive list of credits reflects the fact that this is no doubt a summation of a life's engagement with this specific phenomenon. A distinctive feature of the work is the numerous maps showing US military bases (or forts) around the world at different historical periods. This greatly helps to grasp the huge scale of the operation and its global reach.

On one level the book is an ordered historical sweep, from the conquest of all the areas west of the eastern seaboard, right through the centuries to the forever wars of Bush, Obama and Trump. Threaded through the history is the geography: from the struggles to prize the continental US out of the hands of its indigenous peoples and gradually taking greater and greater control of lands, islands, even oceans, across large areas of the globe. There are Vine's own visits to bases such as the notorious Guantanamo; sections on the all-out wars for conquest in the Philippines; the annexation of Hawai'i; negotiations and arm-twisting to obtain basing rights in strategic locations such as the Azores; the downright theft of Guam; the 100 bases in Panama (invaded 24 times); the disgraceful wholesale takeover (with UK connivance) of Diego Garcia, with the evacuation of

the entire population; and of course the complex saga of the US relationship to the Middle East, its oil, its potentates, its colonial past. The story intersects with the great dramas of Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. Vine illuminates them all through his chosen lens of military strongholds.

But there is much more. His narrative, and analysis, offers a wealth of insights into the themes of empire. These begin with ‘Manifest Destiny’ and take us through dozens of permutations, side tracks and sub-currents all the way up to global dominance and Space Command (though this is only touched on, since a full account of the US role in space would be another book altogether).

Arguably foremost in the rationalisations and purposes of the network of bases is the desire to make way for commerce (trading posts in the early days, then the Open Door policy) and to protect it. The later part is more a story of enabling rapacious raids on stores of minerals and of course oil. The military is in all periods a close partner and protector of corporate America. Let us not forget that in recent decades many military operations, and especially the bases themselves with all their diverse services, are run by private corporations.

Vine is eloquent on the underlying attitudes and ideologies: notably deeply-rooted racism (ethnic cleansing on a huge scale, segregation in the military, slave labour conditions...); and inflated big-stick machismo (Jackson, T. Roosevelt, Trump). He is rightly attentive to indigenous and local population perspectives on expropriation, drawing especially on the work of Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. He demonstrates how the military presence breeds sexual violence, destroys the environment, and damages local economies.

Much in the imperial approach is inherited from British and other European empires; much is new, all-American. Notably there is the idea of non-colonial imperialism, especially after each of the World Wars, when paradoxically self-determination became a US-led crusade. In this model the Pentagon needed (for the most part) only to control small pieces of land (often islands) on which to construct their bases, so that sea, and later air, operations would have refuelling and logistics supply links. As costs rose, and local opposition grew, bases became ‘lily-pads’, easily set up or closed down at will – leaner, fitter, more flexible.

Crucial to Vine’s detailed panorama is the wider geo-political context: be it the two World Wars, the Cold War or the War on Terror. We see the number of bases rise and fall – and then rise again as the next set of enemies or rivals appears on the horizon. As with the British in the 19<sup>th</sup>



century, the US leaders' sense of global hegemony drives them to seize territories they may not in fact need, but which they fear may fall into the hands of their great rival/s. Paradoxically, the more dominant they become, the more they feel vulnerable to attack by far weaker forces. It's the paranoid side of empire building.

The one theme that in my view could have been rather more developed is that of political opposition to the bases (either individual installations or indeed the whole system), and of active resistance. It is not that there are no references. The author usefully surveys the varying responses (including active warfare) by the diverse indigenous nations or tribes to the incremental spread of the 'USA'. There is political pushback and popular protest in all continents, to a greater or lesser extent. Domestically, we hear of Democrat Presidential candidate Henry Wallace (pushed aside to make way for the unknown Harry Truman) who, in 1946, argued for United Nations control of the bases rather than the US. But I would have liked a deeper treatment, possibly through a few case studies, of the modern anti-bases network, and related peace and anti-imperialist movements. Having said that, Vine's concluding chapter offers a very useful array of policy measures that would begin to deconstruct the system.

Arguably the most serious impact of the system of bases is not even the gargantuan financial, human and material resources that are diverted from better uses. That is a serious enough critique. It is the diversion of *attention* away from non-military policies and solutions. As many of us have said so often, if all you have is a hammer then every problem looks like a nail. The great virtue of Vine's *tour de force* is to remind of how this colossal war-making toolbox was constructed over time, and the vital necessity of building coalitions at all levels and locations in order to dismantle it.

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