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GLÄRARD DE LACAZE-DUTHIERS,
CHARLES PÄGUY, AND EDWARD
CARPENTER: AN EXAMINATION OF NEO-
ROMANTIC RADICALISM BEFORE THE
GREAT WAR

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GÉRARD DE LACAZE-DUTHIERS, CHARLES PÉGUY, AND EDWARD
CARPENTER: AN EXAMINATION OF NEO-ROMANTIC RADICALISM
BEFORE THE GREAT WAR

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

The fin-de-siècle in Europe was a time in which, perhaps more than any other, thinkers framed social questions in religious, mystical, and particularly Christian, forms. The persistence, in the late 19th century, of Romantic narratives of sin and salvation coincided with the growth of organized social movements, with the result that many socialist thinkers saw the movement of history as one of redemption from some primal loss of unity. The three social thinkers which comprise this examination—Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, Charles Péguy, and Edward Carpenter—demonstrated an ambiguity between religious antecedents and engagement with contemporary problems, very like the more self-conscious fusions of tradition and change perpetrated by the artists and poets of the Modernist moment. All three shared a neo-Romantic preoccupation with man's conflicted nature—the presence of sin, suffering, and opposition to good which coexists with heroic integrity in the world—and all tried to resolve the problem using heterodox Christian modes of thought and argument, although their hoped-for paradises were temporal, secular, and socialist. Exploring their social projects and respective levels of success will clarify, on the one hand, how fanatical conservatism often takes the guise of avant-garde progressivism, but, conversely, how even the unconscious application of traditional, orthodox religious concepts can in some cases empower progressive, humanist social goals.

DEDICATION

In memory of my father, Robert A. Peterson, Jr., who first inspired my love for the study of the past, and whose open mind and clarity in communication I have tried, not without shortcomings, to emulate.

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I am deeply indebted to Professors Alan Grubb, Steven Marks, and Stephanie Barczewski—their friendly criticisms of the manuscript encouraged me to surpass my own expectations, and their more general academic and professional guidance has been invaluable to me over the past two years. I am especially grateful to my wonderful wife, Jenny, who reads nearly everything I write, and is both my toughest and most indulgent critic. *S.D.G.*

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INTRODUCTION

In his 1974 article, evocatively entitled “Can the Devil Be Saved?,” intellectual historian Leszek Kolakowski uses the title’s theme as a symbol of a larger, “fundamental question,” “neither a specifically Christian nor even a specifically religious” question: “Can the cosmic and historical drama be interpreted as a movement towards the ultimate reconciliation of all things? Will the evils of the human condition, our sufferings and our failures, reveal their redemptive meaning when seen from the vantage point of ultimate salvation?”¹ Within this very general formulation, Kolakowski shows the preoccupation that both religious and secular theodicies, such as Marxism, have in common. To put the question even more generally: is optimism concerning the possibility of future unity and understanding justified, or is it right to be pessimistic? Kolakowski believes that social thinkers are right to retain some notion of “original sin,” that is, that humanity’s attempts to solve all social and economic problems are likely to be dangerous and bring with them new kinds of suffering and inequality. At the same time, he counters, although skepticism is the correct position with regard to grand solutions, human societies need people who are confident in the power of progress—otherwise, “original sin” becomes an excuse for maintaining the status quo.²

The fin-de-siècle in Europe was a time in which, perhaps more than any other, thinkers framed social questions, like Kolakowski, in religious, and particularly Christian, forms. The persistence, in the late 19th century, of Romantic narratives of sin and salvation coincided with the growth of organized social movements, with the result that many socialist

¹ Leszek Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 75.

² *Ibid.*, 85.

thinkers saw the movement of history as one of redemption from some primal loss of unity. Jacques Barzun, in his classic treatment of Romanticism, goes to great lengths to defend Romanticism against the host of commonplace, and frequently negative, descriptors: “Romanticism is not a return to the Middle Ages, a love of the exotic, a revolt from Reason, an exaggeration of individualism, a liberation of the unconscious, a reaction against scientific method, a revival of pantheism, idealism, and Catholicism, a rejection of artistic conventions, a preference for emotion, a movement back to nature, or a glorification of force.”³ Certainly, many Romantics displayed one or more of these traits, but, according to Barzun, they are best defined by their common attempts to construct a new world and philosophy after the destruction of the Napoleonic Wars and the implosion of Enlightenment confidence, and by their shared presuppositions about the dual nature of man—capable of both “greatness” and “wretchedness.”⁴ Many Romantic thinkers rediscovered, with approval, Pascal’s image of man as a “thinking reed,” at once higher and lower than the animals.⁵

The period comprising the last 30 years before the Great War—various overlapping sections of which are described as the *fin-de-siècle*, the *Belle Époque*, or the neo-Romantic or Modernist moment, depending on one’s perspective—was marked by even more rapid and cataclysmic change (and by even fiercer reaction) than that of Romanticism’s first ascendancy a century earlier. Even as intellectuals, artists, and religionists were becoming disillusioned with the dry dogmatisms of 19th-century bourgeois materialism, determinism,

³ Jacques Barzun, *Classic, Romantic and Modern*, (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

and positivism, the tempo of industrialization and technological innovation increased.⁶ Industrialization and growing economic liberalization created large new wealthy classes, as well as many newly impoverished. Numbers of workers and petty bourgeoisie, like the shop-owning family of young Louis-Ferdinand Céline, found the struggle for financial security almost unbearable.

With the unprecedented ease and frequency of international travel and communication (partly due to imperial projects), this was also a time of greater ideological and religious pluralism. In this connection, it is becoming evident that simplistic theses of modern secularization and de-secularization are misleading, and that it was often *pluralization* of religious thought that provoked negative reactions, even among those who claimed they were combating “secularization.” Henri Massis—an adherent of Charles Maurras’ reactionary, royalist *Action Française* movement, and Charles Péguy’s primary interwar hagiographer—bemoaned the fact that, in the Great War, “At the very moment when technical progress seemed to be on the point of bringing about the unity of the human race, there occurred the most complete rupture of equilibrium that the world had ever known.”⁷ He blamed the Great War on the influence of “Asiaticism” (Eastern mystical philosophies) in Germany, and quoted Charles Maurras in support: “the human race is less united than it was under Titus, when all the civilized peoples were grouped under the *fasces*” or “than it was in the time of Saint Louis, when all the Christian peoples were confederated under the Triple

⁶ Steven G. Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 177.

⁷ Henri Massis, *Defence of the West*, trans. F. S. Flint, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 18.

Crown.”⁸ Massis concludes, dolefully, “[T]he facility of material communications, which was, according to democratic doctrines, to bring about a union of minds, has succeeded in making the world *uniform*, but not in *uniting* it.”⁹

New, pre-Freudian emphases on the inscrutability and complexity of the human psyche challenged bourgeois, mechanistic and rationalistic codes of morality. Referring to Franz Kafka, but also to Kafka’s contemporaries in general, Frederick Karl has observed that there is a “preponderance of ‘mad’ figures” in the Modernist literature of pre-Great War Europe—characters who are “naïve and mad, innocent and lacking the ability to live in the world.” He explains this preponderance as a reaction against the positivistic and pragmatic “new religion” of logic and rationalism: in defense of their countercultural values, the avant-garde “tendered a particularly savage and bitter god, the madman, as arbiter of taste, sensibility, and, often, ideology.”¹⁰ From André Gide’s illegitimate scion of an aristocratic line “Lafcadio,” whose gratuitous act of murder, a “crime without a motive,” is intended to confound and satirize the moralistic systems of his upper-class relatives, to Robert Musil’s Christ-like simpleton and sex murderer “Moosbrugger,” whose apparent innocence and inability to feel remorse for his brutal stabbing of a prostitute baffles the Viennese mandarins in their professional rigidity: fictional representations of mentally unbalanced, “un-civilized” outsiders became a commonplace of social criticism and rebellion in the early 20th century.

⁸ In *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ Frederick Karl, *Franz Kafka: Representative Man*, (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1991), 132.

Finally, the rise of the German nation, with its industrial, technological, and military prowess and high birth rates,¹¹ gave reason for apocalyptic anxieties about “decadence,” particularly in France and Austria, whose respective defeats and humiliations at the hands of the Prussians had provoked the creation of the French Third Republic and the Austro-Hungarian reconfiguration of the Austrian Empire. Many conservatives in France saw the defeat as retribution, divine or natural, for the sins of Republicanism and secularization. Ultra-Catholics, after the fact, interpreted the condemnatory words of the Marian apparition at La Salette (which were more ominous and less popular than the message of the Lourdes apparition) as a prediction of the debacle of 1871—the fall of Paris and the Commune.¹² For these cultural critics—exemplified by Léon Bloy, that “pilgrim of the absolute” whose quest took him from the Chat Noir to a visceral, reactionary Catholicism—France’s errors could only be expiated and corrected by a return to monarchy and Catholicism.¹³ Of course, many European thinkers, whether religious or secular, coped with the period’s dynamism and ideological uncertainties by turning to the absolute of nationalism.

In sum, as Péguy famously (and, I believe, correctly) observed in 1913, “[T]he world has changed less since Jesus Christ than it has done in the last thirty years.”¹⁴ Musil remembered 1913 similarly: “time was racing along like a cavalry camel. . . . But nobody knew where time was headed. And it was not always clear what was up or down, what was going

¹¹ Eugen Weber, *France: Fin de Siècle*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1986), 23.

¹² Richard D. E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1970*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), xiii.

¹³ See *Ibid.*, 1-19.

¹⁴ In David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 395.

forward or backward.”¹⁵ Musil, with the benefit of hindsight and of his scientific training under the great logical positivist Ernst Mach, was not as wary of the pace of modern civilization as was Péguy. In fact, Musil playfully mocked reactionary neo-Romanticism as “the well-known suffering caused by that familiar malady of contemporary man known as civilization” and “the ineffable wave of anemic romanticism and yearning for God that, for a while, the machine age squirted out as an expression of its spiritual and artistic misgivings about itself.”¹⁶ Yet for all this, Musil’s vast unfinished philosophical novel, *The Man without Qualities*, is in many respects a characteristic indictment of scientific overconfidence and, more importantly, a deeply sensitive attempt to construct some new “experimental utopia” following the collapse of liberal bourgeois values.¹⁷ Finally, speaking of the fin-de-siècle mania for both sensual and spiritual diversions of all kinds, Paul Valéry is paraphrased by Eugen Weber: “the very pace of modernity was like an intoxication: one had to increase the dose or change poisons.”¹⁸ One need look no further than Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Joris-Karl Huysmans’ *À rebours* to discover the cultural prominence of dandified aesthetes who experiment equally with philosophy, religion, literature, narcotics and love in order to escape *ennui* and to experience the *élan vital* which eludes modern man.

As had their Romantic predecessors a century before, many neo-Romantic artists and thinkers coped with the flux of modern life and organized their thoughts and experiences by recourse to older presuppositions, patterns of thought, or forms of expression—though their content was often radically progressive, and subversive of

¹⁵ Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities, Vol. I*, trans. Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike, (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105, 106.

¹⁷ See Lowell A. Bangerter, “Experimental Utopias: *The Man without Qualities*,” in ed. Harold Bloom, *Robert Musil’s “The Man without Qualities,”* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005), 5-19.

¹⁸ Weber, 32.

traditional ideologies. In the arts, for example, Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* was infused, according to one of the movement's principal aestheticians, with the "liturgical quality" of ballet, "something truly divine and mystic," and aimed, in the words of Diaghilev himself, at a totality, a wholeness "through which all the complexity of life, all feelings and passions, could be expressed apart from words and ideas."¹⁹ Similarly, the French composer Erik Satie wrote avant-garde, minimalist music inspired by liturgy and Gregorian chant, by the sound of the organ and the curve of the *ogives* at Notre Dame Cathedral, and by his readings in Rosicrucian and Gnostic philosophies. Marcel Proust offered up a spiritual autobiography whose sprawling narrative of lost innocence, instructive wanderings, and return to the community-affirming vocation of literature has aptly been compared to Augustine's *Confessions*.²⁰ And T. S. Eliot, perhaps Modernism's most famous model of tradition-in-the-service of the avant-garde, self-consciously wrote that "the most individual parts of (a poet's) work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."²¹

The three figures which comprise this examination—Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, Charles Péguy, and Edward Carpenter—were not primarily artists (though two of the three were poets of varying but not inconsiderable talent and originality, and the other a Symbolist critic of art and literature). Rather, it is in their social thought, a field to which all three aspired, that I find the ambiguity between religious antecedents and engagement with contemporary problems that so pervaded their neo-Romantic, Modernist epoch. All three

¹⁹ In Marks, 180, 181.

²⁰ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994), 83.

²¹ In S. Musgrove, *T. S. Eliot and Walt Whitman*, (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1970), 9.

shared the preoccupation, which Barzun identified in Romanticism, with man's conflicted nature—the presence of sin, suffering, and opposition to good which coexists with heroic integrity in the world—and all tried to resolve the problem using heterodox Christian modes of thought and argument, although their hoped-for paradises were temporal, secular, and socialist. The ways in which fin-de-siècle social thinkers employed traditional Christian forms and concepts were often less conscious, and, perhaps for that reason, less caricatured than the more self-aware invocations of the artists. Exploring their various social projects and levels of success will further clarify, on the one hand, how fanatical conservatism often takes the guise of avant-garde progressivism—witness Céline, Stravinsky, Cocteau and many others—but, on the other hand, how even the unconscious application of traditional, orthodox religious concepts can sometimes empower progressive, humanist social goals.

Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers is by far the least historically consequential of the three. A prolific but minor art critic for the Symbolist review *La Plume*, Lacaze-Duthiers was a self-proclaimed anarchist who, with André Colomer, founded the “Artistocracy” movement. The “Artistocrats,” like other extreme individualistic anarchists, lauded the criminal activities of the Bonnot Gang, attempted to locate the roots of such “illegalist” actions in the writings of Henri Bergson, and were something of an influence on later artistic avant-gardes such as the cubists and the futurists. Lacaze-Duthiers was the primary theoretician of the movement, and, interestingly, his social and aesthetic thought was originally intended to have strong democratic implications. He hoped that, eventually, all people would obtain membership in the commonwealth of “artists.” But Lacaze-Duthiers was too enamored of the artistic prowess of the Romantic martyr—a figure necessarily opposed in his own life and vindicated only posthumously—to be a true democratic, universalist thinker.

Charles Péguy, another French socialist with anarchist and oppositional inclinations, was largely overlooked in his own lifetime, though he enjoyed widespread fame after his death at the front in the first days of the Great War. His religious poem, *The Portal of the Virtue of Hope*, has seen more than sixty editions in France. As he liked to remind his intellectual friends later, Péguy grew up in relative poverty in Orléans, where his widowed mother and grandmother worked as chair menders. Performing exceptionally well in his early schooling, Péguy was admitted to the *École Normale Supérieure* where, like so many other fin-de-siècle *Normaliens*, he fell under the influence of Lucien Herr and became a socialist. As a student, he participated energetically in pro-Dreyfus rallies, and then spent most of his brief adulthood editing and writing for his eccentrically socialist *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*. For Péguy, the goals of Christian salvation and socialist salvation—how to admit all to heaven, and all to the future earthly utopia—were explicitly intertwined. From an early age, Péguy had reacted strongly against the Catholic doctrine of eternal punishment, and his socialist writings are full of insinuations that “the Harmonious City” will reject no one. Yet his later writings, like those of Lacaze-Duthiers, increasingly emphasize the necessary and eternal opposition that will meet the Romantic hero (in Péguy’s case, the French nation).

Edward Carpenter, the English advocate of back-to-nature simplicity, Walt Whitman, Hinduism, and homosexual encounters between social classes, also conceived of the socialist millennium, and of humanity’s progress towards it, in distinctly Christian-Romantic ways. Although Carpenter attributed much of his philosophic outlook to his readings of Whitman, the *Bhagavat Gita*, and English transpositions of Marxist thought, in fact his narrative of lost unity, of educative sufferings and self-knowledge, and of universal

return to the One, owed a greater debt to the culture of liberal Anglicanism and Romanticism in which he was brought up.

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The process by which Carpenter, an Englishman, introduced himself into a study originally intended to focus exclusively on French thinkers was gradual. As I read Carpenter's long prose poem *Towards Democracy*, for another project, I was struck by the incredible similarities in style and content to the religious poetry of Péguy. Both are early adopters of free verse, like Whitman; both write about monistic fusions of physical and spiritual values, again like Whitman; and both rely on explicit formulations of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, much more than does Whitman, to support and elaborate their monism. Carpenter was famously and very consciously inspired by *Leaves of Grass*, whereas no connection with Péguy has been conclusively proven—but Whitman was very popular in Péguy's milieu and the similarities are great enough that some have been tempted to posit conscious influence.²²

Upon further examination, I found that there are many more instances of neo-Romantic ambiguity in Carpenter's social thought than just his appropriation of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. I also realized that the English fin-de-siècle scene, in general, was an almost necessary foil and complement to the French: thrust together politically and diplomatically near the end of the *Belle Époque*, they had been cultural allies for much longer, both seeing themselves, for better or worse, as the true inheritors of Roman and Western civilization against the more conflicted, "Eastern" cultures of Germany and Russia, and

²² See P. M. Jones, "Whitman in France," *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Jan., 1915), 1-27.

against the imperfect image of the East formed by colonial encounters. Finally, Carpenter's inclusion is perhaps a function of my own neo-Romantic need for teleology, for "cosmos in chaos," since, in my opinion, his thought is the most perfectly hybrid of the three—the most productive synthesis of orthodoxy and revolution—and hence a fitting conclusion to the essay.

In terms of the Christian-Romantic theodicies and salvation narratives that support each of their socialist projects, I will argue, Lacaze-Duthiers and Péguy are both "Manichean," emphatic of the Romantic need for suffering, evil, and opposition, and hence pessimistic about the possibility of universal reconciliation. Carpenter, on the other hand, although his redemption narrative also commits the traditional Christian heresy of the *felix culpa*, making sin necessary for the greater good it paradoxically activates, is more "neo-Platonist" than "Manichean." For Carpenter, evil is not *eternally* necessary in order to define, by opposition, the good. Carpenter is sincerely, and perhaps naively, optimistic in his belief that all persons and all beliefs will eventually recognize their common origin and return to unity. Even criminal activity should be seen as a sign of dissatisfaction with the present, and as the harbinger of eventual reconciliation.²³ Opposing beliefs should be investigated, thought Carpenter, not to better offset the single, true belief, but to find the truth latent in each one.

Though my examination focuses on the relationship between tradition and change in the period before the Great War, let me suggest its relevance to the longtime debate concerning the intersection between the Great War and the birth of modernism. Jay Winter

²³ Edward Carpenter, *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*, (London: Swan, Sonnenschein and Co., 1908), 100-105.

has famously argued, in opposition to Paul Fussell, that “the rupture of 1914-1918 was much less complete than previous scholars have suggested,” and that “the history of modernism” is “much more complicated than a simple, linear divide between ‘old’ and ‘new’ might suggest.”²⁴ Winter echoes Roger Shattuck’s now-inescapable contention that modernism was a pre-war phenomenon, and amplifies the argument for continuity by demonstrating the traditional, religious ways in which Great War survivors mourned. Focusing on individual and communal expressions of grief, Winter argues that the reversion to traditional forms of remembrance and cultural representation was not necessarily a conscious rejection of modernist ambiguities and uncertainties, but a result of private searches for meaning and consolation after so much seemingly senseless tragedy. “The strength of what may be termed ‘traditional’ forms in social and cultural life, in art, poetry, and ritual,” writes Winter, “lay in their power to mediate bereavement.”²⁵

From the perspective of my research, the ways in which traditional, neo-Romantic forms of thought and expression “mediated” the discomfort caused by the earlier, lesser cataclysms of the fin-de-siècle certainly seems to indicate that these coping methods have a persistent power. But not everything, after the war, remained the same. With only the most cursory look at the ideologically-motivated violence that lay ahead, I would suggest that, to the extent that Christian theodicies persisted in interwar thought, the “Manichean,” oppositional strain of neo-Romantic social thought became more frantic, more menacing, and predominated over the more optimistic, “neo-Platonist” one—not without reason, given the suffering endured by so many.

²⁴ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

CRITICISM, COMMUNICATION, AND “THE CRISIS OF THE LIBERAL EGO”: THE ANARCHIST AESTHETICS OF GÉRARD DE LACAZE-DUTHIERS

It is customary to preface treatments of anarchism with an acknowledgement of the term’s almost prohibitive plurality of applications.²⁶ Due to its doctrinal fluidity and inherent hatred of authority and rigidity, “anarchism”—in its fin-de-siècle heyday—was invoked by earnest revolutionaries, bohemian dandies, back-to-nature Romantics, egoists, down-and-outers, and shallow “bourgeois youth” who, in the condemnatory words of Peter Kropotkin, only sought “liberation from the concept of good and evil.”²⁷ This miscellany of adherents is usually grouped into “two strands”²⁸: those who espoused the Kropotkin-inspired majority position of communitarian harmony, and the heterodox individualists, concerned only with self-affirmation in the present. Jesse Cohn writes that anarchism’s individualist tendencies are “marginal,” and, serving as the inspiration for terrorism and “propaganda by the deed,” those tendencies “[bear] little relation to the socialist mainstream of anarchism,”²⁹ while Alexander Varias speaks of “a great gap” separating communitarian and individualist anarchists.³⁰

These binary definitions certainly help to categorize diverse brands of anarchism, but the relationship between individualistic and communistic anarchism is complex, and cannot

²⁶ See, for example, Alexander Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives During the Fin de Siècle*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 1-8; Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 12; and Noam Chomsky, “Introduction,” in Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, trans. by Mary Klopper, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), vii.

²⁷ Quoted in John G. Hutton, *Neo-Impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1994), 53.

²⁸ Hutton, 53-54.

²⁹ Jesse Cohn, *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, Politics*, (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 15.

³⁰ Varias, 4.

always be charted between these poles. Richard Sonn has implied, for instance, that the terrorist martyrs of the 1890's (sometimes thought of as the last blundering manifestations of anarcho-individualism before the strategic shift to syndicalism³¹) were not consistent individualists at all, in that they sacrificed their lives for an abstraction, an ideal-future vision of collective humanity.³² And Daniel Guérin, perhaps more than any other historian of anarchism, has downplayed the differences between the two strains, emphasizing the individualistic elements in Bakunin and Kropotkin's philosophies, while pointing to the egoist Max Stirner's (occasional) acknowledgements of man's social needs. "When one looks more deeply into the manner," Guérin writes, "the partisans of total freedom and those of social organization do not appear as far apart."³³

In the aesthetic realm, which famously subsumed politics for many fin-de-siècle artists and anarchists,³⁴ the individual-collective dichotomy corresponds to conflicts such as Symbolism vs. *Art Social*, Idealism vs. Realism, esoteric *formal* innovations vs. intelligible content, and the general problem of the function of the avant-garde. In the 1890s, many Symbolist poets called themselves anarchists, feeling that their crusade against conventions such as rhyme and meter was comparable to the individualist anarchists' quest for total freedom.³⁵ The Symbolists, following Baudelaire's studied dandyism, and informed by Barrès' *Culte du Moi* and Stirner's egoism, preferred obscure and solipsistic dream states over attempts to communicate with others, and rejected the possibility that common people could

³¹ Jean Maitron, *Histoire du Mouvement Anarchiste en France (1880-1914)*, (Paris: Societe Universitaire d'Editions et de Libraire, 1951), 241.

³² Sonn, 264-266, 289.

³³ Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, trans. by Mary Klopper, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 4.

³⁴ See Sonn, ch. 8, "Literary Anarchism: The Aestheticization of Politics," pp. 211-236; also Cohn, 133.

³⁵ Ali Nematollahy, "Anarchism and Literature in France, 1870-1900," (Ph.D. Diss., City University of New York, 2001), 81-88. See also Varias, 136.

either understand or produce true art. The aesthetic theories of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, by contrast, emphasized the need to wrest the production (and appreciation) of art from the elite, and called for an art that was accessible, realistic, and social.³⁶

This latter dichotomy has a larger context. As much as mainstream Marxists may at times have wanted to believe it, these contradictions are not restricted to the anarchist brand of socialism. The analogous question of the role of “declassed” bourgeois theoreticians in the spontaneous, inevitable movement of the mass—“word” vs. “deed”—is a stone on which numerous permutations of Marxism have stumbled. A. James Gregor, speaking of Lenin’s emphasis on the need for a theoretically pure, revolutionary elite, observes that “in all of this one cannot help but see the features of the hero in history—the role of the committed, moral, sacrificial leader of masses, without whom, all the inevitabilities of history come to nought. Whatever the pretended rationale, Sorel’s warrior elite makes its appearance and shapes the course of history.”³⁷ To quote Guérin once again, “Relations between the masses and the conscious minority constitute a problem to which no full solution has been found by the Marxists or even by the anarchists, and one on which it seems that the last word has not yet been said.”³⁸

Perhaps no anarchist thinker sustained an uneasy equilibrium of individualism and collectivism, self and society more systematically than the art critic Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers—both in his aesthetics and, by explicit extension, in his politics. Lacaze-Duthiers began his career as an art critic for the Symbolist review *La Plume*, and was later the primary

³⁶ Nematollahy, 23-64.

³⁷ A. James Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 123.

³⁸ Guérin, 38.

theoretical force behind the “Artistocracy” movement, which began in 1906 with the publication of his *L’Ideal Humain de l’Art*. Artistocracy, with its organ *L’Action d’Art* edited by André Colomer, was, along with Libertad’s “illegalist” *L’Anarchie* and Sebastian Faure’s *Le Libertaire*, one of the few self-asserting departures from the general trend in anarchism towards organization, and it influenced modernist avant-gardes such as Cubism, Futurism, and post-war Surrealism.³⁹ Lacaze-Duthiers’ thought borrowed heavily from Oscar Wilde, Nietzsche, and Max Stirner, and, as time progressed, became increasingly dominated by the Stirner-ean component.⁴⁰ But the foundational documents of Lacaze-Duthiers’ system—especially *L’Ideal Humain de l’Art* and *La Decouverte de la Vie* (1907)—are marked, despite their implied elitism and individualism, by an optimistic belief in the complementarity of the person and the common good, and in the potential of all people to share in this harmony.

Lacaze-Duthiers later remarked that he had, in fact, first intended Artistocracy as “a form of democratic renewal.”⁴¹ Further, Florian-Parmentier, a Symbolist poet and critic whose works appeared in the *Action d’Art* bookstore,⁴² also remarked on the egalitarian impulse of Lacaze-Duthiers’ early manifestoes. Even though the Artistocrat, according to Florian-Parmentier in his comprehensive account of fin-de-siècle literary movements, must live “‘in beauty,’ outside of laws, religions, morality and politics,” and though he “recognizes no other authority than his conscience,” nevertheless, “he differs from the Nietzschean

³⁹ Jerrold Siegel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*, (New York: Viking, 1986), 370; and Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 154. See also Antliff’s article “Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism: The ‘Aestheticism’ of the *Action d’Art* Group, 1906-1920,” *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1998), 101-120; and Jean Maitron’s treatment of the illegalists on pp. 381-409 of *Histoire du Mouvement Anarchiste*.

⁴⁰ Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, 139; and Sonn, 27.

⁴¹ In Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, 139.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 137.

‘over-man’ in that he refuses to take part in an ‘elite.’” The ranks of the Artistocracy, concludes Florian-Parmentier, are theoretically open to all, from the wealthiest noblemen to the dregs of society: “*any man* can be regenerated if he follows the law of the Beautiful, if he realizes the beauty in his heart [*italics mine*].”⁴³

Florian-Parmentier’s conception of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* as necessarily anti-democratic, and his portrayal of the relationship between Nietzsche and Lacaze-Duthiers as antagonistic are, we shall see, misleading and simplistic. Still, he rightly notes Lacaze-Duthiers’ early emphasis on universal, classless potential. Florian-Parmentier, being a Symbolist himself, actually condemns these egalitarian aspirations, and praises the movement for its recent departure from them. To want to communicate one’s faith, he writes, “is the eternal error of the deluded and sincere.”⁴⁴ Fortunately, most of the Artistocrats have learned that the masses do not have the *vision* necessary to become original, self-creating individuals. They now know that “only artists are visionaries.”⁴⁵

Doubly marginal—as an individualist after the shift to syndicalism, yet as a closet communitarian among individualists—Lacaze-Duthiers was well placed to attempt a philosophical reconciliation. And though his democratic tendencies were rather inconsequential historically (it was his more elitist, vanguardist pronouncements that would influence the Cubists and Futurists), the project is valuable, on the level of purest theoretical concerns, both for its unique clarifications of the more prominent thinkers with whom he engaged, and also for its semi-coherent resolution of a perennial socialist contradiction.

⁴³ Florian-Parmentier, *La Littérature and l’Epoque: Histoire de la Littérature Française de 1885 à nos jours*, (Paris: Eugène Figuière et Cie, 1913), 225-226.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

But Lacaze-Duthiers' venture is more than a contribution "from nowhere" to a narrow anarcho-socialist debate. It is, from a broader cultural perspective, significant as one symptom among many (but an especially characteristic one) of the Belle Époque's obsession with merging subject and object, artist and art, self and society, intuition and intellect, action and reflection—all oppositions that had allegedly been created by the materialism of the bourgeois, liberal order. From the "liberation" from positivism famously afforded by Bergson,⁴⁶ and his use of the category of intuition to call for an "open society" based on love and sympathy, to Proust's long, sorrowful, but eventually successful quest to escape "the tedium of being confined in one's skin"⁴⁷—the intellectuals of the avant-guerre were possessed of a neo-Romantic confidence that man was not alone in the world, that intuitive communication with others (and, accordingly, with an artwork) was possible.

Finally, as we shall see, Lacaze-Duthiers' reconciliatory attempt has a current and nearly universal relevance—in that it clarifies the potential dangers of wanting to construct oneself as a daring, spurned visionary, while simultaneously claiming to represent the needs and desires of the many. The convictions that "I am right because I am alone," and yet that "I am right because I am in the majority," are, of course, ultimately incompatible, and radical thinkers who employ this dialectic often escape the contradiction only by privileging the former argument over the latter. Lacaze-Duthiers would seem ultimately to follow this trajectory, favoring self over society, the individual over the collective, without renouncing

⁴⁶ See Raïssa Maritain's account of the effect Bergson's lectures had on her and her husband, Jacques: "Winter was passing away," she writes; "spring was coming." Raïssa Maritain, *We Have Been Friends Together*, trans. by Julie Kernan, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1943), 83-85. See also H. Stuart Hughes' seminal treatment of the "revolt against positivism" in Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 33-66.

⁴⁷ Marcel Proust, *The Guermantes Way (In Search of Lost Time, Vol. 3)*, trans. by Mark Treharne, (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 495.

his views on the absolute, universal nature of political and aesthetic goods. In so doing, he undercut the ethical potential of anarchism's alleged pluralism, and provided one of the theoretical models for fascism, terrorism and other Romantic individualisms that impose their truth claims on others.

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In Lacaze-Duthiers' first manifesto, *L'Idéal Humain de L'Art*, he spends the bulk of the text defining "art," not introducing his neologism "Artistocracy" until page 72 of 97. His style is not slavishly systematic, but rather aphoristic—full of repetition yet with gradual amplifications of meaning. Some of what he writes would seem at first to fit snugly into the framework of the aesthetes and individualist anarchists of the 1890s, of whom John G. Hutton writes that they "drew upon often ill digested snippets of Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Stirner...to invoke a world of pitiless struggle in which all had the potential for freedom but only few superior individuals had the courage to seize it."⁴⁸ Lacaze-Duthiers held that "art" includes much more than works of literature or painting; art is, most importantly, *action*: a life lived originally, self-consciously, and deliberately without regard for convention.⁴⁹

He professed the almost common view, by his time, that "ethics is only the realization of aesthetics." Those who do not live this way, those who are not *with* the practitioners of an aesthetic lifestyle, are necessarily *against* them, and this includes "the majority of men."⁵⁰ To be truly "human" is to be artistic; therefore, the mediocrities (those

⁴⁸ Hutton, 54.

⁴⁹ Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, *L'Idéal Humain de l'Art: Essai d'Esthétique Libertaire*, (Reims: Bibliothèque de la "Revue Littéraire de Paris et de Champagne," 1906), 7-9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-32, 36.

who go about their lives unthinkingly observing bourgeois “mœurs”) are not even human.⁵¹ We ought to worship beauty, he continues, and we find this beauty by observing our own deliberate deeds; and, because self-conscious, life-affirming deeds are beautiful, they are necessarily moral.⁵² “No law contradicts the development of the person,” he writes, and the one who has developed his life into an artwork has the right to venerate his own life as divine. Only mediocrities separate life from art, self from god. True artistic man is the creator of his own feelings, even of his own soul.⁵³ “The genius” makes his own rules; he is in possession of himself and knows what he wants.⁵⁴ Further, the creator should be “without pity for mediocrities.”⁵⁵

Compare all this to Laurent Tailhade’s famous praise of Vaillant’s terrorist attack on the Chamber of Deputies—it mattered not whether a few “vagues humanités” were killed, so long as it was a beautiful and individualistic deed.⁵⁶ One is reminded, even, of the thoroughgoing egoism of Zo d’Axa, who wrote that “in sum, I am sure of nothing save that one must live for Oneself: to live in joy, to live in battle, to give oneself to the present so completely that the future no longer matters.”⁵⁷ Unlike d’Axa, though, Lacaze-Duthiers believed that the artistic minority *should* be conscious of others and of the future of the collective. Still, when this concern appears in the text, one could argue that it is undercut by

⁵¹ Ibid., 46.

⁵² Ibid., 53-54.

⁵³ Ibid., 55-56.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 64, 83.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁶ Sonn, 257.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Sonn, 16-17.

elitism and paternalism. He writes, “This elite exerts a happy influence. It directs the rest of humanity.”⁵⁸

Further, he seems to imply that, even under the direction of the elite, not many mediocrities will be saved. Art will struggle against ugliness and use it, in order to demonstrate the aesthetic and ethical superiority of its “ploutocratie.” With an increasing religiosity, Lacaze-Duthiers prophesies that, in the end, “Each reaps according to his works: the ones, derision, the others, admiration.”⁵⁹ Despite efforts to avoid it, he skirts dangerously close to an aesthetic Manichaeism that makes the existence of ugliness and fallen men *necessary* in order to distinguish the beautiful, glorified few. He even implies that the sub-human mediocrities are somehow *incapable* of truly living, and are hence predestined to their damnation: “des médiocres,” he defines at one point, as those who “have never lived and *will never live* [italics mine].”⁶⁰ Small wonder that the Futurist Gino Severini, who associated with the *Action d’Art* project early on and saw them as his philosophical allies, remembered that

what we are dealing with here is a special anarchism; it was a movement, in any case, which placed the social dimension behind the aesthetic in problems concerning humanity....[T]hey used to say there were no classes in society, there were only those who were for or against beauty. In the first category belonged men of free spirits...in the second group were spirits made for enslavement....In opposition to democratic ideas of equality [the *Action d’Art* group] left these aphorisms of the ‘T’ integral: ‘All men are not equal.’ ‘There do not exist two identical human beings’....At this time our young friends...knew of Nietzsche...from whom they did not deny their paternity....‘Long live violence against everything which renders life ugly’ was their battle cry.⁶¹

But all this is to emphasize only one aspect of Lacaze-Duthiers’ fluid system. His elitism is mitigated, his individualism partially reconciled with collectivism by his inclusive

⁵⁸ Lacaze-Duthiers, *L’Ideal Humain de l’Art*, 58.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶¹ Quoted in Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, 138.

ideas of what constitutes art, and by his then-revolutionary notion of “criticism” as audience participation in the creative process. Lacaze-Duthiers explicitly rejects the solipsism of the Symbolists, asserting that art that is “anti-social,” “made for a small number,” or that “is not popular” is false and narrow.⁶² “Art is social,” he writes; “it is not indifferent.”⁶³ What good are masterpieces, he provocatively asks, without men “to understand them, to love them?”⁶⁴ Yet he does not embrace the “social art” movement, either. As did Kropotkin, in fact, he believes that art should be neither basely propagandistic, nor despairingly realistic, nor uselessly subjective—it should contain both the real and ideal, because that is truest reality.⁶⁵ Art’s purpose is not to set the ideal against the real, but rather to “discover, in the real, the ideal.”⁶⁶ He repudiates the effete, subjectivist dreaming of Symbolism even more explicitly in his next work, *La Découverte de la Vie*: “Today...we should not write for an elite. We no longer take refuge in mystery. *The dream is dead*....Our obligation is to be, more than ever...*precise* in our assertions [italics mine].”⁶⁷

Unlike other individualist anarchists, such as Remy de Gourmont, Laurent Tailhade, and Zo d’Axa, moreover, he does not think that the only valuable, realizable goal is individual, internal harmony. On the contrary, harmony with others, and with nature, is a necessary prerequisite to harmony with oneself.⁶⁸ In fact, “Art” is synonymous with “love,”

⁶² Lacaze-Duthiers, *L’Ideal Humain de l’Art*, 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁵ Nematollahy, 55-56.

⁶⁶ Lacaze-Duthiers, *L’Ideal Humain de l’Art*, 25.

⁶⁷ Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, *La Découverte de la Vie*, (Paris: Société D’Éditions Littéraires et Artistiques, 1907), 272.

⁶⁸ Lacaze-Duthiers, *L’Ideal Humain de l’Art*, 15.

and stands for “the solidarity by which man knows himself in harmony with everything that exists.”⁶⁹

Lacaze-Duthiers’ belief that life itself is every person’s primary artwork also has obvious democratic applications. Art is not “the privilege of an elite.” Because every act can be a work of art, as long as it is done deliberately and self-consciously, “All men should be artists.”⁷⁰ This is why Lacaze-Duthiers can proclaim that “the artist and the worker, the peasant, the miner, are creators,” whose various jobs actually serve the same exact purpose: the glorification of man and his artistic faculties. This individualist, then, has found a way to answer Bakunin’s call for the destruction of the boundary between manual and intellectual labor. Bakunin wrote, in his *Revolutionary Catechism*, that “the artificial separation between manual and intellectual labor must give way to a new social synthesis. When the man of science performs manual labor and the man of work performs intellectual labor, free intelligent work will become the glory of mankind, the source of its dignity and rights.”⁷¹ For Lacaze-Duthiers, manual laborers are capable of intellectual work at the same level as that of the artists proper. In order to become artists, it is only necessary that they act, not mechanically, but purposefully—with a “sincere and living” effort. This kind of “egoism,” incidentally, is endorsed by Bakunin’s more communal conception of anarchism. In *God and the State*, the great revolutionary writes that “the liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has *himself* recognized them as such, and not because they have

⁶⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 57-58.

⁷¹ Michael Bakunin, *Revolutionary Catechism*, <http://marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1866/catechism.htm>, accessed 9/11/2009.

been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatever.”⁷² In other words, for Bakunin as for Lacaze-Duthiers, the truly free man (the artist), may at times find it as expedient to observe prevailing rules as to reject them, but he must above all live intentionally.

The most crucial component of Lacaze-Duthiers’ egalitarian collectivism is his concept of “criticism.” By admiring, questioning, or simply attempting to understand a work of art—by “criticizing”—according to Lacaze-Duthiers, the viewer participates in the production of art. Audience criticism is itself a distinct artwork, elevating the viewer to a more deliberate, self-conscious lifestyle. In a turn of phrase that he will repeat again and again throughout his early manifestoes, he asserts that “*to admire is to create a second time* [italics mine].... It is to collaborate in the work of the creator.”⁷³ The Artistocracy—even though it includes actual, technical makers of art, alongside those who only admire and critique that art—is, in fact, a democracy, because “anyone who admires a work is an artist.” Lacaze-Duthiers insists that the two should be seen as equals in the relationship, and seems to want to preclude the charge that there could be even an implicit, patronizing division between artist and audience—“There is no intermediary between the author and the mob: they sympathize.”⁷⁴

Criticism resolves the tension between Symbolist subjectivism and the grounded objectivism of the more socially conscious anarchists. Lacaze-Duthiers seems to believe that each artist-critic creates, with criticism, a modified, unique work of art in his own mind, but at the same time communicates with the artist’s original intent and approaches a common

⁷² Michael Bakunin, *God and the State*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 30.

⁷³ Lacaze-Duthiers, *L’Ideal Humain de l’Art*, 15.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

ideal. A work of art (whether in life, thought, or on canvas) is only true if it is absolutely original, the product of one's own voice; and yet, each artist will find that they illustrate a single, life-affirming ideal. "We toil separately," writes Lacaze-Duthiers, "convinced that we toil in a common work."⁷⁵ In terms of the aesthetic debates of the time, he responds with a neo-Kantian confidence that truth can be at once subjective *and* universal.

More importantly, though, in the realm of politics, criticism is the key to resolving tactical differences between individual and collective anarchisms. In that it does not call for concerted effort to effect societal change, but only calls on individuals to live artistically in the present, Lacaze-Duthiers' criticism would appear to be completely egoistic and tactically bankrupt. On the other hand, it demands that *all* individuals live beautifully, not just a chosen few; and they are not to live only for themselves, but as exemplars so that others—both now and in the future—may, by admiring and interacting with their beauty, become beautiful themselves. "Social progress consists in the comprehension of art," Lacaze-Duthiers concludes: "To critique"—to admire, understand, and love an art piece, and to recreate a separate work of art in oneself—"is to realize progress."⁷⁶

Lacaze-Duthiers' already-cited second manifesto, *La Découverte de la Vie*, is largely a repetition, at much greater length, of the ideas of *L'Idéal Humain de l'Art*. He does make some amplifications, however, especially on the idea of criticism as art. He is continually tempted to bask in the Romantic heroism of the artist proper, yet at the same time, he works even harder to dissolve the implicit difference between artist-creator and artist-admirer. An artist is anyone who thinks, hopes, adores—anyone who collaborates in the harmony of life,

⁷⁵ Lacaze-Duthiers, *La Découverte de la Vie*, 275.

⁷⁶ Lacaze-Duthiers, *L'Idéal Humain de l'Art*, 86-87.

loves it and understands it, anyone who works and suffers.⁷⁷ He continues, “[The critic] understands the work of the novelist and of the poet only by being himself poet and novelist, artist in the presence of life.... [T]here is no difference between art and criticism.”⁷⁸ Finally, as if he has not yet made himself clear, he proclaims, “We ignore that there are producers and critics. We do not understand what this distinction signifies.”⁷⁹

He could hardly have disagreed more with his *Action d'Art* compatriot Manuel Devaldes, who wrote that “art in its manifestations should essentially be egoist; the artist should work for his own pleasure and not that of the audience...the artist should be a sort of god, with a pure soul, capable of creating beautiful works which are useful by their beauty and without the intellectual help of any layman.”⁸⁰ Devaldes denied any possibility that the needs and goals of the artistic elite and the public could merge. But for Lacaze-Duthiers the two were not at odds. The audience (collective) is made up entirely of potential artists (individuals) and the former is best served when it cultivates the development of the latter. With confidence in this symbiotic relationship, he could declare, “We work for them [future, abstract humanity] *by working for ourselves* [italics mine].”⁸¹ Theoretically, then, Lacaze-Duthiers’ brand of individualist anarchism is not an egoist rejection of organization for the future; rather, future good is best achieved by individual, artistic living in the present.

Oscar Wilde’s social and artistic theories, themselves partially inspired by readings of Kropotkin, William Morris, and John Ruskin, were an important influence on Lacaze-Duthiers, and, consequently, their philosophies share a number of similarities. In fact, when

⁷⁷ Lacaze-Duthiers, *La Découverte de la Vie*, 89.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Varias, 145.

⁸¹ Lacaze-Duthiers, *L’Ideal Humain de l’Art*, 74.

Wilde's tomb, designed by Jacob Epstein and installed in Père Lachaise cemetery, was censured by the Prefect of Police and an official committee of aesthetics for the allegedly obscene genitals of its sculpted angel, the Artistocrats launched a crusade in defense of the tomb. In the name of Aristocratic and Wildean tenets, the *Action d'Art* journal published articles comparing the tomb favorably to other sanctioned works, circulated a petition against state censorship, and ran a series of excerpts from Wilde's primary political essay, "The Soul of Man under Socialism."⁸² Yet, for all his reliance on Wilde, Lacaze-Duthiers makes some significant alterations to Wilde's thought, particularly with his notion of criticism.

Wilde, like Lacaze-Duthiers, believed that the true artist-individual would not "admit any laws but its own laws; nor any authority but its own authority."⁸³ His individual, too, prizes singularity above all else, and is simply "himself." Again, like Lacaze-Duthiers, Wilde reconciles the needs of the collective with his individualism by merely pointing to the positive *example* to others that the true, life-loving individual can be. The great man must *isolate* himself in order to "realise the perfection of what was in him, to his own incomparable gain, and to the incomparable and lasting gain of the whole world."⁸⁴ Later, Wilde writes that the true personality of man "will not meddle with others," but will nevertheless "help all, as a beautiful thing helps us by being what it is."⁸⁵ A Wildean artist, like an Aristocrat, best serves the needs of the public by disregarding them.

⁸² Antliff, "Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism," 107-109.

⁸³ Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism," in *Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 1047.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1041.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1047.

Most importantly for my present purpose, Wilde also believed that common people had the ability to be enlightened by art. But in order to learn, they must first be freed from the necessity of having to work for their sustenance. Only the rentier, having the time to cultivate himself, can be a true artist. Herein is the “chief advantage” of socialism, for Wilde: by redistributing wealth equally, it would remove any necessity of living and working for others, and enable all to be authentic individuals.⁸⁶ All this is reminiscent of the Marxist distinction between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom (with a heterodox, individualistic spin, of course), and, as opposed to the anarchism of Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Bakunin, implies a disdain for manual labor. Wilde is happy to elaborate on this disdain, claiming that people who work are tainted by the “tyranny of want.” They have “no grace of manner, or charm of speech, or civilisation, or culture, or refinement in pleasures, or joy of life” and are “absolutely of no importance.”⁸⁷ In complete opposition to Lacaze-Duthiers’ belief in the artistic possibilities of physical work, Wilde writes, “There is nothing necessarily dignified about manual labour at all, and most of it is absolutely degrading.”⁸⁸

But liberation from the daily necessities of work and provision is only part of the common man’s road to full humanity. He must, as in Lacaze-Duthiers’ system, learn by example from a vital, distinctive work of art. In order to do so, though, he must submit, relinquish his right to criticize—even allow the work to “dominate” him. Wilde finds that the public, while capable of being cultivated, lacks a sufficient “temperament of receptivity.” What they do not understand is that

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1041-1042.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1041.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1050.

the work of art is to *dominate* the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art. The spectator is to be receptive. He is to be the violin on which the master is to play. And the more completely he can suppress his own silly views, his own foolish prejudices, his own absurd ideas of what Art should be, or should not be, the more likely he is to understand and appreciate the work of art in question.... *He is not the arbiter of the work of art* [italics mine].⁸⁹

It is hard to imagine a view of audience participation more opposed to Lacaze-Duthiers', for whom, as for Nietzsche in his final, post-Wagner phase,⁹⁰ *criticism* is itself a separate work of art, lifting the viewer up to a more deliberate, innovative lifestyle. Criticism, then, for Lacaze-Duthiers, is a concept crucial to his synthesis of individualism and collectivism. The people are not simply guided by an egoistic yet unaccountably benevolent avant-garde; they can themselves interact equally with an artwork, thereby creating a unique work of art and taking their place in the ranks of the simultaneously elite and democratic Artistocracy.

Still, one might argue that Wilde's aesthetic anarchism is more practical, more tactically effective than Lacaze-Duthiers'. He does, after all, at least address the need for the appropriation and redistribution of wealth. Lacaze-Duthiers' entire revolution, by contrast, takes place only inside individuals, without concern for their physical needs. However, by stipulating that mediocrities will only become artists when they have emancipated themselves from material cares, while insisting at the same time that those who are already enlightened must not neglect their role as beautiful exemplars by descending into altruistic and socialistic projects, Wilde has rendered the status quo inevitable and eternal. Lacaze-Duthiers' expectations, on the other hand, are perhaps more utopian, more optimistic, yet oddly more realizable. Each person is, at the present moment, a latent artist, and must only live his life

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1058-1059.

⁹⁰ See John Moore, "Attentat Art: Anarchism and Nietzsche's Aesthetics," in Moore, John ed., *I am not a Man, I am Dynamite! Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition*, (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 127-142.

more thoughtfully, justly, and lovingly to bring all others into the Artistocracy. This is why Lacaze-Duthiers can declare that, however elitist an individual artist may be, “art...has its source in the aspirations of the mass.”⁹¹

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The Belle Époque, writes Zeev Sternhell, was a “period of gestation, the period that saw the elaboration of the new syntheses of the twentieth century.”⁹² Sternhell is primarily concerned with the Fascist synthesis, but his statement holds true across numerous fields of thought and action. The youth of the avant-guerre, according to an old but well-attested narrative, having been alienated by the abstract and materialistic individualism of their fathers, sought a rapprochement between spiritual and material patterns of thought, between tradition and innovation, reason and unreason, self and society. “Members of the pre-1914 generation” looked for these syntheses, according to R. C. Grogin, “in a renewal of religious belief, in nationalistic fervor, in new elites, in a new heroic stance, in a revolutionary mythology, in new artistic trends, and in a mystical intuitionism.”⁹³ In his famous thesis on Belle Époque “modernism,” Roger Shattuck characterizes Apollinaire’s “Simultanism,” like Proust’s memory, as an attempt to become both observer and observed, involved and indifferent, and thereby to sympathize better with the whole.⁹⁴ In this connection, Shattuck cites Baudelaire (for his influence on Apollinaire): pure, modern art must “create a suggestive

⁹¹ Lacaze-Duthiers, *L’Ideal Humain de l’Art*, 97.

⁹² Zeev Sternhell, with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. by David Maisel, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 38.

⁹³ Robert Charles Grogin, “The French Intellectuals’ Reactions to Henri Bergson, 1900-1914, (NYU Ph.D. Diss., 1969), ii.

⁹⁴ Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years : The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 315-317.

magic which contains both subject and object, the external world and the artist himself.”⁹⁵

Among the “deepest yearnings of the early years of this century,” according to Shattuck, was the desire both to *create* art and to *be* art, simultaneously to affirm oneself and to lose oneself in communion with all.

For Bergson, too, mystical intuition has strong social, communicative implications, and he makes this explicit in his *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. The way to acquire a love that is not “tribal,” a love that does not necessarily exclude and hate some, is through a religious-mystical inspiration that sees and sympathizes with the humanity in all. The open soul, member of an open society, is able to achieve “a spiritual union, a more or less complete identification” with others in the group—not by abstract morality alone, but through mystical intuition, imagining oneself into the place of another.⁹⁶ To reiterate, then, unlike their mechanistic, individualistic bourgeois predecessors, the intellectuals and artists of Belle Époque modernism optimistically affirmed, among other things, man’s ability to communicate spiritually with other persons and external objects.

Lacaze-Duthiers’ democratic conception of audience criticism, itself a symptom of the synthesizing climate of opinion in which he lived, ought to have enabled him to affirm unequivocally the possibility of artistic communication, to combat what I have called the aesthetic Manichaeism of his system. The tension between universal potential on the one hand, and the need for a majority of ugly and uncomprehending mediocrities in order to distinguish the Romantic-heretical avant-garde on the other, runs through his entire system. He insists that “in the coming humanity the meaning of art will not escape anyone.... [T]he

⁹⁵ In Shattuck, 320.

⁹⁶ Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. by R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, with the assistance of W. Horsfall Carter, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), 88.

division of humanity into two groups: artists and mediocrities, will no longer exist.”⁹⁷

Elsewhere, too, he claims that the artists “are today what all men will be tomorrow.”⁹⁸

Conversely, though, Lacaze-Duthiers often emphasizes the leadership by the enlightened ones, and at times hints at the necessary *failure* of that leadership. The heroic individual is the only one who can, by sacrificing himself, “bring joy to all men.”⁹⁹ Moreover, and more ominously, he has the “duty to direct...the unthinking souls” and to “eliminate the mediocre souls.”¹⁰⁰ Lacaze-Duthiers believes, at least sometimes, that art is not possible without the harmonious contrast of beauty and ugliness: “If it represented only the beauties of life, without describing the counterfeiting of it, art would lack harmony, would not exist.”¹⁰¹ His Manichaeism is so persistent that he even turns to scholastic theodicy (“artodicy”?) to correct his tendency towards believing in the necessity of ugliness, evil, and suffering. He claims that ugliness and mediocrity, as with evil in Aquinas’ system, do not strictly exist—they are, in fact, best described as “nothingness.”¹⁰²

In the end, Lacaze-Duthiers’ democratic project is overwhelmed by his elitism. The prominence he gives to the distinction between the artistic few and the mediocre many undermines his concept of audience criticism and objective interaction. He yields to the idea that the eternal existence of non-artists is profitable in that it demonstrates, negatively, the greatness of being an artist,¹⁰³ much as, in the Jansenist tradition, the damned serve the necessary purpose of forever demonstrating the justice and glory of God. In the last pages of

⁹⁷ Lacaze-Duthiers, *La Découverte de la Vie*, 121.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 285.

his second manifesto, Lacaze-Duthiers admits that the universalism of audience criticism is an ideal that will never be achieved; therefore, happily, the individualistic, Aristocratic class will always be needed. He abandons the social project entirely: “Let us accept the present, such as it is. . . . Let us think that. . .if ugliness did not exist, we would cease to be happy,” he writes. All being perfect, we would no longer have vital opportunities “to struggle or to hope.”¹⁰⁴ The artist must be a heretic—it is necessary, of course, that he be misunderstood, “a posthumous man.” This latent, elitist Romanticism completely enervates the universalism of Lacaze-Duthiers’ system. “In the beginning was the deed,” he would later quote Goethe in Sebastian Fauré’s *Encyclopédie Anarchiste* of 1934, rejecting his earlier idealism explicitly.¹⁰⁵ In another entry in the *Encyclopédie*, he elaborated that “aesthetic action” could be “useful, useless, humane, inhumane. Every sincere act is an artistic act.”¹⁰⁶ Gone is the emphasis on the ethical reflection of “criticism,” and in its place a prizing of action for action’s sake.

Like Lacaze-Duthiers, Gustav Klimt, according to Carl Schorske’s celebrated account, initially opposed the “crisis of the liberal ego” with a belief in the public, communicative function and universally redemptive power of revolutionary art. Self and society, for Klimt the Secessionist, could be reconciled and united. Klimt “had set out to regenerate Austria by creating a whole *Kunstvolke*,” but in the end, disillusioned by the rejections of public and official patronage alike, he withdrew into a more Wildean, solipsistic individualism. “The social circle,” Schorske concludes, “had narrowed in the mind of the Klimt group to the artist-decorator and his customers.” For Klimt and his coterie, as for

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 307.

¹⁰⁵ Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, “Action,” in ed. Sebastian Fauré, *Encyclopédie Anarchiste*, (Paris: La Librairie Internationale, 1934), 18.

¹⁰⁶ Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, “Action D’Art,” in ed. Sebastian Fauré, *Encyclopédie Anarchiste*, (Paris: La Librairie Internationale, 1934), 19.

Lacaze-Duthiers, “an aesthetically schooled elite became their world.”¹⁰⁷ Klimt lived out his days executing private portraits for the upper classes.

Interestingly enough, years before his own and Klimt’s similar apostasies, Lacaze-Duthiers had written an early pair of art criticism pieces charting developments in contemporary Austrian painting, in which he correctly perceived and lauded the democratic, communicative impulse of the Secessionists. He praised the Austrian milieu in general, because “socialism and individualism are making common cause,”¹⁰⁸ and the Secessionists in particular for rejecting stale academe and the official competitions of the over-packed salons. Instead, they displayed their works simply and not too closely together—without regard for medals and accolades—so that viewers could see the true “value” that a painting has “only in itself.”¹⁰⁹ In his second report, Lacaze-Duthiers continued that each Secessionist, though associated in a group, “keeps his individuality, his temperament.”¹¹⁰ Klimt, especially, he recognizes for “the suppleness of his art,” and he finds all the Secessionists to be adept reconcilers of nature, life, and dream.¹¹¹ They had shown, Lacaze-Duthiers believed, that revolutionary youth can make a difference, and it only remained to render their art more explicitly social: “Art ought to play a more intense role in the social question.... The mission of young Austrian painters...is to cause the new spirit to triumph, to proclaim the rights of

¹⁰⁷ Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-De-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 269.

¹⁰⁸ Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, “Le Peinture Contemporaine En Autriche,” *La Plume: Littéraire, Artistique et Sociale*, (No. 276, 15 Octobre, 1900), 621.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 624.

¹¹⁰ Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, “Le Peinture Contemporaine En Autriche (*Suite*),” *La Plume: Littéraire, Artistique et Sociale*, (No. 277, 1 Novembre, 1900), 671.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

the ideal against the material, the rights of justice against force, the rights of the individual against the egoism of society.”¹¹²

Yet for all this synthesizing social concern, one can already discern in Lacaze-Duthiers’ thought the seeds of the elitism and aesthetic class-consciousness that would undermine his egalitarianism. The fact that the Secessionists have met with opposition, he claims, is in itself sufficient evidence of their value as a movement.¹¹³ As in his later formulations, then, the disapproval of the uncomprehending masses is an essential and eternal aspect of the Romantic hero’s narrative. In his valorization of “youth” as against tradition, and in his strong opposition of the practitioners of the new morality to those of the old, too, he prefigures his rejection of intuitive sympathy and communication between different persons.

This departure from faith in the intellectual-artistic abilities of the masses, with its concomitant failure to merge self and society, was a disillusionment endured not just by Klimt and Lacaze-Duthiers. Lenin’s emphasis on carefully guarded, revolutionary orthodoxy on the one hand, and Sorel’s repudiation of doctrine in favor of mobilizing, vitalist myth on the other, seem to be driven by a similar disdain for the proletarian intellect. Lacaze-Duthiers, likewise, by failing to sustain the tension between elite and commoner, subject and object—by abandoning the Belle Époque’s optimism concerning the possibilities of existential communication—placed his thought squarely in the well-traveled path of proto-fascism, terrorism, and other absolutist systems relying on the compulsion of others. Like so many other avant-guerre modernists, he had called for an aestheticization of ethics, politics,

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 672.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 670.

and life. In Shattuck's felicitous phrase, "The frame had been overrun, and art set itself up as continuous with life."¹¹⁴ The only measure of a deed's morality was its beauty.

Still, joined to the liberal-pluralistic notion of "criticism" as sympathetic, intuitive, objective participation for all, Lacaze-Duthiers' "aestheticization of politics" could have avoided a base, immoral elitism. But with criticism undermined by his Romantic emphasis on the chosen few, all that remained was either the fascist violation of the masses by some "misunderstood" hero, or the loneliness of existentialism. The political inheritance of the neo-Romantic moment was not all bad. The subjectivist, vitalist, irrationalist spirit of these years was tempered by an intuitive, egalitarian merging of self and society. But Lacaze-Duthiers, like Sorel, perhaps feeling that the Bergsonian political interpretation of "intuition"—as universal, mystic love and communion—was overly utopian, left it aside while retaining the potentially negative elements. Without the deliberate identification with others afforded by "criticism," Lacaze-Duthiers' system is susceptible to all the classic, democratic condemnations of the Romantic-aesthetic hero: "If self-realisation is aimed at as the ultimate goal," writes Isaiah Berlin, "then might it not be that the transformation of the world by violence and skill is itself a kind of sublime, aesthetic act? Men either possess creative genius, or they do not; those who do not must regard it as their proper destiny, indeed as a high privilege, to be moulded—and broken—by those who do."¹¹⁵ It was left to Lacaze-Duthiers' disciples and allies to bear this conclusion out: the Futurist Filippo

¹¹⁴ Shattuck, 330.

¹¹⁵ Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. by Henry Hardy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 194.

Marinetti, for his part, would later justify Italy's war with Ethiopia on the grounds that "war is beautiful."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 241.

“TWO HANDS JOINED”: BODY, SPIRIT, AND THE NATIONALISM OF
CHARLES PÉGUY

In late June of 1940, on the very day that Marshal Petain declared that the French government was seeking an armistice, protester Edmond Michelet handed out pamphlets containing aphorisms from the writings of Charles Péguy. Péguy, who had died in the first days of the Great War, was a poet and a highly ambiguous, contested figure throughout the interwar years. The tracts which Michelet, a Christian Democrat, distributed read: “In wartime he who does not surrender is my man, whoever he is....And he who surrenders is my enemy whoever he is.”¹¹⁷ Charles de Gaulle, too, was influenced by the thought of Péguy—one of the general’s favorite books was Péguy’s popular religious poem *Le Porche du mystère de la deuxième vertu* (*The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*).

At the same time, both Vichy collaborators and Parisian fascists (who faulted Vichy for not going far enough) also attempted to appropriate Péguy’s legacy. As a war-martyr who had embraced socialism, Dreyfusism, nationalism, and a kind of anti-clerical Catholicism, Péguy had such an ambivalent record that even his own sons differed with regard to the interpretation of his thought. Pierre Péguy saw in him the harbinger of Vichy’s conservative but communal “National Revolution,” while Marcel went even farther, not without reason writing that “my father is above all a racist.”¹¹⁸

Contemporary commentators and historians alike have long tried to locate the unity binding Péguy’s diverse pronouncements together. Emmanuel Mounier, the mid-century Catholic existentialist, emphasized Péguy’s continuing independence and oppositional spirit,

¹¹⁷ in Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 4-5.

¹¹⁸ in *Ibid.*, 5.

writing that, despite the best efforts of extremists on both sides, “Péguy is a man who cannot be annexed.”¹¹⁹ Raïssa Maritain, wife of the theologian and friend of Péguy Jacques Maritain, also claimed for Péguy a timeless “desire for truth, justice, inner liberty,” a complete inability to understand “doctrinaires.”¹²⁰ Hans Schmitt, on the other hand, argued that Péguy’s life does not represent independence and ethical consistency, but rather a long, “moral decline” into proto-Fascism.¹²¹ Schmitt writes: “In a short life he moved from one extreme to another, and yet he claimed never to have changed.”¹²² Increasingly detached from reality, his mind “depressed and brutalized” by the solitude and emptiness of his literary crusades, Péguy allowed his socialism to “[re-emerge] as the national-socialism of Barrès and Sorel.”¹²³ “From 1910 to 1914,” Schmitt continues, “Péguy strode inexorably toward an inferno of arbitrary violence and capricious disorder.”¹²⁴ Zeev Sternhell, too, sees Péguy’s career as an evolution into a precursor of National Socialism.¹²⁵ According to Sternhell, Péguy’s post-Dreyfus disillusionment with reformist socialism made him ripe, like Mussolini, for a “discovery of the nation;”¹²⁶ it was this change that explains his later “venomous attacks on Jaurès, the living symbol of the democratic republic.”¹²⁷ Still, despite the differences between the continuity and change models (and both find much to recommend them among Péguy’s sprawling *Cahiers*), the most perceptive commentators on

¹¹⁹ Quoted in the preface to Péguy, trans. and ed. by Ann and Julian Green, *Basic Verities: Prose and Poetry*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1943), 7.

¹²⁰ Raïssa Maritain, *We Have Been Friends Together: Memoirs*, trans. by Julie Kernan, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1943), 57-58.

¹²¹ Hans A. Schmitt, *Charles Péguy: The Decline of an Idealist*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 174.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 176.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 175

¹²⁵ Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 34-35.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

both sides recognize the lifelong importance, for Péguy, of a single, abiding concern: the problem of eternal hell—or, in the interrogative form, how can *universal* redemption be achieved?¹²⁸

His uneasiness about the doctrine of hell was the main cause behind his adolescent departure from the Catholic faith.¹²⁹ “Nothing,” writes Schmitt, terrified Péguy more “than the Christian vision of hell.”¹³⁰ And Halévy characterizes Péguy’s loss of faith as his refusal “to believe in eternal evil.”¹³¹ Péguy is, therefore, careful to insist in his youthful utopia, *The Harmonious City*, that the city will exclude no one—“As long as there is a single man outside, the door slammed in his face encloses a city of injustice and hatred.”¹³² And in his most socialist phase, when he famously left the École Normale to complete his first dramatic treatment of Joan of Arc’s life, his obsession became his heroine’s: “Who is to be saved?” Joan asks her spiritual mentor, Madame Gervaise, “How are they to be saved?”¹³³ Joan even volunteers to be damned if it would save some others from that fate, but Madame Gervaise reprimands Joan for thinking Christ’s sacrifice insufficient, for thinking her love could be greater than his. Joan submits to Madame Gervaise’s orthodoxy for a time, but rebels again. “Forgive me, my God, if I blaspheme,” cries Joan, “when I think of [the notion that souls are damned] I can no longer pray.”¹³⁴ (Joan eventually leaves this problem unresolved, and returns to temporal concerns at the thought of France’s wartime sufferings.) Small wonder,

¹²⁸ Daniel Halévy, *Péguy and Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, (New York: Longman, Greens, and Co., 1947), 14. See also Schmitt, 48-49, 66-67, 158-159, and 176.

¹²⁹ Yvonne Servais, *Charles Péguy: The Pursuit of Salvation*, (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1953), 11.

¹³⁰ Schmitt, 109.

¹³¹ Halévy, 14.

¹³² In Servais, 32.

¹³³ Halévy, 36.

¹³⁴ In Servais, 45.

as multiple critics have observed, that two of Péguy's key literary influences at this time were Sophocles' *Antigone*, about a young woman who defies the king's law in order to fulfill her own vision of justice, and Alfred de Vigny's Romantic poem *Eloa*, in which an angel descends to hell in order to try to redeem Satan.¹³⁵

Vigny's vision is more pessimistic than Péguy's: Satan is able to seduce and secure the damnation of Eloa. This pessimism pervades Vigny's views of the political and natural worlds, as well. Optimistic about the powers of the lone intellectual (Saint-Beuve first coined the term "ivory tower" in reference to Vigny, albeit somewhat unjustly), Vigny was skeptical of the pretensions of mass man and of democratic politics. Both in his novels and in his poetry, he glorifies the superior, intellectual savior who must certainly find incomprehension and failure in his own life—if he is successful at all, it will be only posthumously.¹³⁶

Revolution is pointless, because "The social order is bad and always will be."¹³⁷ Vigny concludes, "Hope is the greatest of our follies."¹³⁸ Péguy, correspondent to his unyielding hope concerning the eternal lot of humanity, never gave in to this kind of resigned despair about universal, social transformation—despite his own neo-Romantic propensity for ivory tower elitism.¹³⁹

Péguy's ire at the idea of damnation did not dim with age; if anything, it increased. In one of his early *Cahiers*, written while he was bedridden with the flu, and presumably

¹³⁵ Schmitt, 48; Halévy, 21-24.

¹³⁶ See D. Higgins, "Social Pessimism in Alfred de Vigny," *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Jul., 1949), 356. See also Vigny's late poem *La Bouteille à la Mer*.

¹³⁷ In Higgins, 354.

¹³⁸ In *Ibid.*, 356.

¹³⁹ According to Raïssa Maritain, he often said, "I am writing for twenty years hence." Maritain, 56.

recounting a dialogue with his doctor, Péguy erupted in an “explosion of violence,”

according to Halévy.¹⁴⁰ His remarks are worth quoting at length:

I shall attack the Christian faith. What seems to us so strange, let me say outright, so barbarous, the thing to which we can never assent, and which has haunted the best Christians, the reason why the best Christians have gone away, or turned silently aside, master, is this: that strange combination of life and death which we term damnation, that strange reinforcement of a presence by an absence which eternity makes entire. No man whose lot is cast with humanity can give his assent to this.... We don't admit a state of affairs where men are refused access to any city.... We don't admit that there should be a single exception, nor that anybody should be forcibly shut out.... An eternity of living death is a perverse, inverted conception.¹⁴¹

Finally, even when Péguy returned “to the threshold” of religious faith, under the influence of Bergson, Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, and others, he refused to believe that it was necessary to proselytize his wife and children. What is most distinctive about Péguy's repudiation of the doctrine of hell, and with it, Catholic dogma, is his merging of spiritual and temporal salvation. For Péguy, material concerns and spiritual concerns coexisted, neither predominating. The possibility that all could be saved *eternally* meant that they should also be redeemed *temporally*. Conversely, the fact that *social-political* universalism is a self-evident norm indicates that *spiritual* universalism must be also (evidence the quote above). In this blending of matter and spirit, and the social and the religious goals, Péguy seems to be in some respects merely a product of the Bergsonian, neo-Romantic climate of opinion, part of the same movement that prompted Leo XIII to prescribe a more socially engaged Catholicism.¹⁴² In other ways, though, Péguy's monism is an original, itself a precursor of Catholicism's rapprochement with social and aesthetic progress.

¹⁴⁰ Halévy, 65.

¹⁴¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 65-66.

¹⁴² Schmitt, 56.

France's "religious renaissance,"¹⁴³ one manifestation of the rebellion against 19th century materialism and determinism, developed simultaneously with the Third Republic, emerging in the decade just after the Franco-Prussian War under the influence of such literary luminaries as Léon Bloy and Joris-Karl Huysmans, gaining strength from the battle against secular education, and securing its last prominent convert, the philosopher Gabriel Marcel, on the eve of World War II. The movement is often seen as comprising two distinct generations. The first generation, according to its still-definitive treatment, was a "reactionary revolution"¹⁴⁴: an anti-intellectual and almost inevitable backlash against the excessive confidence of Positivism and revolutionary ideologies. The reactionaries were ultra-conservative, ultramontanist, apocalyptic, yet encouraging heterodox spiritualisms of all kinds. Conversely, historians have generally recognized that the Catholics of the second generation, following the Great War—many of whom frequented Jacques Maritain's "salon" at Meudon—though more *doctrinally* orthodox than their predecessors, embraced social progress and cultural and aesthetic innovations more eagerly.¹⁴⁵ Maritain and his contemporaries attempted to substitute the *spirit* of Thomism for the dead letter, and found in it a justification for progressivism.

Péguy is commonly classed with the reactionary first generation of Catholic renovators. Even though he did not officially return to the Church until 1908, almost two

¹⁴³ Wallace Fowlie, *Jacob's Night: The Religious Renaissance in France*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1947).

¹⁴⁴ Richard Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution: The Catholic Revival in French Literature, 1870-1914* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1965).

¹⁴⁵ Brooke Williams Smith, *Jacques Maritain: Antimodern or Ultramodern, An Historical Analysis of his Critics, his Thought, and his Life*, (New York: Elsevier, 1976); Bernard E. Doering, *Jacques Maritain and the French Catholic Intellectuals*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Deal W. Hudson and Mancini, Matthew J. "Maritain and the Ambivalence of the 'Modern' World," in ed. Hudson and Mancini, *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 1-15.

years after Maritain's conversion, and long after Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, his nationalism, polemical fervor, calculated anti-intellectualism, and admiration for provincial virtues and the spirit of "the people," seem to leave him at best an opponent of modernity, and at worst a pseudo-traditional precursor of Fascism.¹⁴⁶ Despite the accusations that Péguy was largely a reactionary anti-modern, however, his thought actually carried within it unmistakably the seeds of the Catholic modernism of the interwar years.

Stephen Schloesser has recently used the label "mystic modernism" to describe the *cultural* alliance of religious and secular that followed the wartime *political* rapprochement of the Union Sacrée.¹⁴⁷ Schloesser argues that, rejecting the dualist theologies of their prewar counterparts, postwar Catholic intellectuals returned to a more orthodox understanding of the synthetic relationship between matter and spirit, time and eternity, culture and faith. Péguy is certainly a pioneer of this "mystic modernism," if sometimes an unwitting one. Despite his traditionalist peasant persona, the sophisticated theological system contained in his poetry is striking for its insistence on the value of temporal, material, and cultural progress. Péguy, for whom the body and soul are like "two hands joined in prayer"—eternally inseparable and equal in worth¹⁴⁸—anticipates the postwar Catholic rejection of dualism, and paves the way for a reunion of grace and nature. Péguy is a "monist" to the extent that, like Walt Whitman, his spirituality was an extremely material one. Although Whitman's "monism" is energized by sexual hedonism, while Péguy's has overtones of medieval asceticism, both affirm the conviction that things done in the body have intense,

¹⁴⁶ See Griffiths, 21-68.

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁸ Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, trans. David Louis Schindler, Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 51. All subsequent citations of *The Portal* use Schindler's translation of the poem.

religious significance.¹⁴⁹ Péguy's monism and his universalism are two aspects of his character, then, that remained constant through a variety of applications.

Péguy's late and uncharacteristically popular poem *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope* contains in microcosm all the particulars of his philosophy, logical growths whose seeds were evident at the start of his career. The poem continues the convention of a dialogue between Joan of Arc and her spiritual mentor, Madame Gervaise, although Gervaise is the only one who speaks in *The Portal*. "Hope," according to Péguy, is like a little child, and alone, among the three Christian virtues, has the power to surprise God—to teach something new, in a manner of speaking. Here is the "mystery" of which the title speaks. Faith and Love are both "obvious"; one would have to "do violence" to oneself, "distort" oneself, in order not to believe in God or not to love one's neighbor. But hope is unexpected.¹⁵⁰ Faith and love deal with what is—only hope "sees what will be."¹⁵¹

To elaborate his point, Péguy moves into an exposition of the three parables recorded in the Gospel of Luke chapter 15: "The Lost Coin," "The Lost Sheep," and, easily the most famous, "The Prodigal Son." Péguy emphasizes the goodness of God over his greatness, at the expense of the more Jansenist strain in French Catholicism. Grounded in a careful reading of this passage, Péguy's final understanding of the Christian God is of a Father who is not content to damn the fallen object of his affection, but who even experiences suffering and fear (another mystery) at the possibility that he will not regain his lost son. God knew about faith and love, but, paradoxically, only fallen man could teach an

¹⁴⁹ See Caroline Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," *Representations*, No. 11 (Summer, 1985), 1-25.

¹⁵⁰ Péguy, *Portal*, 9.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

all-knowing God how to hope. Péguy is solving the problem of evil here, by recourse to a kind of *felix culpa*, rendering God less responsible because he has voluntarily made himself impotent out of love, yet still able to turn evil into good. “Because of this lost sheep,” Péguy writes, “Jesus experienced fear in love. / And the kind of tremor that divine hope creates in love itself. / And God had been afraid he’d have had to condemn it.”¹⁵² Hope emphasizes the worth of man and the physical world, hope is something man can teach God about what it means to be human, an intermediary between grace and nature, as was the angel *Eloa*. God learns “*human anxiety*,” “*mortal anxiety*” from man [italics mine].¹⁵³ Hope does more than reconcile; she merges the two categories into one: “She...is the nearest to God / Because she is the nearest to men.”¹⁵⁴ And later, “being carnal she is pure. / But, being pure, she is also carnal.”¹⁵⁵

At this point, Péguy makes his rejection of a pessimistic dualism more explicit and more ardent. Men—even saved, resurrected men—are not like angels, he insists, because angels are not able to comprehend “this mysterious bond, this created bond, / Infinitely mysterious, / Between the soul and the body.”¹⁵⁶ The body, like the soul, will receive salvation, and together they “will share the eternal, communal happiness”; finally, and perhaps most importantly in terms of the social and religious implications of his monistic optimism, he concludes, “[O]ne is no less just than the other.”¹⁵⁷ After all, all men have “the very body of Jesus.”¹⁵⁸ God depends on man to give his eternal words a temporal, carnal life, to

¹⁵² Ibid., 42.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 47.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 52.

make sure “that the spirit lacks nothing of the flesh.”¹⁵⁹ Another mystery: “A weak creature carries God.”¹⁶⁰ Péguy goes so far as to argue that we should hope in God *because* he first had hope and confidence in us.¹⁶¹ The ultimate, slightly unorthodox, upshot: “God needs us, God needs his creature.”¹⁶²

These considerations about the basic goodness and potential of the physical world lead Péguy to a conclusion directly opposed to Vigny’s. For Péguy, the greatest folly is not hope—it is, rather, despair. Despair is the “greatest sin that has ever been seen on earth.”¹⁶³ He follows this judgment by linking despair to pride, using an identical phrase—“the greatest sin that has ever been seen on earth”—to define pride.¹⁶⁴ With this interesting and perceptive equation, Péguy put his finger on what Jacques Maritain would later, in a clever reversal, call the “Pelagianism of despair”¹⁶⁵—the shallow brand of self-effacement and misanthropy that manifests itself in self-confidence, the conviction that *others* are lost but that the heroic individual has the *ability* to repent and individually succeed. These lines of *The Portal* seem to be a dual indictment of the pessimistic strain of Romanticism and of Augustinian-Lutheran strains of Christianity, and of the otherworldly desperation common to them both. As late as in Péguy’s career as 1913 (yet still early enough to predate more mainstream debates about a socially engaged Catholicism), in an article published in his *Cahiers* entitled *L’argent (suite)*, Péguy reiterated the social implications of his monism: “I will have none of a Christian charity which would mean the constant capitulation (of the

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 72-74.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁶⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers: Luther—Descartes—Rousseau*, (London : Sheed and Ward, 1928), 18.

spiritual) before temporal powers.... Unfortunately, it is not enough to be a Catholic. *One must still work in the temporal if one wishes to tear the future from temporal tyrannies* [italics mine].”¹⁶⁶

Thus Péguy’s humanism is still intact, at least in principle, long after his disillusionment with Dreyfusism and politics, after his alleged “descent to violence,”¹⁶⁷ and after his return to Catholicism. Nevertheless, *The Portal* also demonstrates those aspects of Péguy’s thought that have earned him less savory characterizations, the ways in which his humanism had always been shot through with an exclusivist, nationalist strain. By the very logic of his *felix culpa*, in order to glorify hope, he also glorifies the seeds of hope—suffering, anxiety, doubt, and fear. Therefore, according to Péguy, in a kind of Nietzschean reversal of values, those that are especially adept at suffering and at hoping are superior to those that are not. God has given the French more tribulations than other nations because he knows they can withstand them—“I was right to have confidence in this boy here,” says God, “He was a Frenchman. / I was right to trust him.”¹⁶⁸ Péguy then builds an extended metaphor likening heaven-sent trials to heavy rains, and the French to skillful gardeners, more skillful, he emphasizes, than any others. “Others would have made [the heavy rains] into marshes and swamps full of fever and overpopulated with dirty, disgusting insects,” but not “My good, healthy soil of Lorraine;” rather, “from this very water...they create the spring.”¹⁶⁹ Again, within this counterintuitive hierarchy, Péguy cannot refrain from national comparisons:

¹⁶⁶ Péguy, *Basic Verities*, 170-171.

¹⁶⁷ See Schmitt, 141-175.

¹⁶⁸ Péguy, *Portal*, 85.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

“everywhere else,” the bad days “would poison entire countries.... But here, says God, in this gentle France, my most noble creation... Here they are good gardeners.”¹⁷⁰

In a passage similar in content to the neo-classicism of Maurras and the *Action Française*, Péguy also seems to be using the metaphor of the garden to launch an attack on what he perceives as distinctly German (and politically disruptive) ideologies, such as Romanticism and Lutheranism. He rejects the Romantic fascination with wilderness and sublime excess in nature, making God say that “nothing in my creation is as great / As the beautiful gardens of well-ordered souls, like those of the French.... All the wild beauty of the world is not worth one beautiful French garden.”¹⁷¹ Turning Romanticism on its head, he goes on to claim that this orderly garden expresses more soul, more mystery, and more sorrow than would a wilder, grander scene.¹⁷² “Savages will say that this garden is not great and that it is not profound,” he writes, perhaps mocking the German-Romantic exaltation of ancient forests and barbarian stock, “but I know, (says God), that nothing is as great as order.”¹⁷³ Here we see the reactionary Péguy coming through—in his nationalism, of course, and his eagerness to attack an ideology native to Germany, but also in his disdain for democracy and preference for classical structures in art and society. Here is the Péguy whose invectives against Jaurès and the notion of democratic, reformist socialism were so notorious.

Obviously, Péguy’s inveterate nationalism led him into a number of paradoxes. With reference to this specific argument about German culture, his denunciation of Romanticism

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 101.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 103.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 104.

is even more inconsistent than Charles Maurras', whose royalism and Catholicism were pragmatic responses to French "decadence," and whose neo-Classical critiques of Romanticism were themselves the product of a Romantic nationalism—of the belief that aesthetic style should reflect the essence of the nation.¹⁷⁴ Maurras made much, therefore, of preferring the French Classical tradition to more recent styles elevating emotion over reason. Again, Péguy's exploitation of this kind of argument is even more ironic because his own Romanticism was more prominent. He often idealized peasant life and the Middle Ages in general, proudly invoking his own peasant stock.¹⁷⁵ His nationalism has already been observed, but, unlike Maurras, he also relied explicitly on the more liberal-Romantic nationalism of Michelet. His selection of Joan of Arc for multiple treatments was certainly informed by personal considerations, but was also a symptom of the widespread nationalist, *revanchist* cult of Joan following the loss of Alsace-Lorraine.¹⁷⁶ Finally, in the face of the sometime *Action Française* adherent Jacques Maritain's censure of Bergsonian irrationalism and intuitionism on rational and Thomist grounds, Péguy enthusiastically took Bergson's part—arguing for the Christian application of Bergson's thought even after the latter's consignment to the Index. Péguy was, after all, the epitome of that generation of conservative critics of whom Fritz Stern writes, "[T]hey despised the discourse of

¹⁷⁴ Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 10-11.

¹⁷⁵ Péguy, *Basic Verities*, 76-91. Péguy's characterization of peasant France is beyond rosy: "No one has any idea how low salaries were [in Péguy's day, and before]. And yet everyone had enough grub. In the humblest cottages there reigned a sort of ease.... They got up in the morning (and at what an hour), and they sang at the idea that they were off to work.... Work for them was joy itself and the deep root of their being.... One didn't think of equality, I mean of social equality. A common inequality, an order, a hierarchy which appeared natural because it only meant the different levels of a common happiness."

¹⁷⁶ Michael Winock, "Joan of Arc," in Pierre Nora ed., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Volume III: Symbols*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (New York: Columbia University Press), 442, 445.

intellectuals, depreciated reason, and exalted intuition.... [T]heir prose was fitfully lit up by mystical, but apodictic epigrams.”¹⁷⁷ For all these reasons, it is curious to see Péguy so surrendering to his anti-German sentiment that he plays the role of the Maurrasian neo-classicist.

By Péguy’s day, of course, French intellectuals had long participated in a complicated, “love-hate” relationship with German culture, or at least with what they perceived German culture to be.¹⁷⁸ Initiated by Madame de Staël’s citations of the German virtues of intellectual freedom, individuality, idealism, simplicity and spontaneity in order to criticize, by contrast, Napoleon’s regime, French fascination with select representatives of German thought and culture continued to grow up until the Franco-Prussian War. Despite occasional evidence of Germany’s increasing belligerence and industrial prowess, many French Romantics preferred to retain de Staël’s caricature of a nation of primitive visionaries. Michelet thanked Germany for affording him the power to “study questions deeply,” as well as for giving him “Kant, Beethoven, and a new faith.”¹⁷⁹ Renan compared his studies of German thought to “entering a temple; everything I have found there is pure, elevated, moral, beautiful and touching.”¹⁸⁰ According to Victor Hugo, “No nation is

¹⁷⁷ Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), xiv. In 1912, Péguy encapsulated his long belief in the innocent wisdom of children and his disdain for formal education this way: “Now then, children, go to school. / And you men, go to the school of life. / Go and learn / How to unlearn.” *Basic Verities*, 224-225.

¹⁷⁸ Theodore Zeldin, *France: 1848-1945, Volume Two (Intellect, Taste, and Anxiety)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 113-114.

¹⁷⁹ In *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁸⁰ In *Ibid.*

greater.”¹⁸¹ And Taine wrote, as late as 1867, “The Germans are the initiators and perhaps the masters of the modern spirit.”¹⁸²

Among intellectuals, reactions to the defeat in 1871 were mixed. Some, such as Taine, argued that Germany’s triumph was historically conditioned and justified by the superiority of German culture—French classicism was no match for German relativism, Protestantism and science.¹⁸³ Many repudiated their love for German culture; and, where Germany’s martial actions contradicted earlier French assumptions, they accused Germany of hypocrisy. One thing nearly all the post-1871 critics of German culture had in common, including Péguy, was their indebtedness to German thought. Though Fustel de Coulanges and Émile Durkheim both savagely denounced the Germans as barbarians, their own philosophies had key German antecedents.¹⁸⁴ Barrès looked to the ideas and works of Wagner to bolster his *Culte de Moi* while simultaneously condemning the long practice of teaching Kant to French pupils.¹⁸⁵ And, of course, those who responded with an unthinking, oppositional nationalism were imitating Germany’s earlier, post-Napoleonic nationalist movement, and the apparent success of her traditionalism.¹⁸⁶

After the Great War, this kind of conflicted, generalizing cultural criticism only continued. Henri Massis, an Action Française adherent and admirer of Péguy, published a book in 1927 entitled *Defense of the West*, in which he charged German individualism and irrationalism with the destruction of European unity—“spiritually undone since the

¹⁸¹ In *Ibid.*

¹⁸² In *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

Reformation” and “physically broken in 1914.”¹⁸⁷ Germany, he says, parodying the neo-classicism of Maurras and Péguy, “is perpetually hesitating between Asiatic mysticism and the Latin spirit, and...seems to be in a state of permanent protest against the Roman idea.”¹⁸⁸ Massis declares that “the sedition of the individual against the order of things...is an essential characteristic of German individualism”; speaking of German thinkers such as Spengler, Keyserling, Herder, and Robert Curtius, he claims that “to escape from the ancient Roman discipline is the fixed idea of all these innovators.”¹⁸⁹ For Massis, as for other French pseudo-classicists of the pre- and post-war, the Germans are a new and ungrounded nation, forever vulnerable to sudden change, and not acquainted with continuity, form or structure. In concluding remarks that could, ironically, apply to the French just as easily in certain contexts, Massis derides the Germans for “the ease with which they adapt themselves to new forms of life, and receive contradictory impulses”—for “those historic upheavals which are a continual threat to older and more complete nations, where culture is preserved and transmitted as a long-tried practice.”¹⁹⁰

Clearly, then, Péguy’s conflicted intellectual relationship with Germany was a commonplace in Belle Époque France. Even still, his internal contradictions were uncommonly ironic, in that he employed the Maurrasian criticism of German Romanticism, even when his own philosophy and aesthetic could hardly have been farther from French neo-classicism.

¹⁸⁷ Massis, *Defence of the West*, 21.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 34, 58.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

Beyond the specific inconsistencies in his cultural criticism, the most general and far-ranging paradox in these latter passages of *The Portal* is that he manages to turn his universalistic optimism and concern for material progress into a criterion for excluding some (those who are not universalistic and optimistic enough, presumably). In light of Péguy's famous defense of Dreyfus and his long opposition to anti-Semitism, it is interesting that, in his own more general project of exclusion and "othering," he used the same kind of paradoxical, oppositional logic so integral to religious and racial anti-Semitism. A comparison of Péguy's exclusivism with both Léon Bloy's religious anti-Semitism, and with the racial anti-Semitism of the *Action Française* and other neo-fascist groups, will bear this out. Bloy, the often scatological and vitriolic Catholic polemicist whose dualistic Christianity Péguy surpassed in so many ways, wrote his *Le Salut par les Juifs* in response to the "anti-Jewish lucubrations" of Edouard Drumont's pamphlet *La France Juive*. According to Bloy, Drumont—who was the first prominent French peddler of anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus Affair¹⁹¹—realized "with the composure of a wily intelligence that...worldly success consists in feeding human bellies exactly the mast on which they dote," and so he "dug up the explosive and persistent claim that [the Jews] have enriched themselves by petty cheating at our expense."¹⁹²

Bloy takes for his title and for his text a line from the fourth chapter of John's Gospel: "Salvation is of the Jews"—"a most disquieting text," he writes, "which sets us at a

¹⁹¹ Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair: The Case of Alfred Dreyfus*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman, (New York: George Braziller, 1986), 21-31.

¹⁹² Léon Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, selection by Raïssa Maritain, trans. by John Coleman and Harry Lorin Binsse, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1947), 245-246.

furious distance from M. Drumont!”¹⁹³ He also attacks the anti-Dreyfusism and anti-Semitism of the Assumptionists, inquiring ironically “whether there might not be some grave danger in a priestly heart’s thus begging for the extermination of a people...from which have sprung the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Evangelists, the Apostles, the faithful Friends and all the first Martyrs; without daring to mention the Virgin Mother and Our Savior Himself...who surely had spent a whole previous eternity coveting that lineage.”¹⁹⁴ Bloy believes that “in days gone by, the Jews were hated, they were gladly massacred, but they were not held in contempt by virtue of their race.... Anti-Semitism, a wholly modern thing, is the most horrible blow yet suffered by Our Lord.”¹⁹⁵ He concludes with this striking summation of the implications of Christian doctrine: “remember that every morning I eat a Jew named Jesus Christ, that I spend a part of my life at the feet of a Jewess... and finally, that I have put my confidence in a pack of kikes—as you call them.”¹⁹⁶

Yet for all this, Richard D. E. Burton has, not without reason, called *Le Salut par les Juifs* “one of the most repulsively antisemitic works of a decade that outdid all others in the violence of its Judaeophobia.”¹⁹⁷ For Bloy, all these optimistic, doctrinal affirmations about the Jewish people are *in spite* of their crimes. It is simply their destiny to continue in opposition to Christianity, to play their inevitable role both as persecutors and as persecuted of the Church. Jews, though ultimately serving a beneficial purpose in light of Christian teaching, must resist God’s plans and be beaten by them: “The history of the Jews obstructs

¹⁹³ Ibid., 246.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 247.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 268.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 273.

¹⁹⁷ Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 80.

the history of mankind as a dam obstructs a river, in order to raise its level.”¹⁹⁸ Hence, despite their very real culpability, they cannot be destroyed, and it is useless to try. Bloy compares them to Cain, the first murderer, who the Lord mercifully “set a Mark upon...that whosoever found him should not kill him.”¹⁹⁹ Moreover, the Jews represent for Bloy the manifestation of an inevitable historical and spiritual law—that of “the mystical Competition between the Elder and Younger son.”²⁰⁰ Bloy explains, “The anathematized, the persecuting brothers always represent the People of God *against* the Word of God.”²⁰¹ There is reason to believe in an ultimate reconciliation of the rebellious elder brother, and Christ will not come to save all men until this reconciliation. As Burton observes, then, Christians are doubly indebted to the opposition of Jews—to the extent that they *are* responsible for the initial, atoning sacrifice that was the crucifixion, and also in that the result of their present strivings against Christ will be his final return.²⁰² Bloy makes this Christian Hegelianism explicit: “The Jews will be converted only when Jesus descends from His Cross, *and precisely Jesus will be able to descend from it only when the Jews are converted* [italics mine].”²⁰³ Even in his Christian rehabilitation of Jews, then, Bloy retains an ancient rationale for anti-Semitism: antagonism to Jews is a necessary component of their eventual reconciliation and of the triumph of Christianity.

This paradoxical and pragmatic logic of anti-Semitism, making antagonism necessary for unity, did not disappear with the advent of the more sinister, racial strain to which Bloy referred. Religious discrimination aside, opposition to Jews was a primary unifying factor for

¹⁹⁸ Bloy, 248.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 250.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 252.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Burton, 81.

²⁰³ quoted in Ibid.

the Right as a mass movement in France. According to Zeev Sternhell, racial anti-Semitism first “made its appearance on the political scene with Boulangism”; “the first national socialists” valued anti-Semitism not so much for purely ideological reasons, but for its “revolutionary power and its capacity to mobilize the masses.”²⁰⁴ Maurice Barrès “considered anti-Semitism the ‘popular formula’ par excellence” because of the unanimity and “revolutionary energy” it could muster.²⁰⁵ And Charles Maurras could hardly have made his pragmatism more explicit. Calling anti-Semitism’s emergence “providential,” Maurras exulted that “it enables everything to be arranged, smoothed over, and simplified. If one were not an anti-Semite through patriotism, one would become one through a simple sense of opportunity.”²⁰⁶

National revolution, therefore, was aided by and indebted to the necessary exclusion of Jews, just as was Christian salvation. Sternhell’s concluding remarks underscore just how similar the oppositional logic of modern anti-Semitism was to the old religious kind, as well as to that of Péguy’s more general racism. “Unable to define itself in any other way than in terms of opposition, the nationalism of the turn of the century used racism and anti-Semitism as a means of stigmatizing everything it was against. The Jew symbolized the anti-nation: he was all that was negative—the cosmopolitan *in opposition to whom, and yet at the same time in consequence of whom*, national sentiment could finally emerge [italics mine].”²⁰⁷ Péguy, despite his famous pro-Dreyfusard fury, employed an exclusionary, paradoxical logic of the nation analogous to that of the nationalist anti-Semites. For Péguy, of course, Jews did not

²⁰⁴ Zeev Sternhell, trans. by David Maisel, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 44.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

play the role of “anti-nation,” but rather whoever he assigned to the category, whether it be the English in Joan’s day, or the Germans in his own—all those that did not suffer and hope and fight for God the way the French did.

In view of Péguy’s nationalism and his exclusion of cultures that are “anti-French,” the social potential of his monism is tainted. No longer a rationale for social progress, the beautiful physicality of *The Portal*—the conviction that “It depends on us Christians / To make it so that the eternal lacks nothing of the temporal... That the spirit lacks nothing of the flesh”²⁰⁸—takes on a more ominous cast. The French must incarnate spiritual truth in the material of the battlefield. As early as 1909, he expressed his monistic nationalism with predictable derision for intellectuals: “Our positivists will learn metaphysics by the firing of rifles. And that mutually, for I mean firing and being fired at.... They will learn the relation between a people’s body and a people’s spirit.... Our antipatriots will learn the price of a carnal fatherland.”²⁰⁹ Moreover, in 1913’s *L’argent (suite)*, he spoke approvingly of “the necessity of Rome in the temporal purpose of God”—“Rome,” in the context, clearly denoting not just the political system but militarism proper.²¹⁰ Thus, the mystical fusion of body and spirit that enabled his universalism to manifest itself in social optimism also made certain that his more pessimistic, exclusivist pronouncements could not be mitigated by the kind of otherworldly detachment that accompanied the similar misanthropy of the Protestant tradition.

I have argued that, by drawing on the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, with its monistic and communal implications, Péguy’s pretensions to socialist universalism had even

²⁰⁸ Péguy, *Portal*, 66.

²⁰⁹ Péguy, *Basic Verities*, 158-159.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

greater possibility of consistency and success than Lacaze-Duthiers' did. His incarnational monism also unwittingly provided a foundation for the Catholic modernism and social engagement of the interwar years. But the necessary opposition—the Manichaeism—of his cultural nationalism, much like Lacaze-Duthiers' aesthetic Manichaeism, derailed the humanistic possibilities of his orthodoxy. God depends on “the fatherland,” even more than he does on individual bodies, to give material form to spiritual truths, and this in inevitable opposition to other, less Catholic nations.²¹¹ Hence, Péguy can proclaim, “in war times nothing remains but the State.... And he who surrenders is my enemy, no matter who he is”; but “Blessed are those who died for carnal cities. / For they are the body of the city of God.”²¹²

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 155, 279.

“BROAD CHURCH MYSTICISM” AND THE SOCIALIST UTOPIA OF EDWARD CARPENTER

Writing in 1920, after the Romantic and religious phases of socialism in England had in large part faded into the pragmatic organization and electoral politics of the Labour Party, Edward Carpenter still conceived of his inevitable socialist millennium, quite impractically, as “the salvation, for which humanity looks...the return of the little individual self to harmony and union with the great Self of the universe.”²¹³ That socialism played the role of a surrogate religion for many 19th-century reformers is almost intuitively evident, and is an irony often cited without apparent need for proof. In 1977, Stephen Yeo set out to isolate the specific terms and thought patterns early British socialism borrowed from Christianity, and to locate the sociological and psychological needs socialism met that religion had earlier fulfilled. According to Yeo, the religious aspects of early British socialism include its determinism and millennialism, its desire to resolve “the problem of theodicy,” its call for absolute devotion, and its asceticism.²¹⁴ Further, like other young religions still at the missionary stage, there was little centralization, and much room for diversity.

Carpenter—whose own unique brand of socialism Yeo described as a blend of “mystical, nature-based, eclectic appropriations of Christian and other religions”²¹⁵—is, by virtue of his independence, but also by virtue of the ethical impulse he held in common with many other early socialists, an exemplar of this idealistic, religious stage. According to Stanley Pierson, Carpenter “encouraged Socialists to attach Christian sentiment and imagery”

²¹³ Edward Carpenter, *The Origins of Pagan and Christian Beliefs*, (London: Senate, 1996), 274.

²¹⁴ Stephen Yeo, “A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896,” *History Workshop*, No. 4 (Autumn, 1977), 18-19.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

to their struggle, and “to view the cause in ethical terms rather than the class war” of Marx.²¹⁶ Carpenter, born in 1844 to a Brighton magistrate and a conventionally religious mother, was a pioneer of many causes—from his crusade against the hypocrisy and unhealthiness of Victorian sexual repression, to his advocacy of acceptance for the “intermediate sex” of homosexuality, to vegetarianism, anti-vivisectionism, and his lifelong interest in Hinduism and Eastern philosophy. These aspects of his thought, and especially those pertaining to sexual liberation, were so dominant that more than one commentator has suggested that his Romantic and religious brand of socialism was merely a convenient vehicle for the cultural campaigns he would have wanted to wage regardless.²¹⁷ The elevation of the body and the intertwining of matter and spirit, which pervades his heavily Whitman-inspired writings, were actually, according to Sheila Rowbotham, aspects of his attempt to sanctify “sexual pleasure for its own sake,” thus insulating homosexuality from condemnation on the grounds that it is not procreative.²¹⁸ And for Ruth Livesey, Carpenter’s asceticism, his emphasis on cleanliness and natural living, and his exaltation of male comradeship were all motivated by a desire to reconstruct Victorian notions of “bourgeois masculinity” and to affirm the masculinity of his own homoerotic brand of socialism.²¹⁹

Though most of these commentators acknowledge in passing the influence that Carpenter’s moderately Anglican upbringing and time as a cleric had on his thought and mission, none have given that influence the consideration it is due, nor have focused on those aspects of his system that rely on Christian (though often heterodox) particulars. Of

²¹⁶ Stanley Pierson, “Edward Carpenter, Prophet of a Socialist Millennium,” *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, (March, 1970), 312.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 316.

²¹⁸ Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love*, (London: Verso, 2008), 281.

²¹⁹ Ruth Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 117-119.

the Carpenter family's relationship to the popular Brighton preacher Frederick W. Robertson, Pierson only remarks that Robertson was "noted for his incarnation-centered theology" and was "a frequent visitor in the Carpenter home."²²⁰ In addition, concerning Carpenter's time as a curate under the vicarage of Frederick D. Maurice—a Broad Church Anglican and socialist known for his rejection of the doctrine of everlasting punishment—Pierson rightly observes that "something of the Anglican leader's love-centered religious vision may be found in Carpenter's later outlook," but then leaves it at that.²²¹ Rowbotham, whose recent biography of Carpenter is nearly exhaustive, echoes Pierson's observation, and likewise leaves the particulars unexplored: "Carpenter...absorbed Maurice's approach much more than he admits."²²² Rowbotham later observes that the Cambridge University Extension project, for which Carpenter lectured after resigning his curacy, was "suffused" by its founder "with Maurice's vision of social harmony through personal contact," but thereafter she only mentions Maurice in passing.²²³

One reason for this neglect, which Rowbotham and Pierson make apparent in the above citations, is that Carpenter himself did not elaborate on the influence of Robertson, Maurice, and the culture of liberal Anglicanism that suffused his earliest years. Pierson follows Carpenter's autobiography almost exactly in his reference to Robertson, for Carpenter only mentions the preacher once.²²⁴ In reference to Maurice, with the exception of a few illuminating remarks, Carpenter for the most part merely describes the hilarious difficulty Maurice had in conveying his sincere but obscure moral philosophy into "broken

²²⁰ Pierson, 301.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 302.

²²² Rowbotham, 27.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 41. See also pp. 98, 103, 150, 332.

²²⁴ Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams, Being Autobiographical Notes*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 38.

sentences,” and highlights the disagreements they had after Carpenter came under his supervision and knew him personally.²²⁵

Instead, concerning the formation of his thought, Carpenter emphasizes his reading of the *Bhagavat Gita*, his discovery of H. M. Hyndman’s *England for All*, his own ideal of masculine comradeship and what he called “homogenic love,” and, of course, his early and abiding love for Whitman. The *Bhagavat Gita*, “falling into [his] hands” in early 1881, gave Carpenter “a kind of super-consciousness—which passed all that I had experienced before, and which immediately harmonized all these other feelings, giving to them their place, their meaning and their outlet.”²²⁶ Similarly, *England for All* helped Carpenter articulate his vaguely socialist ideas into a program of action. His ideas, which “had been taking a socialist shape for many years” had lacked a “definite outline” which Hyndman’s retelling of Marx’s theory of surplus value, especially, then provided—“From that time forward I worked definitely along the Socialist line: with a drift, as was natural, towards Anarchism.”²²⁷ And as for Whitman, Carpenter famously compared his influence to that “of the sun or the winds. These influences lie too far back and ramify too complexly to be traced.... ‘Leaves of Grass’ ‘filtered and fibred’ my blood.”²²⁸

Certainly, it is fitting that Carpenter stresses these various determinants, as they were integral to his system and his mission; his thought relies even more, though, on the Universalist, Romantic and neo-Platonist breed of Christianity that so pervaded the 19th century climate of opinion. The religious ideas of German Romantic philosophy, of Samuel

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 55-57.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

²²⁸ Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy: Complete in Four Parts*, (New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1922), xxiv.

Taylor Coleridge (in particular among the English Romantics), and of Broad Church Anglicanism “filtered and fibred” Carpenter’s blood even more than did Whitman’s poetry, and perhaps for that reason were, for him, even less susceptible to being “traced.”

As previously stated, although Carpenter did not elaborate on the seeds of his thought that are Christian and Romantic, he did make a number of statements that together form an image of the religious and philosophical influences of his young life, and several of these concern Maurice specifically. Carpenter remembered that when he was fourteen, because he observed a young Brighton curate being praised for his manners and sermons, he began intending to take Orders. He also recalled fantasizing that, in the event of a fire, he would bravely rescue his prayer book. He dismisses this youthful religiosity with mocking tone: “I saw myself in my mind’s eye rushing into my mother’s room where the sacred volume lay, and bearing it out through flames and smoke into the street. It was not my mother or sisters that I was going to save.... Alas! what a defect of nature, or of teaching, must have been there.” The most memorable characteristic of Carpenter’s father, Charles, was his interest in German philosophy. Carpenter jokes that when his father, at the age of 23 and in the navy, began learning German in order to read philosophy in his spare time, it “did not look as though he were destined to remain long on board ship!”²²⁹ Later, Carpenter explicates more fully what he considered to be his father’s metaphysical outlook. The lines are worth quoting and examining at length:

Though having a strong religious feeling, he soon emancipated himself from current orthodoxies in religion, and seldom in later life went to church....
For Frederick W. Robertson, who was then preaching at Brighton, and who not unfrequently came to our house, and for Frederick D. Maurice, however,

²²⁹ Ibid., 36.

he had great admiration; and his own views were—as far as I remember what he said when I was a boy—a kind of Broad Church mysticism, derived at first from reading S. T. Coleridge (whom he had occasionally met in former years in London), and gradually broadening out under the influence of Eckhardt, Tauler, Kant, Fichte, Hegel and others into a religious and philosophic mysticism without much admixture of the Broad Church at all.²³⁰

Robertson was a prominent liberal theologian and follower of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle and Goethe, and his sermons at Brighton in the late 1840s and early 50s were famous for their sensitivity and openness, their emphasis on the goodness and love of God, and for the number of thoughtful seekers who attended. Maurice, too, was a leader in the Broad Church movement, a Universalist with regards to Christian salvation, a founder of Christian Socialism in England, and like Robertson, an admirer of the Romantic poets, and of Coleridge above all. With the addition of the Germans, this is a revelatory list, and enables us to locate the intellectual climate of Carpenter's youth. His calculated distancing of himself from his father's friends and views ("as far as I remember what he said") is a bit disingenuous, as he would later both admit and demonstrate a closer affinity to Robertson, Maurice, Coleridge and the rest. And his claim that there was very little of the Broad Church in his father's later, more purely philosophic mysticism (with the implied distinction between the mysticism of the Broad Church and that of the English and German Romantics) is, we shall see, misguided, since liberal Anglicanism was heavily populated by Romantic heterodoxies of all kinds. In summing up the influence of his father's outlook, though, Carpenter does recount two other significant ideas he later found in his father's correspondence—in one letter the elder Carpenter discusses the prospect of an eventual kind of supra-conscious intelligence in man, which will not require reflection, much like the

²³⁰ Ibid., 38.

unconscious instinct in animals; in another letter, he defines Nirvana as the state of being “so conscious of the indwelling and inworking of Deity, that [man] will ascribe every movement, whether of his body or mind, to...the One Life, and thus think of himself as swallowed up by and absorbed, as it were, in that Being.”²³¹ Surveying these statements in retrospect, Carpenter acknowledges “a priceless debt...to the early contact with [his father’s] mind.”²³²

In the account of his ordination and curacy at Cambridge, and of his personal contact with Maurice, Carpenter reveals even more about his early theological views. He emphasizes that, “brought up in the philosophical Broad Churchism of my father,” he did not even consider that his own mystical idiosyncrasies might be an obstacle to religious orders. Thus, he recorded that he was surprised, more than anything, when the examining Bishop—the moderate Harold Browne—singled out his interpretation of Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of Isaac for special review.²³³ Carpenter told the Bishop that the episode represented the evolution of the human race’s collective conscience away from human sacrifice, and toward a higher form of religious observance. The Bishop objected that the scene was a prefiguring of the Atonement, signifying the necessity of sacrifice but also the merciful substitution of Christ—the ram caught in the thicket. According to Carpenter, in another tantalizing allusion, he had “picked up” his explanation of the passage from his readings of the German historian and religious scholar, Baron von Bunsen, and found the version confirmed by the histories of England’s most prominent liberal theologian, Dean Stanley. Despite disclosing such a level of study on the matter, Carpenter recounted his

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

exchange with the bishop with his usual persona of detached ease and humored innocence. He submitted “so dreadful a heresy...without a qualm,” he writes, and when questioned about it, “I had some difficulty in understanding what the trouble was, but when the Bishop in grave tones began to remind me...that the whole scheme of Biblical salvation rested four-square upon this incident (not forgetting the ram), I immediately saw that the fat was in the fire, and that there was now no escaping a solemn discussion on the Atonement. And to that it came.”²³⁴ Carpenter prepared a “mystic script” detailing his perspective on the Atonement, and the Bishop, after reading it replied that he was quite certain Carpenter’s view “was *not* the doctrine of the Church of England.”²³⁵ In the event, Carpenter was right to trust in the broadness of the Anglican Church, as he received ordination minutes later.

The main reason Carpenter had trouble articulating his doctrinal stance at this time, he claimed, was that his views were “woolly in outline, sadly blurred by the Broad Church mysticism of F. D. Maurice,”²³⁶ again evidencing a perhaps greater familiarity with heterodox theologies than he cared to clarify. And, finally, in the extended section where he recounts Maurice’s coming to Cambridge, and jokes about his esoteric lectures and the great difficulty his critics had in pinning down his heresies, Carpenter also indicates that, at this time, Maurice’s doctrines were still his own. In fact, Carpenter’s main (and growing) objection to the life of a churchman was not philosophical or theological, but rather related to the ignorance and hypocrisy he saw in the average parishioner:

It was curious that after having been brought up in and adopted Maurice’s views, I should now, having become his curate, feel as uncomfortable as I did.... But when it came to standing up oneself in church and reciting these

²³⁴ Ibid., 54.

²³⁵ Ibid., 55.

²³⁶ Ibid., 54.

documents to a congregation who (as one knew perfectly well) did not understand a word of them, and practically received them in their grossest sense and in a spirit of mere superstition, then I felt it *was* necessary to draw the line somewhere!... [T]he trouble to me was a practical one—namely the insuperable *feeling* of falsity and dislocation I experienced, and which accompanied all my professional work from the reading of the services to the visiting of old women...who would hastily shuffle a Bible or prayer-book on to the table, when they saw the parson coming.

Finally, in 1909, while speaking at an anniversary of the Vegetarian Society, Carpenter praised Maurice because “it was one of the great objects of [his] life to bring all classes together,” and called the churchman “a great influence in my life.”²³⁷ From these several references to his milieu’s religious mysticism and above all to the Christian Romanticism of Robertson and Maurice, it is clear that Carpenter owed much to these inspirations, despite his later, more extended acknowledgements of the impact of Whitman, Hinduism, Socialism, and his desire for “comradely” love. The debt will become even clearer after a comparison of the Broad Church Romanticism of the day and of Carpenter’s system.

In his seminal treatment of Romantic thought and literature, *Natural Supernaturalism*, M. H. Abrams traces persistent Christian and Neo-Platonic themes up through the literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, in order to demonstrate the ways in which Romanticism is, according to T. E. Hulme, “spilt religion.”²³⁸ Among other things, Abrams asserts that Augustine’s *Confessions* is the common ancestor of such disparate innovations as Wordsworth’s *Prelude* and Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*. Augustine’s inward gaze—and especially his attempt to retroactively impose order on his life—connect him to these fellow spiritual autobiographers and give his *Confessions* the right to be called “the first modern

²³⁷ In Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter: Prophet of Human Fellowship*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 16.

²³⁸ In Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 68.

work.”²³⁹ Of particular significance to Abrams’ project is the Romantic conceit of the “circuitous journey,” based on the Christian model of history as a circular, symmetrical, and providential restoration of fallen man. In the Romantic approximation, the hero, while out and away from home, confronts a crisis of evil or suffering that brings a new level of self-understanding, and, upon his unwitting return home “[knows] the place for the first time.”²⁴⁰ Abrams shows that this (admittedly commonplace) narrative structure for organizing experience—from primal unity, to self-conscious alienation, and then on to a more perfect unity—has antecedents in both pagan and Christian thought, but, ultimately, he quips, all manifestations of this construct are “a long series of footnotes to Plotinus.”²⁴¹

Plotinus, for Abrams, is the father of all those who recast Adam’s sin as an individuation—a consciousness of self—and the imminent salvation as a return to the “All.” In the *Enneads*, Plotinus defined the fallen soul as “partial and self-centered,” “a deserter from the All...isolated, weakened, full of care, intent upon the fragment.”²⁴² Even the sexual division, according to the medieval Scottish neo-Platonist Erigena, is a product of the fall, and primordial humanity was androgynous.²⁴³ Neo-Platonist, “proto-Hegelian” notions of a unity that necessarily begets its antithesis, which in turn seeks reconciliation, were energized by the addition of Hermetic mysteries and “Christianized versions of Kabbalist doctrines,” and then transmitted into prevalence among radical Christian theologians by Renaissance thinkers like Giordano Bruno and Jacob Boehme.²⁴⁴ In the 1790s and following, the thought pattern claimed the widespread currency it enjoys to this day, Abrams argues, because of its

²³⁹ Abrams, 83.

²⁴⁰ T. S. Eliot, in Abrams, 253.

²⁴¹ Abrams, 146.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

ability to sort out the great flux and suffering, the “continuous...revolution and disorder” that characterized Europe after the French Revolution and after the disillusionment with Enlightenment optimism.²⁴⁵

Coleridge, of all the Romantics, was most concerned with synthesizing Romantic thought and Christianity, and was instrumental in transmitting neo-Platonic and German metaphysics to religious thinkers in England. Some aspects of Coleridge’s Romanticism that exerted a special pressure on Maurice include his interpretation of the sin of the Fall as individuality and self-reflection, his narrative of a *felix culpa* and a universal return of all to One, his distinction between reason and the understanding, and his belief that all sects and systems of thought could be reconciled by focusing on their *positive* statements, rather than on what they deny.²⁴⁶ As a young man, even before his exposure to German Romanticism, Coleridge had studied Plotinus, Bruno, Erigena, and Boehme “with great although carefully qualified admiration.”²⁴⁷ Tellingly, upon his discovery of William Blake, he wrote with approval that the poet was “a Swedenborgian” and “a mystic *emphatically*.”²⁴⁸

With all these threads of influence converging, it is no surprise that in his early *Religious Musings*, Coleridge describes fallen man collectively as “An Anarchy of Spirits!”; in this low fragmented state, “the smooth savage roams / Feeling himself, his own low self the whole.”²⁴⁹ In order to regain the unity of humanity, in all its parts, man must utilize a kind of supra-rational, intuitive, “sacred sympathy” capable of creating “The whole one Self! Self,

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 146.

²⁴⁶ Charles Richard Sanders, “Coleridge, Maurice, and the Church Universal,” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 21, No. 1, (Jan., 1941), pp. 31-45.

²⁴⁷ Abrams, 265.

²⁴⁸ In Ibid.

²⁴⁹ In Ibid., 266.

spreading still! Oblivious of its own, / Yet all of all possessing!”²⁵⁰ This, he prophesies, is “the Messiah’s destined victory!”²⁵¹ Accompanying the narrative in Coleridge’s system is a distrust of rationality as alienating (“the rational instinct... [formed] the original temptation, through which man fell”²⁵²), and an obsession with locating universal, monistic unity. Like Plotinus and most 19th century Romantics, though, Coleridge’s ultimate unity is not as homogeneous as was the original—the constituent parts have gained by their straying, and retain their newfound knowledge of individuality, hence the felicity and necessity of the fall. “Coleridge,” Abrams notes, was “a diversitarian monist,” who believed that humanity’s end would be “multiety-in-unity.”²⁵³

Maurice would later ascribe his own repudiation of partisanship and his quest for universal unity, at least in part, to Coleridge’s instruction, observing, “Those who have profited most by what he has taught them, do not and cannot form a school.”²⁵⁴ According to Charles Richard Sanders, Maurice “seized upon” Coleridge’s conviction that all opposing sects actually have their most profound, positive pronouncements in common. The more “we penetrate into the ground of things, the more truth we discover in the doctrines of the great number of philosophical sects,” writes Coleridge: “All these we shall find united in one perspective central point.”²⁵⁵ This notion took on a more distinctly Christian cast in Maurice, and “grew into his vision of the Church Universal.”²⁵⁶ For Maurice, who had met opposition for his rejection of the exclusivism of the doctrine of hell, the Church “is neither Anglican,

²⁵⁰ In *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ In *Ibid.*

²⁵² In *Ibid.*, 268.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 269.

²⁵⁴ In Sanders, 31.

²⁵⁵ In *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

Gallican, nor Roman, neither Latin or Greek.”²⁵⁷ To the Scottish Minister McLeod Campbell he wrote, “Perhaps I hold more strongly than you do a reconciliation of the whole of humanity with God in Christ,”²⁵⁸ and, similarly, he spoke reproachfully of any who would presume to “divert the stream of God’s mercy into canals and tanks of their own manufacture.”²⁵⁹

Further, Maurice believed, in accord with neo-Platonism and Romanticism, that humanity’s quest for original unity was the primary mechanism and design of history. For Maurice, the Reformation and the Enlightenment were to blame for the new wave of individualism and intellectualism, and he saw the 19th century as playing a penultimate role in history’s scheme, uniting the positive aspects of the Enlightenment with an older notion of communion and self-forgetting. Maurice’s Christian Socialism was motivated by these spiritual beliefs, and he hoped to see all classes united just as all creeds would be. “I cannot help thinking that a time is at hand...when we shall perceive that what we call our individual salvation means nothing, and that our faith in it becomes untenable when we separate it from the salvation which Christ wrought out for the world.”²⁶⁰ Maurice also believed in a “multiety-in-unity,” rather than a total obliteration of the individual in the whole. In his theological terms, he affirmed that man could and ought to know himself and others: “We can know nothing of ourselves till we look above ourselves.... The knowledge of man is possible because the knowledge of God is possible.”²⁶¹ As in Coleridge’s distinction between reason and the understanding, and perhaps analogous to Bergson’s later separation of

²⁵⁷ In *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁵⁸ In *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁵⁹ In *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁶⁰ In *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁶¹ in *Ibid.*, 43.

intuition and intellect, Maurice did not deny the possibility of communicating with and knowing God through God-given reason—the problem came when men attempted to understand God in purely human terms and constructs, a job for which the understanding is not intended.²⁶²

Perhaps the most important way in which Maurice attempted to reconcile Romantic thought with orthodox Christianity was by an optimistic appeal to the doctrine of Christ's incarnation, with its implications of the goodness of the physical world, and of Christ's spiritual and physical empathy with all persons. Maurice, according to Paul Dafydd Jones, held to a “radically immanentist understanding of God”—seeing God's governance and concern for universal love and equality as directly operative in the world—and to a “Christic anthropology” in which “all human beings [share] in the infinite goodness of Christ, not the corruptive sin of Adam.”²⁶³ Maurice's brand of socialism was driven by this assumption of spiritual equality and brotherhood in Christ, and he hoped that, on this basis, acts of sympathetic contact between classes would suffice to bring about a more just society. Maurice explicitly believed that interclass sympathy and open communication was a more effective long-term tactic than the alteration of conditions.²⁶⁴ Maurice encapsulated the relationship between his incarnational theology and his social project, in an 1848 essay entitled “Fraternity”—if it is true that “an Everlasting Father has revealed himself to men in an elder Brother,” Maurice observed, then “we can feel to each other as brothers; we can look upon all you whom we address in this paper, nobles, shopkeepers, labourers,

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Paul Dafydd Jones, “Jesus Christ and the Transformation of English Society: The ‘Subversive Conservatism’ of Frederick Denison Maurice,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 96, No. 2 (April, 2003), 206, 214.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 219.

mechanics, beggars, aristocrats, democrats, people of every class and party, as brothers.”²⁶⁵

Maurice critiqued the traditional social system from the vantage point of his belief in universal equality in Christ—for Christians and non-Christians alike. Since all are equal, competition was immoral and cooperation a mandate.²⁶⁶

Likewise, Robertson—the Brighton minister and regular guest in Carpenter’s childhood home—found in the doctrine of the incarnation a common ground between the progressive and Romantic teleologies of the age and Christian orthodoxy. In one sermon preached at Brighton parish, he attempted to explain the mysterious implications of Christ’s humanity. Carpenter, of course, may not have been in the congregation that day, and, at any rate, was only a child, but Robertson’s words further illustrate the intellectual atmosphere encouraged in Charles Carpenter’s home. Taking as his text Hebrews 4:15-16, which explains that Christ “was in all points tempted like as we are,” Robertson argued that Christ’s ability to be tempted physically and spiritually, as a man, illustrates “the truth of the human heart of God.”²⁶⁷ Moreover, the fact that he will continue, eternally, as a man is doubly significant in its application: “We think of God as a spirit, infinitely removed from and unlike the creatures He has made. But the truth is, man resembles God.... The mind of God is similar to the mind of man.... *The present manhood of Christ conveys this deeply important truth, that the Divine heart is human in its sympathies* [italics mine].”²⁶⁸ All possibility of goodness and sympathy between man and man is a product of this sympathy between God and man. Robertson felt that it would be difficult to overestimate “how much the sum of human happiness in the

²⁶⁵ In *Ibid.*, 215.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁶⁷ Frederick W. Robertson, *Sermons Preached at Brighton*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1899), 89.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

world is indebted to this one feeling—sympathy. We get cheerfulness and vigor...from mere association with our fellow-men.”²⁶⁹

In a later sermon, preached in Brighton when Carpenter was eight years old, and entitled “Man’s Greatness and God’s Greatness,” Robertson, again synthesizing Romantic and neo-Platonist ideas with orthodox Christianity, declared that man’s greatness consists in his dependence on and his union with God. Echoing Plotinus, Coleridge, and the prophet Isaiah, he asserted, “to be independent is man’s shame.... And the moment man cuts himself off from God, that moment he cuts himself off from all true grandeur.”²⁷⁰

In his own appropriation of the Christian-Romantic teleology of the “circuitous journey” (with its attendant neo-Platonic universalism), in his desire to maintain a healthy individualism in the hoped-for collective, in his critique of the limits of scientific knowledge and his belief in a supra-conscious level of spiritual intuition, in his rejection of Victorian repressiveness, and elevation of material goods to spiritual ones—in all these ways, Carpenter showed just how much he, too, was a product of the alliance between Romanticism and Broad Church mysticism. In fact, the reason Whitman’s corporeality and comradeship, the *Bhagavat Gita*’s idealism, and early British socialism’s desire to bring classes together all found such fertile ground in Carpenter, is not that he was, simply by nature, ready to embrace something antithetical to his upbringing; rather, these influences, by their very resemblance to his intellectual environment, grafted themselves onto an already-formed thought system, resonating with earlier inspirations and helping him organize and articulate those inspirations.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 593.

Carpenter's "masterwork" and most famous publication is his long, free-verse poem "Towards Democracy," first published in 1883 and expanded in subsequent editions until complete in 1905. Carpenter composed the work under the heavy and admitted sway of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and the "Song of Myself" in particular was the "template" for Carpenter's title poem, according to Michael Robertson.²⁷¹ It is certainly not surprising, then, that the nebulous social project outlined in "Towards Democracy" is saturated with declarations of the greatness and transcendence of the physical world and its desires, and of the need for spiritual *and* physical communion with others. The speaker is a Whitmanesque Everyman who easily traverses England's social strata and empathizes with every profession, every gender, and every age. Identification with others is achieved by first identifying with one's own body—unlearning the dualistic austerity of Victorian religiosity. Carpenter defines the "freed soul" as one "that has completed its relation to the body," and the millennium as a time when "men and women all over the earth shall ascend and enter into relation with their bodies."²⁷² Note his insistence, with "ascend," that the body's needs and realities are not lower than spirit, but higher even.

As in the Romantic theologies of Maurice and Robertson, knowledge of one's own individual self is only possible by entering into physical and spiritual union with all—the knowledge of God so to speak. In what is almost certainly an intentional inversion of the evocative lines of Psalm 17:15 ("As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" [KJV]), Carpenter encourages the downtrodden with an image of perfect, millennial knowledge of self and God, individual and collective:

²⁷¹ Michael Robertson, *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 179.

²⁷² Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, 5.

“When you shall behold *yourself* in the clean mirror of God you shall be wholly satisfied [italics mine].”²⁷³ In this construction, it is not man’s duty to reflect God; rather God is a mirror reflecting the collective spirit of humanity back upon each one. Carpenter continues to elaborate on the connection between his monism and his ideals of equality and fellowship. “The body is the root of the soul. . . . The soul sustains itself in love,” he writes, intending “love” to signify sex.²⁷⁴ “You shall realise Yourself,” concludes Carpenter, only by “penetrating into that medium” of Equality with others.²⁷⁵ Carpenter hoped that men who recognized human equality might have interclass encounters both sexual and spiritual—by their fellowship and camaraderie paving the way for a more just society.²⁷⁶ This latter emphasis is, of course, a unique addition to Maurice’s ideal of human fellowship, but the tactical model (cross-class associations as the primary mechanism for social change) is identical.

Carpenter’s monism, I have argued, was the sole product neither of his desire to rehabilitate “homogenic” love, nor of Whitman’s influence. These considerations only invigorated a belief he had long been exposed to and taken as his own, without needing to take the specific doctrine literally—that of the social consequences of the incarnation. On multiple occasions in “Towards Democracy,” Carpenter relies on the biblical phraseology of the incarnation to describe his narrator’s project. He admonishes England not to look for any God, or system, or philosophy to save them; instead, he writes, they should look for “The Son of Man”—that descriptor for Christ used most often in the Gospels, and

²⁷³ Ibid., 35.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Rowbotham, 71-72. See also Robertson, 177-178.

emphatic of his humanity. The Son of Man “will not bring a new revelation,” will not answer “eager questions about death and immortality,” will not be perfect; instead, he will bring “just the whole look of himself in his eyes,” and will “restore the true balance.”²⁷⁷ Again, as Carpenter’s Everyman narrator travels from one sympathetic association to another, he says, “I am a seeing unseen atom... I resume a body and disclose myself.”²⁷⁸ In each of these incarnational encounters, his desire is to “touch” each person (“Him I touch, and her I touch, and you I touch—I can never be satisfied”²⁷⁹), much as the First Epistle of John says that because Christ was manifested in the world, “our hands have handled...the Word of life.” Further, Carpenter’s narrator proclaims, “I am come.... Born beyond Maya [that is, before time] I now descend into materials”; similarly, in the book of Hebrews, the writer says, “when [Christ] cometh into the world, he saith...a body hast thou prepared me.... Lo, I come.”²⁸⁰

Carpenter borrows expressions from the prophetic book of Isaiah, a book notable for its dual emphases on both God’s immanence and his transcendence. Carpenter’s narrator claims to have lived in the physical world at one time, but now he “[has] the freedom of worlds innumerable”²⁸¹—Isaiah 57 (the passage, incidentally, on which Robertson had based his Brighton sermon, “Man’s Greatness and God’s Greatness”) relates that God “inhabits innumerable worlds,” while simultaneously, somehow, dwelling with men. Similarly, Carpenter borrows the famous paean from Isaiah 6—“Holy! Holy! Holy!”—to praise not the Christian God, but the transcendent state of being in union with all. Returning to images of

²⁷⁷ Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, 48-49.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁸⁰ Hebrews 10:5, 7 [KJV].

²⁸¹ Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, 71.

the incarnation, Carpenter, in a line reminiscent of Maurice's "Christic anthropology," concludes that every child born into the world is, as Christ was, a union of matter and spirit, a confirmation of equality and fellowship. Every mother's body is "a temple of the Holy One."²⁸²

In his late work of comparative religion, *The Origins of Pagan and Christian Beliefs*—which is in the main a demonstration of the commonalities between the historic religions of the world—Carpenter's philosophical monism and belief in a universal, Romantic scheme of history are especially evident. The central thesis of *The Origins* is that Christianity "[sprang] from just the same root as Paganism, and that it shares by far the most part of its doctrines and rites with the latter."²⁸³ The growth of human religions is one aspect of humanity's inevitable movement towards higher consciousness and fellow-feeling, and the more one studies the similarities between world religions, from taboos and rites of expiation to messiah figures and eucharists, the clearer it becomes "that religious evolution through the ages has been practically One thing—that there has been in fact a World-religion, though with various phases and branches."²⁸⁴ Carpenter conducts his exploration of these similarities in great detail, but all, ultimately, in order to prove that there are three stages in the evolution of human consciousness—simple, animal consciousness, self-consciousness, and that which "for want of a better word we may term...Universal Consciousness."²⁸⁵

As in neo-Platonist and Manichean narratives of inevitable but profitable evil, "it would be foolish and useless to rail against the process" by which man fell into self-

²⁸² Ibid., 88.

²⁸³ Carpenter, *The Origins of Pagan and Christian Beliefs*, 12.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 16.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 222.

consciousness: “It had to be.”²⁸⁶ In Carpenter’s version, though, it is Christianity—or at least a bourgeois, individualistic appropriation of Christianity—that is responsible for the middle, self-conscious stage, and the final stage will combine the positive, brotherhood-affirming pronouncements of Christ with those of other religions. The affinity of Carpenter’s narrative to those of Coleridge and Plotinus could hardly be more pronounced. “Man, centering round himself, necessarily became an exile from the great Whole. He committed the sin (if it was a sin) of Separation.”²⁸⁷ And again, in what seems almost an exact borrowing from the travels of one of Plotinus’ “emanations” or of the Romantic hero of a *Bildungsroman*: “To some such unity-consciousness we have to return; but clearly it will not be...of the simple inchoate character of the First Stage, for it has been enriched, deepened, and greatly extended by the experience of the Second Stage.”²⁸⁸ All the elements of Abrams’ “circuitous journey” are here—the circular symmetry, the balance of individualism and collectivism in the final stage (“multiety-in-unity”), the educative necessity of the intermediate wilderness wanderings, and the inevitability of it all. And for Carpenter, as for Maurice, the 19th century occupies a special place in the cosmic plan. “In the present day this period is reaching its culmination,” Carpenter prophesied; “a great and general new birth,” is “now not so very far off.”²⁸⁹

Further, in Carpenter’s vague intimations about what the future society would actually be like, there is more of Robertson and Maurice’s Romantic, incarnational Christianity than there is of Hyndman’s socialism. Carpenter explains that the ancient

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 226.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

mystery of the Eucharist—that God is himself the eternally recurrent, physical victim of his own sacrifice—represents the truth that there is a link between God and man (and man and man), and symbolizes the participation of the individual in the collective, eternal life of humanity.²⁹⁰ By an intuitive recognition of the unifying power of love and of one’s identification with the rest of humanity, one can rise above tribal affiliations and, in a sense, live forever (here the similarity with Bergson, too, is palpable). As in Maurice’s Christian Socialism, the final stage will be democratic not because all will be equal and classes obliterated, or because of majority rule, or because of a dictatorship of the proletariat, but because it will rely on “intuitive understanding” of differences, and class distinctions that remain will not prevent sympathetic contact and fellowship.²⁹¹ “Emancipated Man,” Carpenter wrote, “passes...through all grades and planes of human fellowship, equal and undisturbed, and never leaving his true home and abiding place in the heart of all.”²⁹² The final stage of Unity echoes Maurice and Robertson’s ideals, finally, in that the individual’s capacity for self-knowledge and individuality will be dependent on his knowledge of and participation in the Whole.²⁹³

In some respects, it would be hard to locate a man more seemingly antithetical to his age than was Carpenter. His various crusades—vegetarianism, the benefits of sandal-wearing, anti-vivisectionism, Hinduism, Transcendentalism, socialism, tolerance and recognition for same-sex love—made him marginal to Victorian convention. Even his socialist allies, exceptional themselves, considered Carpenter a rarity: G. B. Shaw, who knew

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 252.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 254-255.

²⁹² Ibid., 255.

²⁹³ Ibid., 273-274.

him personally from meetings of the Fellowship of the New Life and the Fabian Society, mockingly dubbed him “The Noble Savage,” and Hyndman complained that “odd cranks” and “sentimentalists” like Carpenter were confusing and misdirecting socialist energies.²⁹⁴ But despite his innovations and idiosyncrasies, Carpenter’s entire philosophy rested on the well-worn tenets of Romanticism, and particularly on the Broad Church mystic variety familiar to many educated Englishmen. Christianity and neo-Platonist universalism are of such significance to Carpenter’s worldview that, among his contemporaries, it seems to me that he most resembles not one of his socialist comrades, for instance, or one of England’s other upper-class advocates of “homogenic love,” such as J. A. Symonds, but rather the Scottish minister, mystic, poet, and fantasy-writer George MacDonald.

MacDonald, who is the rightful but neglected father of adult, prose fantasy in the English language, was, like Carpenter, a follower and associate of Maurice, and he was even persuaded by Maurice’s Broad Churchism to join the Anglican Church for a time, despite his disagreement with many of the Thirty-nine Articles.²⁹⁵ Further, MacDonald read Swedenborg, Boehme, and Blake extensively, and his own fantastic novels were consciously modeled on the work of German Romantic mystics such as Novalis.²⁹⁶ MacDonald was “heretically eccentric”—not only did he align himself with the “liberal” wing of the church in matters of biblical criticism and interpretation, but he was an extreme universalist in all its implications. His constitution rebelled against the strict Calvinism of his homeland. He believed that all would be saved, that non-Christians would have opportunities in the afterlife to come to know the Christian God, and he even suggested that the devil would

²⁹⁴ Rowbotham, 95, 97.

²⁹⁵ Richard H. Reis, *George MacDonald*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), 32.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33, 87.

ultimately be redeemed.²⁹⁷ Much like Carpenter, MacDonald resolved (to his own satisfaction) the problem of evil and suffering, both in the temporal, material world and in the cosmic scheme of salvation, by recourse to a neo-Platonist universalism. Because man, unlike God, is limited in time, according to MacDonald, God's good designs on him must take place in time, with all the process of suffering that entails.²⁹⁸ Suffering in this world, and suffering in whatever form hell might take in the afterlife, are temporary means of instruction and growth. "Evil," wrote MacDonald, "is a moral good—a mighty means to a lofty end."²⁹⁹ Again, even hell is not retributive, but restorative: "I believe that no hell will be lacking which would help the just mercy of God redeem his children."³⁰⁰

MacDonald's most famous and influential adult fantasy, *Phantastes*, is about a young man named "Anodos"—a Greek word meaning "a way back"—whose travels in Fairy Land signify his desire to return, to find "a way back" to the innocence of childhood.³⁰¹ Anodos' narrative is largely episodic, proceeding from event to interchangeable event, but is, in part, organized around his acquisition of a shadow, and his eventual eradication of that shadow through good deeds. He comes upon a hut in a clearing, in which an old woman is reading aloud: "As darkness had no beginning, neither will it ever have an end. So, then, it is eternal."³⁰² In the hut, he is possessed of an "irresistible desire" to look in the closet, and, when he does, he meets and is bound to his shadow. Later on, he meets a "little maiden,"

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 32-33, 36.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 34-35.

²⁹⁹ In Ibid., 34.

³⁰⁰ In Ibid., 35.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 87.

³⁰² George MacDonald, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 55.

“almost a woman,” who “carried a small globe, bright and clear as the purest crystal.”³⁰³ The globe has vibratory, musical qualities, but Anodos touches it too roughly, his shadow envelops it, and it shatters. According to Richard Reis, the touch and the breaking of the crystal sphere is suggestive of the loss of sexual innocence.³⁰⁴

At any rate, the shadow and the shattered glass both represent the prehistoric disobedience and loss of unity, the necessary evil within the neo-Platonic narrative. At the end of the story, by opening another door, Anodos unwittingly frees the young maiden, whom he has not seen for some time, from confinement. At first he does not recognize her, but she reminds him, “You broke my globe. Yet I thank you.”³⁰⁵ If she had not been deprived of the instrument, she would not have learned “something so much better. I do not need the globe...for I can sing.”³⁰⁶ Anodos sees that the maiden had been “uplifted, by sorrow and well-doing, into a region I could hardly hope ever to enter.” But as the maiden departs, she sings this universalist, monist encouragement: “Thou goest thine, and I go mine— / Many ways we wend; / Many days, and many ways, / Ending in one end. / Many a wrong, and its curing song... but only one home / For all the world to win.”³⁰⁷ Here, as elsewhere, the similarity to Coleridge, Maurice, and Carpenter’s narratives of future, mystical union, and to their belief in the compatibility of positive truth claims, is obvious. With confidence in the design of the universe, and in the beneficial and necessary effects of evil, Anodos claims, “I know that good is coming to me—that good is always coming.”³⁰⁸

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁰⁴ Reis, 92.

³⁰⁵ MacDonald, 164.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

I have argued that Carpenter’s mature philosophy, despite its apparent divergences from 19th century English Christianity, owed at least as much to these sources as to his later discoveries. With regard to his famous fascination with Hinduism, I believe this thesis is especially illuminating. Carpenter’s debt to “Broad Church mysticism” at once encouraged and tempered his fascination with Eastern religion, and the ways in which he critically and selectively utilized the lessons of Hinduism distinguishes him from other fin-de-siècle admirers of the mystical superiority of the East.

In Britain, the 1890’s was a time of renewed interest in the spiritual and cultural offerings of the East, after a century-long hiatus of missionary fervor and a narrow, Anglo-centric imperial philosophy.³⁰⁹ The most important example of this interest was the Theosophical movement, founded in New York in 1875 by the Russian Helena Blavatsky, who claimed to receive letters that traveled through space from Buddhist mahatmas in the Himalayas.³¹⁰ Blavatsky, who knew nothing of India’s languages, taught that all religions have common origin in an ancient “wisdom-religion,” that the universe is the product of “emanations” from a primal One, and that each person possesses a higher self, accessible through mystic, esoteric rituals.³¹¹ Theosophy found fertile ground among devotees of spiritualism, which had been in vogue since mid-century, but, more significantly, among those critical of British imperialism and mission work, those weary of 19th-century

³⁰⁹ William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2002), 27-28, 46-54.

³¹⁰ Stewart J. Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom, 1815-1914*, (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2008), 385.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

materialism and industrial civilization, and those who sought a spiritual life that did not seem to conflict with the recent discoveries of science.³¹²

At the invitation of a Singhalese friend from Cambridge named Arunáchalam, Carpenter traveled to Ceylon in 1890 in order to sit under the teaching of his friend's guru, Gñani Ramaswamy. Like so many other Western enthusiasts of an idealized Hinduism, Carpenter wrote to a friend that he hoped "to renovate my faith, and unfold the frozen buds which civilisation & fog have nipped!"³¹³ In accord with his expectations, he found the Gñani to be a "pre-civilization man"—"one could almost feel him to be one of the old Vedic race of two thousand or three thousand years back."³¹⁴ With the Gñani, he felt himself "in contact with...the intense *consciousness*...of the oneness of all life...the soul and impulse of religion after religion."³¹⁵ In January 1891, he observed a nighttime religious festival in Taypusam, in which "hundreds of men and boys, bare-bodied...but with white loin-cloths" marched into the temple and, with horns blaring, worshipped the lingam—a stylized phallus symbolic of Shiva. He was enamored of Hinduism's openness and innocence about sexuality, again like other Western admirers.³¹⁶

Unlike many Theosophists (whose teachings he characterized as "of a somewhat second-hand character") and other eager critics of Western civilization, though, Carpenter did not betray the monist supposition that all religious and cultural traditions have positive contributions in common, including that of the West. In fact, despite finding in Hindu mysticism the spiritual component of love and unity that he had sought, Carpenter was often

³¹² Mark Bevir, "Theosophy and the Origins of the Indian National Congress," *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1/3 (Feb., 2003), 101. See also Brown, 386.

³¹³ In Tsuzuki, 104.

³¹⁴ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 143.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ Rowbotham, 153-154.

critical of Indian society, even to the point of prescribing Western remedies. When he first arrived in Ceylon, he noted—ironically, with an air of snobbery in the service of democratic ideals—that “the natives are...too submissive creatures...there is something very touching about them.”³¹⁷ Carpenter appreciated the Hindu emphasis on internal contemplation as the path to a spiritual kind of casteless unity, but “in the west, he countered, “we are in the habit of looking on devotion to other humans...as the most natural way of losing one’s self-limitations and passing into a larger sphere of life and consciousness.”³¹⁸ For Carpenter, as for the Romantic Christian Socialists, the future state of universal, unitary consciousness had to be accompanied by material, social equality, and a continuing sense of individuality. Carpenter hoped that “a dash of the Western materialism” would help the lower castes to assert themselves,³¹⁹ that more freedom would be given to women, and that science would “give that definition and *materialism*...which is so badly wanting in the India of to-day.”³²⁰

Remembering his “personal experiences of the Eastern teachings” ten years later, he mused that “the true line is that...which consists in combining and harmonizing *both* body and soul.” East and West had historically erred on opposite sides of this dualism. “The Indian methods” could bring “great illumination,” but also “over-quiescence” and “torpor”; “Western habits” tend to the “over-activity and...distraction of the mind,” ending in “disintegration.”³²¹ Carpenter credited Whitman for “first adequately [pointing] out” the necessity of balancing these two poles. Of course, as we have seen, his familiarity with this idea began much earlier than in his discovery of *Leaves of Grass*.

³¹⁷ In Tsuzuki, 104.

³¹⁸ In *Ibid.*, 105-106.

³¹⁹ In Rowbotham, 156.

³²⁰ In Tsuzuki, 107.

³²¹ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 144.

While Carpenter's hopes for social and spiritual union, like those of Maurice and MacDonald, could certainly be criticized as naïve and optimistic, his is no Panglossian "best of all possible worlds." He recognized the suffering and opposition in this world, but he believed that these things carried within them the seeds of redemption. On the other hand, he is rare among Romantic thinkers for not emphasizing opposition more. The neo-Platonist and incarnational impulses of his thought prevented his project from halting at a kind of Romantic, heroic or nationalistic Manichaeism, as did Lacaze-Duthiers and Péguy's pretensions at universalism.

In the context of 19th-century preoccupations with the problem of evil (and social inclusion vs. social opposition), Carpenter's philosophy is "neo-Platonist" as opposed to "Manichean," in the sense that, although both heterodoxies teach the instructional and evolutionary necessity of evil (the *felix culpa*), Manichaeism makes evil (or antagonism to the Romantic hero) eternal, while neo-Platonism prophesies the return of every deed and every person to perfect Oneness. Like many religious and social thinkers of his day, Carpenter employed a Romantic narrative that relied on inevitable antithesis and reconciliation. But perhaps by temperament, and perhaps because of the particular brand of Romanticism transmitted to him through the Broad Church, Carpenter's writings avoid any sign of the pessimistic, spurned martyr (or nation of martyrs) that so often eclipsed Romanticism's social possibilities. Moreover, empowered by the sincere monism of Coleridge's Romanticism and of a certain form of Christological orthodoxy, Carpenter was better situated than were Péguy and Massis, for instance, to judge the many benefits and disadvantages of different cultures, whether "East" or "West."

CONCLUSION

Three case studies is certainly too small a pool to make any conclusive generalizations about the differences between French and British social thought, or about the comparative merits of “Manichean” and “neo-Platonist” redemption narratives—but I will make a few suggestions. According to Paul M. Cohen, who in this respect relies on Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the “consecrated heretic,” there has been, since the days of Rousseau, a “peculiarly French concept” of intellectual and artistic freedom, involving the necessity that the intellectual hero be isolated, within the establishment he criticizes but marginal to it.³²² This concept, as we have seen, must ironically be accompanied by the intellectual’s inability to successfully persuade others, otherwise he loses his marginal position. Here is the metaphorical “Manichaeism”: confidence that one has exclusive truth, but pessimism regarding other people’s ability to receive that truth.

That this kind of intellectual martyr’s complex has historically enjoyed greater vogue in France than elsewhere, while certainly a thesis with evident merit, would be very difficult to demonstrate. It is certain, though, that it is not a distinctly French phenomenon. It seems that both of these competing beliefs—on one side, unifying truths can be found in competing beliefs, and progress is therefore possible; on the other, opposition validates the truth by defining it, and division and skepticism, therefore, are necessary—are a profound part of the human experience, and can be found coexisting even in single individuals.

I have tried to demonstrate that, in the face of the economic, cultural, social and intellectual confusions of modern life, Lacaze-Duthiers, Péguy, Carpenter and their fellows

³²² Paul M. Cohen, *Freedom’s Moment: An Essay on the French Idea of Liberty from Rousseau to Foucault*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 3-8.

turned to older Christian and mystical modes of thought, in order to organize, justify, and mitigate the experience of suffering, inequality, and opposition—with mixed results. Of course, the taxonomical shorthand I have employed—“Manichaeism” vs. “neo-Platonist”—is, like all generalizations, susceptible to the criticism that it obscures significant differences, thus becoming a meaningless term. Just as there are as many “fascisms” as there are fascists, there are as many “Manichaeisms” as there are Manicheans, and I have tried to be sensitive to the many distinctions between Lacaze-Duthiers and Péguy. In general, moreover, it is by no means certain that “neo-Platonist” universalism and optimism is always superior to a more pessimistic, opposition-oriented outlook. Perhaps, as Kolakowski suggests, societies need both pessimists and optimists, with regard to humanity’s potential for understanding and harmony, in order to function properly. At any rate, it is important, as we decide what kind of people we want to be, what kind of policies we want to support, and what kind of society we want to inhabit, to consider the religious and Romantic antecedents of our presuppositions.

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