George Woodcock: the ghostwriter of anarchism

George Woodcock: The Ghost writer of Anarchism[1]

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Abstract

In ordinary language, a ghost writer is someone who stands behind or writes on behalf of a named author. In dubbing George Woodcock the ghost writer of anarchism we instead want to suggest that Woodcock identified anarchism's 'essence' or, as Stirner has it, 'the spirit that walks in everything'.[2] After considering the evolution of *Anarchism* in the context of Woodcock's political activism we discuss Woodcock's contribution to the construction of the anarchist canon and his treatment of anarchism's 'essence'.

Keywords: Woodcock, Anarchism, Canon,

1. Introduction

Anarchists have never been backwards in coming forwards with accounts of their doctrines. Notable contributions include Wilson's *Anarchism*, (1884), Malatesta's *A Talk About Anarchist Communism Between Two Workers*, Voltairine de Cleyre's *Why I am an Anarchist*, Berkman's *The ABC of Anarchism* (1929), Rocker's *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism* (1948) Goldman's *Anarchism: What it Really Stands For* (1911) Guérin's *Anarchism* (1965), Walter's *About Anarchism* (1969), Meltzer and Christie's *The Floodgates of Anarchy* (1970), Milstein's *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* (2010). Yet Woodcock's book, first published in March 1962 has endured. Nicolas Walter believed that *Anarchism* was 'the most widely read book on the subject' guessing that it had 'introduced more people to anarchism than any single publication.'[3] (Walter 1987: 174) In the Foreword to his own introductory text, Colin Ward similarly described *Anarchism* as 'probably the most widely read book on the subject in the

world'.[4] That *Anarchism* eclipsed all the alternative introductions is perhaps not surprising. Woodcock's literary connections helped him secure Penguin's interest, even before the American edition had had time to establish a reputation. Taken under Penguin's wing, the book found an international readership and a global distribution network. Translated into countless languages, it remains in the (bottom half) of the top 100 books on anarchism, according to Amazon's UK rankings, and notwithstanding anarchism's rich literary heritage it was for many years the standard reference for anarchist scholarship.[5] Its significance for both '60s radicals, and for the generations who followed is neatly summarised by Jeremy Jennings. He also provides what was – at least until recently – a familar categorisation of key texts. There is *Anarchism* 'the standard text on the history of anarchism' and then there are other works. Jennings mentions Peter Marshall, James Joll and others.[6]

Text-book introductions to anarchism not only list Woodock as a source, but replicate key features of his analysis: that anarchism was principally a European phenomena; that it existed between the 1880s and 1930s, dying with the Spanish revolution in 1939; that it was an idea and that it was importantly elaborated by a series of special men.[7] Woodcock's history of libertarian ideas has not only contributed to an ongoing conceptualisation of 'classical anarchism' by identifying its key nineteenth-century exponents, it also helped define the parameters of 'new anarchism' without even providing a clear account of this category. Our argument is that *Anarchism* has played a central role in the construction of the anarchist canon and our intention in evaluating Woodcock's work is to reveal the assumptions, ideologies and logic that underpin this canon and probe its boundaries and limits.

1.1 George Woodcock: The Poet

George Woodcock (8 May 1912 – 28 January 1995) was a poet, man of letters, historian, biographer and critic. Born in Winnipeg and he is celebrated both as a Canadian and for his

outstanding contribution to Canadian literary culture. The 'Winnipeg boy', as W.H. New calls him, 'virtually created Canadian literature', according to Peter Hughes, notably through his founding and editorship of the influential quarterly journal of the same name.[8] His politics also distinguished him. For Douglas Fetherling Woodcock was Canada's 'only anti-authoritarian intellectual'.[9] However, in this role, the cultural rootedness of Woodcock's thought is open to dispute. Woodcock's family moved to England less than a year after his birth and he remained in the country for 30 years or so, moving permanently back to Canada only in 1949. By this time, he was well-versed in anarchist thought and had made formative encounters with comrades in the London movement.[10]

The first person who talked to Woodcock about anarchism was a fellow commuter called Brooks. Brooks was not an anarchist but 'thought it must be considered seriously' as a doctrine and he lent Woodcock the first anarchist book he ever read: Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*.[11] Perhaps this introduction to anarchist autobiography was significant: Woodcock used biography consistently (though not exclusively) as an approach to structure his analysis of anarchism and he produced a series of biographical sketches of some of the 'major' anarchist thinkers he represented in *Anarchism*. In addition to the book-lengh studies Woodcock published on Godwin, Kropotkin and Proudhon he included chapters on Proudhon and Kropotkin, alongside Herzen, Orwell, Graham Greene, Ignazio Silone, Arthur Koestler, Franz Kafka in *The Writer and Politics* (1948).

Woodcock inhabitited the literary circles of the magazine *Twentieth Century Verse* in London. The group met in the radical bookshop of Charles Lahr, who had become 'an anarchist in his youth in Germany'.[12] Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet in the Western Front*, Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* and Robert Graves's *Good-Bye to All That* left a deep impression on him during this period and he became 'a pacifist anarchist'.[13] Interwar Spanish politics proved decisive for the addition of anarchism to Woodcock's 'spectrum of acceptable

beliefs'. The abdication of Alphonso XIII in 1931, Woodcock remembered, 'encouraged me to believe that peaceful overthrow of authority was possible, that pacifism and revolution might be reconciled'.[14] Deciding 'to refuse to serve militarily if a war came about'[15] Woodcock saw anarchism as a logical extension of pacifism in times of war and extraordinary worldwide violence: 'Having decided that I would resist the dictates of the state, if necessary to the extent of going to prison, I realized that war resistance led naturally and logically to anarchism, since one was necessarily putting one's own conscience above the law, and therefore denying the presumptions of the state and legality.[16] When war was declared, Woodcock cited the influence of Gandhi, Wilde and some individualist anarchists in his application to be recognised as a conscience objector.[17]

Woodcock began attending anarchist public meetings in London 1941 and he built important relationships with the *War Commentary* and Freedom Press Group during the 1940s while he was publishing his own magazine, *NOW*. He felt closest to those anarchists who were 'almost completely Gandhian' and disagreed with speakers who spoke in favour of revolutionary violence.[18] He dated his interest in anarchist history to this time and records that his relationship with Albert Meltzer declined as a result, because Meltzer identified him as a potential rival.[19]

1.2 The Desire To Please Marie Louise

Woodcock calls his seminal work *Anarchism* his 'critical history' and compares it favourably to his earlier book *Anarchy or Chaos*.[20] Writing in the 1980s, he regarded this book as 'no more than a passable apprentice work, its ideas half-digested, its story distorted, and the desire to please my new comrades - especially Marie Louise - painfully evident'.[21] Frank Mintz, a fiercesome critic of *Anarchism*, located the important difference between the two texts in the shift in Woodcock's politics. *Anarchy or Chaos*, he argued, was written when Woodcock was

still an anarchist. Although some of the strongest affirmations of those convictions found their way into the later text, *Anarchism*, by contrast, was the work of a writer who had become hostile to anarchism, and, above all, to the idea of revolutionary transformation.[22]

One explanation for Woodcock's turn against forms of anarchism he identified with Bakuninism might be the disappoinment that followed the crushing of the Spanish Revolution. However, his autobiography indicates that he felt a greater sense of disappointment at the ending of the war. Naturally, Woodcock did not regret the peace, but he felt an acute sense of pointlessness in being a pacifist anarchist in the post-war political climate. There were personal reasons, too. Reading his autobiography, *Letter to The Past*, it seems that his wife, Ingeborg, played a role in his disenchantment with anarchism and in encouraging his 'escape' to Canada. Woodcock does not elaborate about Ingeborg, respecting her wish not to be drawn in his memoir, nevertheless the retreat from anarchist politics is apparent. Woodock records that his anarchist friends treated his departure as a betrayal – though Nicholas Walter suggested that the death of Marie Louise Berneri was by far the most significant event of that time and that Woodcock's departure 'was scarcely noticed'.[23] However his former comrades felt about his departure, Woodcock does not contest the judgement he attributes to them. He admitted: 'I would never have decided to go away from London if I had not concluded that my involvement in anarchism must now be only philosophic'.[24] Factionalism and 'the bitter disunity within the anarchist movement had ... made me skeptical as to whether our beliefs could ever be effectively manifest as more than a current of thought sustained by individual thinkers and through them influencing society'.[25] Woodcock's sense of anarchism's ideational power is one of the main themes of *Anarchism*. Eschewing political action, he left for Canada convinced that the ideas of individual thinkers were the most perfect manifestation of anarchism.

It seems that Woodcock always felt a need to legitimise his decision to quit the

London anarchist movement at the end of '40s. *Anarchism* played an important part in this process insofar as it declared that the anarchist movement he had 'abandoned' was already dead. Admittedly, the Prologue contained some important qualifications. Anarchism, he argued, 'is both various and mutable ... As a doctrine it changes constantly; as a movement it grows and disintegrates, in constant fluctuation, but it never vanishes'.[26] Yet the thrust of his argument ran counter to this view and he summed this up thus: 'Lost causes may be the best causes – they usually are – but once lost they are never won again'.[27]

In 1968 this prounouncement appeared embarrassingly wide of the mark and to explain what appeared to be a too-hasty judgment, Woodcock wrote 'Anarchism Revisited'. This article begins with a quote from *Anarchism* about anarchism's failure and permanent death. Reflecting on this conclusion, he describes *Anarchism* as 'largely a reckoning' with his 'own youth'.[28] Neatly summarising his involvement with anarchist groups from the early 1940s, Woodcock mentions that he had 'compiled a jejune manual of anarchist tenets, *Anarchy or Chaos*, as narrowly sectarian as a Trotskyite tract'[29] but confirms his radical credentials. He reminds readers that he edited the British anarchist papers *War Commentary* and *Freedom*, that *NOW* was the main organ of literary anarchism during the 1940s and, finally, that he contributed regularly to Dwight Macdonald's *Politics*. The refusal of an immigration visa by United States in 1955, a good four years after he 'had abandoned any kind of connection with organized anarchism', reinforces this standing.[30] So it was a radical Woodcock who declared the death of the anarchist movement, adding, in his mature reflection, that this diagnosis was correct, notwithstanding the newly emerging anarchism of 60s. How could this be?

His answer was that what emerged in 60s is 'new anarchism'; something totally different from the old, not at all a continuation of nineteenth-century anarchism. The 'anarchists of the 1960s', Woodcock claims, 'were not the historic anarchist movement

resurrected; they were something quite different, a new manifestation of the idea.' In this article, Woodcock use the term 'classic anarchists', 'historic anarchists' and 'the old revolutionary sect' to describe the dead.[31] Elsewhere, he refers to 'classic Bakuninist anarchism', demonstrating a deep hostility to Bakunin, also evident in the chapter in *Anarchism*.[32] Anarchism did not enjoy a revival in 1960s but a rebirth. 'The old revolutionary sect has not been resurrected, but in its place has appeared a moral-political movement typical of the age.'[33]

2. The Book

How should we describe Woodock's book? Given that Woodcock highlighted the intimate links between arts and anarchist politics, it seems strange that *Anarchism* attaches very little importance to the role of the arts and artists in anarchist history. However, his acquaintance with literature plays an essential role in shaping the arguments of *Anarchism*. Throughout, Woodcock uses intense and dramatic language and striking metaphors to convey his ideas. In the Prologue the history of anarchism is sometimes understood as a chronological event (a term coined by a political theorist, embraced by certain activists, and turned into a movement by them) and sometimes as an approach that can be attributed to anyone in history. Woodcock tells us that anarchism is 'a system of social thought, aiming at fundamental changes in the structure of society and particularly – for this is the common element uniting all its forms – at the replacement of the authoritarian state by some form of non-governmental cooperation between free individuals.'[34] Woodcock does not offer much help or discuss his main claims (arguing that all forms of anarchism unite in the belief that power is located at the authoritarian state) but instead makes use of a language that treats these ideas as given truths.

The structure of the book is also instructive. The substantive content is sandwiched between the Prologue which outlines what anarchism is, moving from fluidity to essence and

an Epilogue, which takes the form of an obituary. The filling is composed of two parts: 'Part One: The Idea' and 'Part Two: The Movement'. Part One is dedicated to anarchist thinkers, and it includes chapters on those responsible for cooking up the anarchist idea, according to Woodcock: William Godwin, Max Stirner, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Michael Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin and Leo Tolstoy. This arrangement of the gallery of anarchist thinkers was of course a continuation of the tradition championed by Paul Eltzbacher[35] and Woodcock credited Eltzbacher's work as 'a pioneering survey of the various trends of anarchist thought'.[36] However Woodcock did not follow the model slavishly. Eltzbacher regarded Benjamin Tucker as a prominent anarchist. Woodock relegated him to a bit-part in the chapter 'Various Traditions', featured in the second part of the book. Woodcock also prefered history to 'science' and he re-ordered Eltzbacher's listing to place Stirner before Proudhon rather than the other way around, as Eltzbacher preferred. Apart from these deviations, the cannonical approach was otherwise quite similar.

2.2 Assumption And Naming Policies

Some of Woodcock's central ideas about anarchism are conveyed in the rich language he uses to describe anarchists. To give one example, Woodcock introduces Proudhon in his Prologue as a 'stormy, argumentative individualist who prided himself on being a man of paradox and a provoker of contradiction' who 'published the work that established him as a pioneer libertarian thinker'.[37] This short description contains many narrative tricks and tropes of coherence and Woodcock employed these repeatedly throughout the book to construct an image of anarchists and types of anarchism. He invited readers to familiarise themselves with an incoherent body of thought and incoherent individuals who were proud of their incoherence. Proudhon is first of all 'stormy'. Don't expect balance. The resonance with Rousseau's preference for paradox over prejudice is lost in the conjunction of paradox with

contradiction. Proudhon's dedicated chapter, titled The Man of Paradox, reinforces the point.

This is the first of a series of labels which set anarchist doctrines in stone. Subsequent

chapters on 'Ideas' follow the same pattern. Woodcock attaches adjectives to anarchists in

order to portray them as sometimes attractive but typically unreasonable or naive. It comes as

no surprise to discover at the end of the book that the ideology they created is charming but

unrealistic and the movement their ideas spawned was chaotic and ultimately defeated.

Woodcock's labeling policies are also politically significant. Some anarchists might

have struggled to find an anarchism without adjectives. Woodcock does the opposite. The

Proudhon introduced in the first pages of this seminal book on anarchism and the anarchist

movement is 'an individualist'. And this label is attached without any questioning or

discussion. There is no indication that this is Woodcock's view or interpretation, it is

represented as a well-known fact. This approach shadows the canonisation process in play.

William Godwin is injected into the family tree as 'The Man of Reason'. There is no debate or

argument, even though Godwin did not identify as an anarchist. Anarchists including

Kropotkin identified him as an ancestor, but the inclusion surely deserves a rationale, a

reflection on Godwin's identification as a precursor and the grounds of the family

resemblence?[38] Why not start with Winstanley: The Communist? or Eve: The Insubordinate.

2.3 History Of Anarchism As A History Of Ideas

Woodcock's reductionism is not peculiar to the history of anarchism. As John Dunn argues,

the history of ideas has not been written as the history of an *activity.* Complicated structures

of ideas have been arranged to become deductive systems. 'Reified reconstructions of a great

man's more accessible notions have been compared with those of other great men; hence the

weird tendency of much writing, in the history of political thought more especially, to be

made up of what propositions in what great books remind the author of what propositions in

what other great books.' And 'as a make-weight to this type of analysis, we have biographies

of great thinkers which identify the central arguments of their more important works' and

'sketch in their social background in some detail'.[39] For Dunn, the history of thought is not

about representation but, 'in the most literal sense', reconstruction. He comments that it is

often extremely unclear 'whether the history of ideas is the history of anything which ever did

actually exist in the past.'[40] The emphasis he places on *activity* is not about the realisation of

an idea, but about reflecting on what has been realised when this idea was set down.

Proudhon said something: there is no doubt. If we adapt Dunn's view to the history of

anarchist ideas, the question is: what he was *doing* in saying what he said? [41] This is not the

question that Woodcock asks. And Dunn's critique reveals that the history of anarchism as it

is characteristically written conforms to to 'the history of thought as it is characteristically

written'.[42]

2.4 Prologue

The story of anarchism Woodcock gives in The Prologue reserves all the foundational

positions for Western agents: it excludes non-Western anarchisms. There is not a single

mention of a non-Western anarchist thinker or a non-Western anarchist movement. This tells

us that to understand the nature of anarchism, there is no need to study non-Western/Third

World anarchisms. If you want to study anarchism in general, studying European anarchism

will do. There is no need to know about Mexican anarchism or Chinese anarchism. To study

the history of French anarchism is to study 'the history of anarchism'. The Prologue assumes

an apparent hierarchy of traditions.

Even within the Western world, Woodcock establishes cultural hierarchies. This much

is evident when he promotes his position as a pacifist and where he condemns anarchists who

accept violence as a political means. Spain, Italy and Russia are represented as places where

'violence had long been endemic in politic life'. In these areas, anarchists, 'like other parties, accepted insurrectionalism almost as a routine ...'[43] The key words in this description are 'endemic' and 'routine'. Both serve wonderfully to undermine the rationale of revolutionary anarchist political action experienced in Spain, Italy and Russia. We are encouraged to think that propaganda by the deed, for example, was not a genuine anarchist idea at all, but a response to the endemic behaviours on show in peripheral countries. The subtext of Woodcock's carefully chosen metaphors suggests that the attempts anarchists made to instigate revolutionary insurrection in these countries reveals their culturally 'violent' routines.

2.5 The Gallery

In his section on anarchist theory, 'Part One: The Idea', Woodcock dedicates chapters to six thinkers said to represent anarchism. Each chapter is based on a biographical story, assorted details picked out to narrate the ventures of a man in radical politics and capture the essence of their thought. The titles of the chapters are used to demonstrate the prominent features of these writers as individuals. Accordingly, William Godwin is 'The Man of Reason'; Max Stirner is called 'The Egoist'; Proudhon is 'The Man of Paradox'; Bakunin's contribution to anarchism is captured as 'The Destructive Urge'; Kropotkin is 'The Explorer' and Tolstoy is 'The Prophet'.

It is possible to think of many alternative labels. The title of the chapter on Godwin might easily have described his utilitarianism or his relation to romanticism. The title of a chapter on Stirner could have described his anti-humanism. For Proudhon, federalism, anti-militarism and anti-nationalism were possible alternatives. Anti-theologism, anti-authoritarianism or internationalism might have worked for Bakunin. Kropotkin could have been dubbed the Anarchist Communist, or perhaps the theorist of propaganda by the deed.

The Esperantist might have worked for Tolstoy, or his chosen nominal of Christian anarchist. The possibilities are multiple. And Woodcock's selection is telling: if one of the main theoreticians of anarchism is depicted as destructive, then anarchism becomes a doctrine of destruction.

As entry points into the ideas of his representative thinkers, the labels set the tone for the discussion, informing the selection of metaphors, lines of narration and the overall conclusions. Yet Woodcock chooses to discuss the personal adventures of the anarchists to discuss the substance of their ideas. Instead of focusing on the relation between ideas, the intersection of lives, events and theories, and instead of trying to map and reveal the outlines and interconnections of anarchist history, he paints as colourfully as possible the jumbled, chaotic, 'stormy' flows in the history of politics which are all gathered together under the tag of anarchism. Almost inevitably, his narration tends not to find connections, but on the contrary, to discover more incoherency and non-connectedness within individual lives.

The chapter on Bakunin provides a spectacular illustration of how un-reasonable anarchism can be, in the iconic figure of Michael Bakunin.Woodcock outlines the passage to Bakunin's fascinating (and yet pathetic) character at the end of his discussion of Proudhon:

> Proudhon did not create the anarchist movement – though he shares credit with Godwin for creating anarchism - and he might have rejected many of its later manifestations, but without his preparatory work it could hardly arisen under the captaincy of his most spectacular and most heretical disciple, Michael Bakunin.[44]

The first uncomfortable supposition in this excerpt lies in the claim that Proudhon shares the credit with Godwin for creating anarchism. As we suggested earlier, this attitude results in a confusion: if we are referring to a historical movement, than Godwin is definitely not one of

its creators, for the anarchist movement did not emerge until years after his time. But if we are referring to anarchism as a doctrine coined by certain individuals in the nineteenth century, who also studied the history of radical thought to find progenitors, it would be those individuals who created anarchism, not the ancestors they have arguably found. Perhaps the point of conjoining Godwin-Proudhon is to highlight a break from reason-paradox to unthinking, irrational action?

The second haunting supposition in the extract lies in the introduction of Bakunin. By defining Bakunin with the words 'spectacular', 'heretic' and 'disciple', Woodcock prepares us to read about a man who courted controversy and was exciting in a risky way, but whose ideas were derivative: all trousers and no talk. In fact, the chapter on Bakunin begins like a psychological case study, not a political sketch. Bakunin is described as being 'monumentally eccentric', 'naïve, spontaneous, kind, yet cunning'. He is described as behaving with 'enthusiasm', with 'instinctive defiance', a player of a 'great game of prolonged childhood', he is associated with 'pure comedy' or the 'caricature of an anarchist'.[45]

2.6 Description First Then Analysis

Bakunin is defined, in Norbert Elias's sense, as someone who could not go through the 'civilizing process'.[46] His infantile behaviour, violence, bodily functions, forms of speech: in all these senses, Bakunin appears un-civilised; an eccentric representing the spirit of repressed Europe. Even physically, according to Woodcock, Bakunin was:

gigantic, and the massive unkemptness of his appearance would impress an audience even before he began to win its sympathies with his persuasive oratory. All his appetites – with the sole exception of the sexual – were enormous; he talked the nights through, he read omnivorously, he drank brandy like wine, he

smoked 1,600 cigars in a single month of imprisonment in Saxony, and he ate so voraciously that a sympathetic Austrian jail commandant felt moved to allot him double rations.[47]

Woodcock's sometimes patronisingly benevolent, sometimes humerous tone and the incidents and stories collected in the chapter are familar to anyone who has read E.H. Carr's biography of Bakunin.[48] Indeed, there is a tradition of Bakuninalia which paints him in similarly exaggerated terms. Nevertheless, Woodcock's portrayal of Bakunin as the 'destructive urge' is not a side issue and is not easily dismissed. Bakunin, as extraordinary as he might be in Woodcock's eyes, is not placed as an exceptional character in anarchism. The anarchism Woodcock depicts includes the Gargantuan Bakunin as a central character. Woodcock describes Bakunin's politics as 'pan-destructionism';[49] the Bakuninist conception of revolution as 'revolution as apocalypse';[50] and Bakunin's thoughts as luridly illuminated by 'the destructive vision of blood and fire'.[51] Bakunin, a radical political figure, who devoted his life to revolutionary movements worldwide and had a huge influence on a string of other comrades and key events of the revolutionary era – both by his writings and his organisational efforts – the man who spent many years in terrible conditions in prisons as a result – is derided in the first page of the section reserved for him, as an enormous childlike eccentric who chain-smoked 1,600 cigars.

Woodcock had a reason for painting Bakunin as he did. And it creates a void in Woodcock's narration: if Bakunin was such a caricature, how did he become widely acknowledged as a political figure, indeed, one of Marx's most significant political rivals? In Paul Avrich's words: 'A century ago anarchism was a major force within the European revolutionary movement, and the name of Bakunin, its foremost champion and prophet, was as well known among the workers and radical intellectuals of Europe as that of Karl Marx,

with whom he was competing for leadership of the First International.'[52] Woodcock has two solutions for this 'inconsistency': a) it was inexplicable! Bakunin (like Rasputin) exercised an indefinable power upon people; he had the ability to 'inspire other men freely with his ideals and lead them willingly to action on the barricades or in the conference hall';[53] b) Bakunin's failings were themselves a part of what anarchism is.

The rest of Woodcock's portraits are all different, but the treatment Woodcock gives of Bakunin is replicated throughout the book. Every anarchist celebrity in the list represents a character in the gallery: a moderate teacher of young ladies in a Berlin academy who praised 'crime and exalted murder',[54] an ascetic and pacifist literary genius, an Eastern Prince who explored anarchism in the depths of Siberia, a modern Gargantua spreading all kinds of unreasonable insurgencies (which are in fact 'routine' in peripherical cultures), an autodidact man of paradox giving and a man of reason whose politics was a 'little more than Sandemanianism'.[55] No wonder Tony Blair referred to the contemporary anarchist movement as the anarchist circus!

2.7 The Movement

Woodcock's second section, 'Part Two: The Movement' is made up of chapters devoted to anarchist traditions in certain countries. Chapters for French, Italian, Spanish and Russian anarchism make up the main part of this section. The last chapter ('Various Traditions') looks at anarchism in Latin America, Northern Europe, Britain and the United States.

This section, which discusses the realisation of *the anarchist idea*, is also a place where we find a pronounced exclusion of Third World anarchisms. Woodcock first mentions non-European anarchists when they attend the anarchist congress in Amsterdam in 1907. We read about Japanese delegates representing anarchism in Japan, but we do not find anything about anarchism in Japan, China or Korea. We read that Malatesta 'agitated and conspired not

only in Italy, but also in France, England, Spain, the Levant, the United States and Argentina'[56] but we fail to find anything about anarchism in the Levant, or about Eastern traditions like the Armenian anarchism. Anarchist feminist activism is ignored, works of anarchist artists are ignored,[57] and anarchist involvement in anti-colonial struggles are also ignored.[58]

Woodcock's approach suggests three main positions: 1) activist anarchism is problemmatic, but it is still a part of the noble anarchist ideal, 2) the anarchist movement is a realisation of the activist/Bakuninist current and it practically died when the Spanish revolution (and Spanish anarchism) failed (lost) in 1939, 3) Tolstoyan (and later Gandhian) pacifism is the best face of this (the anarchist) ideal, but in this world this dignified version is doomed to die as well.[59] Woodcock is quite convinced that he is not writing about a living movement, he is writing about a dead one.[60]

This way of judging the impact of a political movement is not peculiar to the history of anarchism. John Dunn's work again illuminates the generality of the theme. Dunn questions what it means to be successful in revolution, for a philosophy, an idea, an ideology or a revolutionary actor. He notes that the French revolution of 1789 was not anticipated. There were religious prophets, there were agitators but 'there were no examples of men who saw their life in strictly secular terms and devoted the whole of it to the project of transforming the political and social order of their country by an attempt to seize power within it.'[61] Dunn's conception of revolutionary success gives us a mirror to understand what it means to fail. And it is vital to reflect on this conception to indicate the specific quality anarchism has. Naturally an anarchist activist would not exhibit two features of this definition. First of all, the anarchist project of political and social transformation either operates across state boundaries or through small, micro experiments. Second, perhaps more importantly, the anarchist project does not proceed by seizing power. That leaves the rhetoric

of failure in a strange place: anarchism is considered a 'failure' because during the event of the revolution, it failed to secure fundamental social transformations once the struggle for power had been resolved. That activists in the political movement never understood revolution narrowly as an event; that they never struggled for power; that they included the social and the personal as part of the political order becomes irrelevant. The movement represented an idea (Bakuninism) and when it was crushed, the idea went with it. Similar arguments were made in 1989: Sovietism was Marxism. Marxism was communism. When the Berlin Wall fell, communism died.

2.8 The Failure Of Anarchists

Todd May describes strategic political philosophy as a philosophy that involves a unitary analysis directed towards a single goal. May associates strategic political philosophy with various Marxisms and tactical political philosophy with anarchism whereas for tactical political philosophy:

> there is no center within which power is to be located. Otherwise put, power, and consequently politics, are irreducible. There are many different sites from which it arises, and there is an interplay among these various sites in the creation of the social world. This is not to deny that there are points of concentration of power or, to keep with the spatial image, points where various (and perhaps bolder) lines intersect. Power does not, however, originate at those points; rather, it conglomerates around them. Tactical thought thus performs its analyses within a milieu characterized not only by the tension between what is and what ought to be, but also between irreducible but mutually intersecting practices of power. [62]

Anarchism and the anarchist movement crucially accept that 'there is no center within which power is to be located'. Thus, anarchism is strongly resistant to varieties of reductionism in politics. However, the historiogaphy of anarchism, the construction of the anarchist canon, is higly reductionist and applies a strategic political philosophy covertly. One reason that it has remained unnoticed by anarchists is the fact that modern histories of ideas have been characteristically written in this form. But this strategic type of historiography is misleading. Woodock gives us one version, defining the core problem that unites all forms of anarchism as 'the replacement of the authoritarian state by some form of non-governmental cooperation between free individuals'. It is imperative to challenge this and acknowledge the ways in which it shapes assessments of anarchism and reveals the underlying assumptions of the canonical approach. Dunn's critique of the success/failure of modern revolutions is based on the insight that 'social process … does not succeed or fail. It merely occurs. It is men [*sic*] who succeed or fail.'[63] Contrary assumptions about the failure of anarchist revolution directly affected Woodcock's canonisation of anarchism – simply because the failure was deemed to be the failure of the realisation of an idea that he himself had filled and in ways that highlighted its redundancy.

2.9 Creating 'Old' Anarchism

Nicolas Walter's review and analysis of various editions of *Anarchism*, published in *The Raven* in 1987, is one of the best critiques of Woodcock's approach. Walter's question is about how well Woodcock's book 'really represents anarchism'.[64] He answers negatively. Woodcock is 'so strongly biased towards the intellectual and against the militant aspects of anarchism that he gives an increasingly partial view of the movement.'[65] Walter criticises the order of priority of the sections 'The Idea' and 'The Movement' the 'general romantic and intellectual bias, for its excessive concentration on a few individuals, and above all for the obituary tone

of the Epilogue.'[66] Walter reminds us how Woodcock created a new category for the anarchist resurgence of 1960s, ('new' anarchism) only to justify his own thesis about the death of anarchism, and he argues that 'there was no radical break between the "old" and the "new" ... but an essential continuity between the two.'[67] Walter adds that Woodcock was 'simultaneously exaggerating the rigidity of 'old' anarchism and the flexibility of 'new' anarchism and the gap between the two ... After exaggerating the decline of the 1950s of course, Woodcock exaggerates the revival of the 1960s.'[68] Anarchists were 'alive and kicking at the time when they were meant to have left the stage, and moreover showing all the qualities which he still supposes to be characteristic of the new anarchists of the revived movement.'[69]

Walter's observations are significant because the idea of discontinuity has had serious effects on anarchist thought.[70] It suggests a dichotomous periodisation: classical anarchism/old anarchism, new anarchism/60s, classical anarchism/60s anarchism-postanarchism. This periodisation continues to affect anarchist debates today where emerging anarchist writers rely on Woodcockian notions of old/new anarchism and perpetuate the idea that anarchism works with deaths, breaks and waves, where every epoch reflects a different character, a different entity, hugely different from the one before. *Anarchism* and *The Anarchist Reader*, Walter argues, 'remain the best introduction to anarchism we have in the English-speaking world'. But, he adds, this 'says more against us than against George Woodcock.'[71]

3. Conclusion

Anarchism is a rejection and death notice of Bakuninist anarchism, construed more generally as the anarchist movement. Woodcock was a believer in 'noble' anarchist ideas all his life, and being a pacifist as well, he did not regret fostering pacifist policies while dispising 'the

semi-mystical vision of salvation through destruction'.[72] His book was not only designed to represent anarchism and carry its memory to future generations, it was also aimed to win the pacifist argument against the activist positions within anarchism. This attitude, combined with a loyalty to the framework adopted by Eltzbacher and a general fidelity to the mainstream mode of historiography in the history of ideas, resulted in a book that claims to capture the essence of anarchism (and is widely accepted to do so) but in fact was itself a reconstruction of a particular politics. Woodcock wrote for the anarchists. Standing behind them, he identified anarchism's essence. *Anarchism* invented a spook and in elevating the idea, Woodcock established the anarchist canon.

[1] This article is adapted from chaper 2 in Sureyyya Evren's doctoral thesis 'What is anarchism? A reflection on the canon and the constructive potential of its destruction' (Loughborough University, 2012) https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/dspace-jspui/bitstream/2134/10266/4/Thesis-2012-Turkeli.pdf

[2] Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, trans. Steven Byington, with an introduction by Sidney Parker (London, Rebel Press, 1982), p. 42.

[3] Nicholas Walter 'Woodcock Reconsidered', *The Raven* 1 (1987), p.174.

[4] Colin Ward, *Anarchism A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004).

[5] W.H. New *A Political Act, Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock*, (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 1978) p. xii.

[6] Jeremy Jennings 'Anarchism' in Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright, *Contemporary Political Ideologies*, 1st edn. (London: Pinter, 1993), p. 145.

[7] Süreyyya Evren *Anarchism as One of the 'Political Ideologies'*, Öyle Bir Blog http://oylebirblog.blogspot.com.tr/2014/04/anarchism-as-one-of-political-ideologies.html

[8] New pp. viii; x; P. Hughes, *George Woodcock* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 49.

[9] Douglas Fetherling *A George Woodcock Reader* (Ottawa: Deneau & Greenberg, 1980), pp. viii-xii.

[10] George Woodcock, *Letter to the Past, An Autobiography* (Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg & Vancouver: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982), p.21.

[11] Woodcock *ibid*., p. 168.

[12] Woodcock *ibid*., p. 177.

[13] Woodcock *ibid*., pp. 187; 183.

[14] Woodcock *ibid*., p. 187.

[15] Woodcock *ibid*., p. 192.

[16] Woodcock *ibid*., p. 196.

[17] Woodcock *ibid*., p. 225.

[18] Woodcock *ibid*., p. 239.

[19] Woodcock *ibid*., p. 246.

[20] Woodcock *ibid*., p. 250. In 'The Rejection of Politics', dated 1972, Woodcock is less critical of *Anarchy or Chaos*. Although he notes that 'in many ways it was a naive book' he also admits that 'there are parts which, with a little rewriting, I still found worth reading' and concludes: 'I still believe in general terms what it says.' (Woodcock, *Anarchism and Anarchists*, Ontario: Quarry Press, 1992, p. 78). However he still summarises his changing attitudes towards this book in a preface written for the second edition of *Anarchy or Chaos*: '…even only a few years after it was written, *Anarchy or Chaos* seemed to me a very naïve book, and by the end of 1950's, when I was already preparing my *Anarchism*, I was so embarrassed by what I saw as its juvenility, that I asked Freedom Press to withdraw it from circulation. Later, at the age of 60 in the early 1970's, I returned to it and – like my old friend Herbert Read considering his revolutionary youth - I also found that "I now envy these generous occasions." I realized, as I now do, that much of *Anarchy or Chaos* still belongs to the decade in which

it was written. But there were parts which I still found worth reading, and still useful …' (*Anarchy or Chaos*, George Woodcock, Lysander Spooner, Willimantic 1992, p. ii-iii).

[21] Woodcock 1982, p. 250.

[22] Frank Mintz 'Anarchism by George Woodcock', *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review*, 4 (1978) online at http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/j6q60z

[23] Walter 1987, p. 177.

[24] Woodcock 1982, p. 309.

[25] Woodcock 1982. p. 281.

[26] George Woodcock *Anarchism. A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 17-18.

[27] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 474.

[28] Woodcock 1992, p. 40.

[29] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 41.

[30] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 41.

[31] Woodcock *ibid.,* pp. 44; 57.

[32] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 112.

[33] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 44.

[34] Woodcock *Anarchism*, p. 11.

[35] Paul Eltzbacher *Anarchism Seven Exponents of the Anarchist Philosophy*, trans. Steven T. Byington and edited by James J. Martin (London, Freedom Press, 1960).

[36] Woodcock *Anarchism*, p. 207.

[37] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 9.

[38] For Woodcock's later reflections on the inclusion of Godwin see *Anarchism* p.31

[39] John Dunn *Political Obligation in its Historical Context: Essays in Political Theory*, (Cambrige: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.15.

[40] Dunn *ibid.,* p. 16.

[41] Dunn *ibid.,* p. 22.

[42] Dunn *ibid.,* p. 15.

[43] Woodcock *Anarchism*, p. 13.

[44] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 133.

[45] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 134-135.

[46] Norberto Elias *Power and Civility, The Civilizing Process*, vol. II, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

[47] Woodcock Anarchism, p. 134.

[48] E.H. Carr *Michael Bakunin*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1975)

[49] Woodcock *Anarchism*, p. 208.

[50] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 173.

[51] Woodcock *Anarchism,* p. 171.

[52] Paul Avrich *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 5.

[53] Woodcock *Anarchism*, p. 135.

[54] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 88.

[55] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 61.

[56] Woodcock *ibid.,* p. 248.

[57] cf. Allan Antliff *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007); Patricia Leighten *Reordering the Universe, Picasso and Anarchism 1897-1914*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[58] cf. Benedict Anderson *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London and New York: Verso, 2005); Maia Ramnath*, Decolonising Anarchism, An Anti-Authoritarian History of India's Liberatin Struggle* (Oakland, CA & Edinburgh: AK Press/IAS, 2011).

[59] His pessimism on the issue is best seen in his biography of Gandhi: *Gandhi* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1974)

[60] Fetherling says that Woodcock wrote *Anarchism* as a 'history of a dead movement,' but saw it 'taken up as the standard work by a new generation of followers.' Fetherling, p. x.

[61] Dunn, p. 218.

[62] Todd May *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 7.

[63] Dunn p. 219.

[64] Walter p. 174.

[65] Walter p. 174.

[66] Walter p. 175.

[67] Walter p. 175.

[68] Walter pp. 176, 179.

[69] Walter p. 180.

[70] For a discussion see Ruth Kinna and Alex Prichard, 'Anarchism: Past, Present and Utopia', in Randall Amster, Abraham DeLeon, Luis A. Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella II and Deric Shannon (eds) *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*, (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 270-79; Ruth Kinna, 'Introduction' *Bloomsbury Companion to Anarchism* (New York & London, 2014), pp. 3-40.

[71] Walter p. 184.

[72] Woodcock *Anarchism*, p. 173.