

## SAVILLE'S ROW WITH THE PENGUIN BOOK OF SPANISH CIVIL WAR VERSE

Valentine Cunningham

Hostile notices—however maliciously lopsided and carefully wounding—are normally not worth the bother of a reply. Fair-minded readers can be left to arbitrate between the text and the reviewer for themselves. But in the case of John Saville's curiously crude mishandling and venomously wilful misjudging in the last number of the *Socialist Register* 1981, of my 1980 *Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* some riposte is called for. The more personal insults that Saville feels licensed liberally to sprinkle around—about my so-called paranoia, gormlessness, nasty schoolboyishness, bumbling, ignorance of life, and the rest—I ignore because they are as much beyond rational debate as they are beneath contempt. But Saville does also make serious allegations about careless **and/or** deliberate distortions of historical fact: and enough of them as to make any standing on dignity in these matters look like an acknowledgement by me that he's proved his points. What's more, the sorts of point about facts and interpretations of fact that Saville raises are also more generally interesting because of what they reveal about the way Thirties' issues are still alive and continuing and about the way ideological assumptions, prejudices, preferences and prescriptions penetrate deeply into all reading and writing of history—even such sturdily confident data-wielding and **prejudice-**rebutting reading as Saville purports to go in for on this occasion.

One reason, of course, for hesitating to reply to hostile critics is that every sane writer knows full well that his stuff is far **from** perfect. My Anthology is not spared **from** being annoyingly shot through with misprints and errors of all sorts that escaped detection at every stage of correction and checking. How on earth, one wonders, did the consistent mis-spelling of **MacNeice's** name slip through? Or that mis-dating of the battle of Brunete by a year? Or that absurdly wrong assignment to the *Communist Manifesto* of **Marx's** famous passage about religion as the heart of a heartless world that was quoted in both Auden's and Cornford's poetry? Furthermore, my Introduction carries a number of suggested readings of events that I would now no longer stand by. After all, the Introduction, published with the Anthology in 1980, was actually written in 1975–6, quite a long time ago (the book was an unconscionable time in the printing), which is why I'm not much moved by Saville quoting at me books published thereafter nor uncheerful about admitting I've

changed my mind on some issues. I no longer think it even possible, for instance, that Auden paid *two* visits to Spain: Cyril Connolly, I now accept, got his dates mixed up. But there are other speculations, other speculative and slanting readings that I do stand by. And I defend the right to make suggestions, to seek to fill in gaps in the data, to try to detect possibilities between the given lines. Anyway, readers of the past do these things all the time, whether they admit it or not. Saville dislikes flexibility; he wishes to deny the virtue of speculation; he refuses to recognise the possibility of variant readings. So he's particularly irked by my array of 'perhaps', 'not inconceivable', 'one wonders'. He is the kind of historian who claims to know, and believes that the facts, and if not the facts then the implications, are clear. In Cornford's case, he declares, my 'allegations' can be 'disproved by fact', and where the 'facts' are less obvious, as in the case of Pollitt, then 'context' will provide the certitude Saville craves. And being a certitude seeker, Saville can't stand rival readings to his own. When they're offered, he can't bear to discuss them temperately.

Which is odd. For it surely cannot be that Saville is really unaware of how much his own position is only one among several possible, of how his readings are under ideological constraint, nor unaware of the extent to which many of the events and meanings of the Spanish Civil War are open to readings from divergent ideological stances and also frequently subjected to such variant readings. Certainly, after the extraordinary range of political reactions to my Anthology I am left in no doubt that tangling with this war, even if only with the poetry its British participants produced, is to be pushed out into a dangerous ideological cross-fire.

'Although this is supposed to be an anthology of Civil War Verse, every single item is from the left with the exception of an isolated stodgy chunk from Campbell—which is instantly followed by a would-be debunking review of it by Spender.' That is rightist sympathiser Hilary Corke—who even believes 'that the weight of factual evidence is heavily against the supposed nationalist bombing of **Guernica**'—in the *Listener* (11 September 1980), studiously avoiding defining, naturally, where all the missing rightist poetry might be magicked from. From further right still comes a letter from a Francoist volunteer who fought with Eoin O'Duffy's Irish Christian Front: 'Once again I see a cheap snide remark about O'Duffy's Brigade. I am fed up of these sneers against the men and boys of the brigade. . . I was one of them, an ex-Franciscan Capuchin novice, a boy. . . My religious fervour was strengthened by the sight of churches burned and pillaged. By the sight of destroyed altars, organ lofts, statues and religious paintings. Straw, billies and excrement covered the floor, graffiti marred the walls. Graves of Religious were dug up and the coffins strewn about. . . we were paid Legion rates, fifteen pesetas every five days, about four and five pence. The Reds were drawing

between **150** and **200** pesetas a week. Idealism, how are you. . . I am sick to death of the romantic heroes on the Red side and I feel better now I've got this off my chest.' On the other hand, and about as far away politically as you can get from that outburst, Alan Albon warms in the *Anarchist Fortnightly* (1 May, 1981) to what he detects as overlaps between his political preferences and my own:

**In the Autumn of 1980 I came across this book in a bookshop and bought it because I recognised someone on the cover. This man stayed at our house just before he went to Spain as an ambulance driver. He went a Communist sympathiser and had to die for his life, not from the fascists but the Communists.**

**From an anarchist point of view the most interesting part of this book is the introduction. . . It is a story of deception and falsification with which we are only too familiar. . . as a history, and to get the feel of the times it is worth reading with a bit of nostalgia for us ageing anarchists with our ageless philosophy.**

At least Albon recognises that my Introduction's sympathies lie emphatically with George **Orwell**, with the POUM and other non-communist sectaries of the Spanish revolution with whom **Orwell** fought and sympathised, and on whose behalf *Homage to Catalonia* and the great spate of reviews and letters that accompany it make a polemic—that has never been, in my view, effectively rebutted—for the truth and against persistently lying Stalinist propaganda.

For his part, Saville won't come quite clean. My Introduction manifests a 'Cold War approach', and so it 'ought not to be confused with **Orwell's** position'. So **Orwell's** position is worth defending? Well, not quite: 'for the immense scholarly work on Spain and the Civil War in the past quarter of a century has now taken our analysis and our understanding far beyond **Orwell's** interpretation'. And what that means in practice is that Saville feels enabled—though without actually specifying how and why, and keeping his voice quite low because of the immense prestige **Orwell** has rightly earned—feels enabled to go right on disbelieving and discrediting the **Orwell** line on the POUM and Communist dirty-trickery that my Introduction supports. But you can't make approving noises about **Orwell** in general whilst also defending to the hilt the thirties Communist parties, their leaders like Harry Pollitt, their activists like John Cornford, who supported the arrests and executions of **Orwell's** kind of friend and who would doubtless have felt little remorse had **Orwell** himself ended up among the OGPU hit-men's victims. '[E]very night splits, unpopular bosses, and known Fascists are taken for a ride': so John Cornford, writing to Margot Heinemann in August 1936. Only by good luck did **Orwell** escape with his skin intact when Cornford's Party's definition of 'fascist' widened publicly and violently to embrace the POUM. Saville should make up his mind between **Pollitt/Cornford** and **Orwell**.

Because I agree with **Orwell** and not with his enemies, Saville would like, if possible, in the first place, to prevent me from commenting on any historical events at all. Curiously, for a supposed Marxist, he complains like an old-fashioned bourgeois literateur about the shortage of 'literary discussion', 'literary commentary on the poems themselves' in my Introduction. Pure 'literary commentary', 'literary discussion' **solus**, 'the poems themselves': my critical theory and practice recognise no such entities, and I'm surprised John Saville should toy with such notions. My Introduction is concerned with the poems, the writings, in context; it is an effort to grant the texts that I print and reprint their necessary historical and political contexts. Saville can't see this. He refuses to admit that every historical and political point made relates directly and continually to writers and the problems of writing in the Thirties and in and about the Spanish Civil War. This helps him repeatedly travesty my analyses. It is obvious to the most casual reader that I'm not trying to write a general history of the Thirties or of the Civil War. But not obvious to Saville. 'His essay', Saville gibes, 'is not a discussion of the impact of the war upon the consciousness, or the conscience, of the British people, or why, when the war broke out in mid-July 1936, it immediately brought together all the fears and the hopes of the anti-fascist movement.' But of course it isn't! It's a discussion of the impact of the war on the minds and hearts of British **writers**, and the way the hopes and fears of anti-fascist **writers** were focused by the war. Saville's phrase 'the fears and the hopes' is lifted, unacknowledged, from my quotation from the autobiography of John Lehmann, novelist, poet and editor of the key literary magazine *New Writing*: 'everything, all our fears, our confused hopes and beliefs. . . veered and converged towards its testing and its opportunity'. That it's the like of John Lehmann I'm concerned with is un-evident only to John Saville.

'Cunningham', Saville goes on, 'is mostly concerned with the British Communist Party during the Civil War years and with the attitudes and behaviour of its members.' But, again, no I am not. My Introduction discusses the British Communist Party, but only as its actions touched the lives, deaths and reputations of British writers at the time of the war. It discusses the CP membership, but only insofar as it involved the authors I discuss. Saville's unwillingness to recognise these obvious facts is an important part of his deliberately false picture of me as someone seeking out every last bit of scurrilous gossip and **rumour** in order to do dirt on Communism. It helps colour his allegation that the witnesses I produce don't count. When, for instance, I bring forward writers who have professed themselves disillusioned politically by their Spanish experiences Saville calls this 'no serious evidence' ('he scrapes up a half dozen or so examples'), because the 'overwhelming majority' of British volunteers, working-men and not writers, didn't get disillusioned.

I actually have my doubts about this kept-up enthusiasm among the majority of volunteers, and Saville would speak less confidently had he actually read Judith Cook's valuable *Apprentices of Freedom* (1979) that he cites in a footnote, shot through as that fine piece of oral history is with disillusioned statements about the conduct of the war, and with notes on volunteers who left the Party after the war. But not for a second do I suggest that the writers I cite stand for all the volunteers. On the contrary, the 'poets' war' myth is one I spend a good deal of space refuting (and not 'in the end', as Saville puts it with his usual misrepresentation, but right at the beginning of my Introduction). But in any discussion like mine, concerned with writers and the war, the professed disillusionments of **Orwell**, Auden, Spender, Ewart Milne, Miles Tomalin and Jack Lindsay matter immensely. For they, though Saville is the only one blind to this, are the sort of people my Introduction is all about.

I needn't labour the point, but it applies widely to Saville's complaints. So that when he takes me to task in the matter of 'a long discussion of the attitudes to war in general in the 1930s' he's **complaining** about something that isn't there. I'm only discussing the attitudes prevailing among the young intellectuals and writers that concern my Introduction. And when Saville declares that I 'denigrate the memory of those who fought on the side of the Republic ("many volunteers did have fairly muddy motivations" . . .)' he again fails to distinguish the well-documented case that I'm making about intellectuals from a more general case I'm far from making. (Like the editor of *John Cornford: A Memoir*, who cut out Cornford's father's claim that his son was escaping from 'personal responsibilities' in Spain, Saville thus seeks also to blur uncomfortable realities about the intellectuals he cares for.)

It has to be said that Saville does grant, as of course he should, albeit he grants it grudgingly, that 'A literary anthology of the present kind demands a political as well as a literary evaluation' [his old-fashioned 'literary' at work again, one notes]. But Saville quickly makes it clear that any such evaluation must not dare to run on Orwellian lines; it certainly mustn't go counter to Saville's own particular orthodoxies. The CP, Harry Pollitt, the *Daily Worker*, John Cornford, members of the International Brigade, the Stalinist version of the war, must be defended at all costs; no shadow of criticism must ever fall on any part of their memory. Everything must fit Saville's view of the war as the simple, clear-cut anti-fascist crusade that the *Daily Worker* said it was. **Nothing**, it seems, has detracted, or must detract, from this picture of a simply heroic event. 'Nobility. . . heroism. . . heroism' Saville intones, even though this question of soldierly heroism was exactly the one that troubled thinking socialists in the Twenties and Thirties, and lies at the very centre of unresolved debate among leftist commentators, critics, and writers before, during and after the Spanish war.

At the heart of my Introduction is the major argument that CP propaganda worked, assiduously but misleadingly, to keep the war issues as simple as Saville wants them. Truth, I argue, was cynically wrenched and distorted to suit the CP version of events, on the one hand to make the war look respectable, a bourgeois, writers', artists' and intellectuals' war, and on the other hand to glorify the derring-do of the Communist fighters and the CP-controlled International Brigades at the expense of what looks like the equally undoubted bravery of volunteers and fighters flying non-Communist colours. And Saville fails to meet this argument head on. His efforts at discrediting it merely tinker away futilely at its margins. He has too little to say about my piled-up evidence of the Daily Worker's disregard for accurate reporting. He can only muster a **cheap** jeer about the style of the opening **sentences** of my piece 'Neutral? 1930s Writers and Taking Sides', in F. **Gloversmith** (ed.), *Class Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s* (1980), ignoring the fact that my Anthology's demonstration of the Daily Worker's news manipulation is there followed up by an analysis of how the editors of *Left Review* twisted and wrenched a considerable number of the responses to the Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War questionnaire so as to support the desired impression of a massive and cohesive United Front in favour of the Republic among the writers who mattered. Where some manipulation, such as the strange fate of Alex **McDade's** song 'There's a Valley in Spain', is so obtrusive that even Saville in his role of PR man for the Thirties' CP must comment on it, he tries to laugh it off as of no consequence. The values of the Daily Worker he is intent on upholding, however wicked or silly or whatever. When I imply that the CP had little sense of relative literary merits when it disregarded the likes of **Cornford** and Caudwell but praised Wilfred Macartney as the 'Famous Author', Saville replies that Macartney was indeed 'a well-known author' because his *Walls Have Mouths* was a Left Book Club success. But that was my point. Macartney's sectarian notoriety counted, and counts, for little beside the wider fame of Christopher St John Sprigg's crime stories and air-books, let alone being weighable against the fame of Auden ('Famous Poet to Drive Ambulance in Spain') or of Eric Gill and Henry Moore ('Famous Artists Aid Spain').

And Harry Pollitt, long-time general secretary of the British CP, must be protected from the suggestion—one rooted in a cluster of stories all to the same effect—that he and his Party wanted banner-headline martyrs for the cause (in the words he's said to have said to Spender, 'Go out and get killed, comrade, we need a Byron in the movement'). As my Introduction clearly states, a number of these tales have the ring of apocrypha. Some of them crumble as you probe them. When I wrote to A.L. Rowse, asking him to let me see the evidence that he alleges in *A Cornishman at Oxford* (1965) that he has for his declarations about Ralph Fox's worsening

relations with the Party—I was interested too in evidence for Rowse's assertion that Fox 'was ordered to Spain by the Party which wanted martyrs for the cause—I got no reply. What's more, I'm impressed by what Tom Wintringham's sister, Mrs. M. Penning-Rowse, has written to me: 'it seems to me that the story of **Harry** Pollitt suggesting that my brother Tom should go and get killed must really be apocryphal. Harry Pollitt was very fond of Tom, and if there is any foundation for his remark it was probably caused by extreme exasperation with Kitty (not then married to Tom). She certainly had that effect on people, and had been asked to leave Spain by the Republican authorities.' Nonetheless it is the case that Pollitt himself lent a certain life to the stories by his contribution to *Ralph Fox: A Writer in Arms* (1937), ed. John Lehmann, T.A. Jackson and C. Day Lewis, which does (p. 6) actually claim that Fox was a latter-day Byron. 'The great poet Byron went to Greece to fight for liberty; in a later period Comrade Brailsford fought for liberty in Greece; these are the examples our British comrades are following today in the conditions of our time.' 'I recall to you', Pollitt winds up, 'the words of the poet Byron: "Still Freedom yet, thy banner torn but flying. . ."' Byron twice in a single page! He does seem to have been rather on Pollitt's mind. But this is a piece of my Introduction's evidence Saville just ignores, preferring instead a gush of rhetoric on the subject of my supposed smears.

In any case, whatever I thought of Pollitt and Byron, I myself would not try, as Saville does, to whitewash Pollitt with a sentence of praise garnered from the revised edition of John Gunther's *Inside Europe* (October 1936). To be sure Gunther thought well of Pollitt and the sentence Saville quotes ran through several *Inside Europe* editions until it got abruptly dropped in the February 1940 War Edition. But Gunther also thought well of Stalin and *Inside Europe* provides one of the most embarrassing washes of naive Stalin **hagiography** to be found anywhere in the Thirties. 'Stalin. . . one of the very greatest. . . In speeches. . . addressed by ordinarily uneffusive folk as "Our Best Collective Farmer Worker", "Our Shockworker", "Our Best of Best", and "Our Darling, Our Guiding Star". . . Guts. Durability. Physique. . . Patience. Tenacity. Concentration. . . Shrewdness. Cunning. Craft. . . Sense of Detail. This is very great. . . Ability to handle men. . . Zeal.' And so on (I quote from the same edition as Saville quotes). It's not the kind of prose to recommend anybody as a percipient judge of political character. (And this regrettable tosh lasted longer than the sentence about Pollitt: Gunther went so 'far as to polish up the style of this Stalin purple for the War Edition.)

If I were John Saville I'd also dwell on the implications of what Judith Cook's *Apprentices of Freedom* reveals about **Harry** Pollitt's activities in Spain. What was he after if not another dead hero to the **CP's** credit when he persuaded Fred **Copeman**, 'nearly dying in Spain', to join the

Party? 'Harry Pollitt came to see me and said it would be a bloody tragedy if I died without joining' (Cook, p. 26). And what about Pollitt's key role in the British Party's repeated efforts at suppressing and containing what seem now like legitimate protests, foot-draggings and the wish to go home among some of the frequently tired, scared and fed-up International Brigaders? 'Not surprisingly', says Sid Quinn about the Jarama (Cook, p. 74) 'we got some deserters after that battle, and blokes who'd lost morale. There was a wee bit of agitation, and I remember Harry Pollitt came out and, man, were we naive, but he moved us. What we really needed was guns, but he spoke to us, and what a speaker! The best I've bloody heard in my life. He'd bring tears to a glass eye.' Like Will Paynter, kept continually busy in 1937 at the task of making discontented volunteers happy, or Arthur Horner, joining Paynter in the effort to staunch a spate of desertions at Brunete (Cook, pp. 53-55), Pollitt was clearly no simplistic, nor even unjesuitical rhetor. He *was* slippery, as my Introduction alleges.

Saville can't, he says, detect the 'slippery contradictions' in Pollitt's Introduction to *David Guest: A Memoir* (1939). He invites me to explain the slipperiness. Hardly necessary, I'd have thought, since he does give his readers in full the Pollitt passage I was alluding to:

**David Guest and men of similar type would not have us be unmindful of those hundreds of other young men, labourers, dockers, railwaymen, engineers, clerks, seamen, miners and textile workers who have also made the supreme sacrifice. Men whose family circumstances make it impossible for any special Memoirs to be published about them, but who were David's comrades in life, in arms and in death, and to whose immortal memory this volume is as great a tribute as it is to those from the public schools and universities.**

Are these words not, Saville asks, 'a principled statement, a reminder to the movement he was addressing that it was the working-class volunteers who were the overwhelming part of the British volunteers, and that most of them would remain unknown and uncommemorated to later generations?' But I'm afraid I can't read it this way. For a start Saville's 'unknown and uncommemorated' surprise me: for Pollitt is claiming precisely that the working volunteers *are* being memorialised. But it's the whole movement of the passage's thought that seems to me devious. Pollitt is slippery, in fact, in the extreme, because, whilst he makes those obligatory, warming noises about the merits of the mass of working-class volunteers who are not going to get a special memoir, he (a) gives the Imprimatur of the CP of Great Britain to a volume which for all those professed worries about the 'immortal memory' of the proletarian volunteers is actually largely, if not exclusively, concerned with the immortal memory of the graduate, well-connected volunteer, David Guest, and so shows up his concern for the ordinary volunteer as limited and

opportunistically bogus, and (b) because he tries to pretend that this memoir devoted to Guest can, by dint of some manoeuvre, implication, stretch of the imagination too recessive and unclear for me at any rate to spot, manage to be 'as great a tribute' to the poorly-connected, un-bourgeois, socially undistinguished as it is to the likes of Guest (those from the public schools and universities): which is pathetically misguided and misleading rubbish.

I hope that analysis goes some way towards helping John Saville see what I mean by slippery. I'm not confident it will. For he can't even see what difference the second version of the Jarama Song makes ('what a trivial business it all is, or should be'). The grumbling, the wry discontent, the sly ironies of Alex McDade's song about growing neglectedly old in the Jarama front line—as authentic a soldier's grumble it seems to me as the song G.S. Fraser included in his story 'An Incident of the Campaign', in *Seven*, No. 1 (summer 1938), pp. 11–18; 'O, all you fine rebels, whose guns go rantan, / I am a poor sod of a Government man'—McDade's grouching Saville finds, discountable because it's not vehement or crude enough for his taste in soldier's songs (no ' "fuck" and "shit" and "balls" '). And the simplistic hero-mongering ('fought like true sons of the people', 'brave comrades fell', 'our glorious dead') into which the song got revised doesn't offend him because that's just how John Saville himself thinks of the war.

Admittedly, the Jarama Song is a problem. No one appears to know exactly when and by whom and in what stages it was revised. As one who is more persuaded by the unheroic notes sounded by Spanish War participants and observers I certainly experienced something of a shock when I recently watched veteran International Brigaders walking along a Spanish road singing some of the revised version for the benefit of BBC-TV cameras. Clearly one has to defer somewhat to veteran Dave Goodman's witness (in a letter to me)—though I'm still curious as to when the revised version's last verse about standing for our glorious dead 'before we continue this meeting', hardly the sentiments of any kind of marching song, got itself into the picture. Goodman writes:

It was in January 1938 that I arrived in Spain and February 1939 that I returned home. During that time 'Valley of Jarama' was a song much sung by International Brigaders but the only version I ever heard was the later one. It was much later, after my return to England, and with some surprise, that I encountered the original version. Your explanation of the second version ('. . . transformed by Party hacks into a slogan-laden celebration') is very wide of the mark indeed. . . The fact that by the time of my arrival in Spain a new version was being sung reflected the change in the situation since Jarama. The original version directly related to the experience of those who fought at Jarama, including Alex McDade. The later version, with few exceptions, was sung by those like me for whom the conduct of the International Brigaders at Jarama was an inspiration and part of the tradition inherited by those of us who came later. Who wrote it I do not

know but there is no reason to think that the memory of Alex McDade was in any way traduced by it or that his widow's feelings were callously disregarded.

Goodman also points out—as does Saville—that it is most unfair on the Communist Party that I did not mention that William Rust reprinted the original song in all its 'humorous cynicism' (a phrase Rust borrowed from *The Book of the XV Brigade* whence he derived the Song), and reprinted it in his *Britons in Spain: A History of the British Battalion of the XVth International Brigade* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1939) which was the more or less official CP account (and which, by the way, gives thanks for 'the valuable assistance and advice of Harry Pollitt who. . . for two years devoted himself with unflinching energy and devotion to the needs of the volunteers and the care of their dependents'). I accept the particular criticism. I should have pointed out Rust's reprinting of the Song. Doing so, however, would not have altered my case. When I pursued the matter, which of course began in a reading of Weintraub's *The Last Great Cause* (1968) but, despite Saville's repeated insistence that I've merely quoted Weintraub, goes much further in documentation than Weintraub even begins to, my worries over the Party's preference for the unquestioned heroising of the second version of the song got larger, and so did my hostility towards one more clear set of instances of the *Daily Worker's* customary slight regard for the truth in its repeated statements that the revised, and in my view damagingly travestied, version was the one McDade himself actually wrote at the Jarama. My annoyance is as strong as ever. I certainly cannot agree with Saville that the affair is of no moment, nor with Dave Goodman that McDade's memory was not being cheerfully traduced.

Likewise, though I'm certainly prompted by Saville's protests into admitting that there may have been occasional overstatements in and about my Introduction's dealing with John Cornford, I stand by the broad outlines of a story that I still think observers less biased than Saville won't be able to help agreeing with. Saville huffs and puffs, but there is plenty of room for my suggestion that the Party was extremely worried about Cornford's passing—of course passing, and I have never suggested otherwise—association with the POUM. I have no doubt that this association of Cornford's *was* disquieting to Pollitt and the Party. Cornford was, after everything that he'd seen of the POUM and despite the political caveats he wasn't chary of spelling out (some of them, in the 'Diary Letter from Aragon', I reprint in my Anthology), still set on returning to fight with his old POUM unit. The crucial letter to his Cambridge tutor—'by the time this reaches you I shall already be on my way to rejoin the unit of the Anti-Fascist Militia with which I have been fighting this summer'—was written on 4 October 1936, the very eve of his departure for Spain, via Paris. The letter shows no knowledge of the new

CP plan for an International Column of foreign volunteers. **Cornford** had been busily recruiting Communists for the POUM. (How, by the way, can Saville say that I make 'no reference at all' to this 'volunteer group formed by Cornford', when I clearly state that **Cornford** was aiming to return 'to the same POUM militia, *with others* who would provide an exemplary stiffening in the ranks?') So I'm not at all surprised that Harry Pollitt appears to have been reluctant to take **Cornford** entirely into his confidence. The Communist worries about his active POUM associations, associations which only ceased when he arrived in Paris and threw in his lot with the new International Column, are sufficiently manifest in Tom Wintringham's disingenuous efforts in his *English Captain* (1939) to reduce their extent and significance. Saville doesn't refer at all to my evidence from *English Captain*. No wonder, for Wintringham's embarrassing blend of distortion and character assassination stands unrebuttably there, in print. Nor does Saville mention the footnote that Pat Sloan, the Communist, Left Book Club author and Stalinising Russophile who edited *John Cornford: A Memoir*, added to Cornford's report on 'The Situation in Catalonia'. He added it in fact to the passage that Saville quotes, where **Cornford** is dismissing the political threat of the POUM despite the presence in it of such a magnetic leader as the miner Grossi, 'sincere and courageous revolutionary' ('wen brave and intelligent leaders like Grossi are incapable of giving their troops proper political, military, or organisational training'). Sloan's footnote interrupts such reflections sternly: 'The optimism of these remarks concerning the Anarchists and the POUM seem [sic] to be the only particular in which John Cornford's judgment erred. It was precisely the penetration of Fascists into these organisations—noted by J.C.—that made possible the Barcelona uprising of May 1937.'

Evidently what Saville calls Cornford's 'understanding and analysis of POUM' was not sufficiently (in Saville's words) 'abundantly clear' for the Party. Strangely, this footnote is omitted from Jonathan Galassi's reprint of Cornford's Political Report in *Understand the Weapon, Understand the Wound: Selected Writings of John Cornford* (1976). Is that why Saville makes so much of Galassi's volume? ('Cunningham does not appear to know the Galassi volume': not so; it came to hand after I'd written my Introduction, and didn't add anything I wanted—indeed in the case of that footnote it actually left important things out—so I judged it not worth fussing to include.)

Instead, though, of calmly confronting these problems Saville prefers bluster. Characteristically, when I observe that the *Daily Worker* appears to have been slow to report Cornford's death, Saville rants on about my ignorance of battlefield mess, chaos, uncertainty. If he had read a bit more, he might perhaps be less certain about that uncertainty. It is particularly striking to me, not only how tightly organised the

International Brigades were, but also—and this has become even more noticeable since the publication of Judith Cook's book, and Richard Felstead's *No Other Way: Jack Russia and the Spanish Civil War* (Port Talbot, 1981) and *The Road To Spain: Anti-Fascists at War 1936-1939*, ed. D. Corkill and S. Rawnsley (Dunfermline, 1981)—how much the ordinary working-class British volunteers were conscious of the reputation, doings and whereabouts of their more notable and glamorous bourgeois comrades: men like Ralph Fox, 'very dashing' in his 'black beret, black leather coat and large revolver', and **Cornford** 'a real romantic type, six foot tall. . . like a bloody Greek god' (Cook, p. 43). And it happens that (as Saville adds in a late footnote) **Cornford**, this most prominent of volunteers, made more prominent still by a white bandage about his head ('he looked like Lord Byron'), was actually seen to die by Walter Greenhalgh. 'We wait and wait and finally John **Cornford** climbs up to the brow of the hill to look over and the early sun catches his white bandage and that was it. He got one straight through the head' (Cook, p. 41). Knowing that now, helps me keep on wondering why the *Daily Worker* delayed in noticing his death. At any rate, I need more than Saville's free-ranging blah about the battle conditions of **Cornford's** tragic slaughter to put a stop to my speculations.

But then why, I wonder, this curious intensity of Saville's in his tenacious trawl through my dealings with the **Cornford** record? It can't be that he really thinks my Introduction 'traded the memory of a young Communist intellectual', for it's evident that what I was trying to do was rescue **Cornford** from what I see as his uncomradely traducers in the Communist Party. I can understand, though I cannot altogether sympathise with Saville's efforts on behalf of Harry Pollitt's reputation: they're the patent result of Saville's ideological preference for Thirties' Communism against its critics. But his interventions on behalf of what he believes to be **Cornford's** good name, interventions made at every possible point, however minor or nearly inconsequential, sound like something more than a simple case of ideology. And, of course, they are. For I've had his package of **Cornford** objections, down to their last finickingly petty details, made to me before.

There's the objection to my laying stress on the alteration of **Cornford's** 'party' to 'Party' in the poem 'Full Moon at Tierz' when it appeared in the *Memoir*, and to my wondering whether the 'Anarchist workers' kept **Cornford's** poem 'A Letter from Aragon' out of Spender and Lehmann's anthology *Poems for Spain* (slight points that become more impressive when set alongside the whole raft of more obvious political doctorings of poems that I refer to in my Introduction in a footnote to the **McDade** affair, pp. 77-8: evidence like the change of the Donagh **MacDonagh's** line about Charles Donnelly, 'Something has been gained by this mad missionary' to 'Time will remember this militant visionary', that Saville

omits to mention, much as he wrongly declares I haven't informed my readers about the journey of the poem 'A Letter from Aragon', Anarchist worker and all, through the Communist edited pages of the *Left Review* and the *Cornford Memoir*). There's the meal that's made about my re-printing Cornford's 'Diary Letter from Aragon' at a place in my Anthology a few pages after two letters that were actually written after it was ('slapdash editing', Saville calls it, and confusing to readers: but my Anthology isn't a chronologically arranged gathering of material; the letters are set out unchronologically because I wanted to cluster together material with place-names massively prominent in their titles or contents, Cornford's 'A Letter from Aragon' leading on to his 'Diary Letter from Aragon', which leads into a place-name obsessed portion of H.B. Mallalieu's 'Poem in Spring', leading on to Jacob Bronowski's 'Guadalajara', Cornford's 'Full Moon at Tierz', John Lepper's 'Battle of Jarama 1937', and so on; the letters are unmisleadingly dated; and nothing political is lost or gained by these letters' present positioning). And there's even the objection to including **Cornford** in a list of Thirties' leftists who shed or altered names with obvious bourgeois connotations when they went over to the workers' side: in this case, Rupert John Cornford's Rupert.

Rupert did undeniably get dropped, Saville agrees, but too early in Cornford's life to count as a politically conscious move: 'everyone knows' he 'was always called John'. But not everyone did know that. I for one did not. I'm glad to be informed. So that while I'm sorry John Saville seems to think the important process of bourgeois socialists seeking to disguise and change their identities by changes of name doesn't matter, and in particular that the pervasive problematic of names among Thirties' writers doesn't touch **Cornford** (he who published a poem under the name 'Dai Barton' and whose intransigent forename John is made to feature memorably at the beginning of Margot Heinemann's fine poem 'For R.J.C. (Summer, 1936)', a title by the way in which R. if not Rupert still seems to be in play—'No, not the sort of boy for whom one **does/Find** easily nicknames, Tommy and Bill'), I am nonetheless happy to accept the testimony of Cornford's close friends in this one matter.

It must, though, be stressed that it is the witness of Cornford's close friends; at least of his close friends. For the place where I've seen Saville's **Cornford** points before, and in almost every particular, large and small, serious and trite, is in the ten pages of notes on my Anthology made by Margot Heinemann, who sent me a xeroxed copy of them. Margot **Heine**mann is, of course, the beloved whom **Cornford** sadly left behind him when he was so regrettably cut off in his beginning prime as apoet. Saville's piece is largely, as the repeated coincidences between it and Margot Heinemann's Notes reveals, a put-up job.

One has to respect the natural desire of families and friends to protect the name and memory of a dead loved one. But the record of the protective

efforts of dead writers' families and friends is not at all encouraging. They have often been extremely unhelpful. Cassandra Austen destroyed her sister's letters; Mrs. Richard Burton burnt her husband's papers; the second Mrs. George **Orwell** obstructed **Orwell's** biographers; the second Mrs. T.S. Eliot has been exceedingly touchy towards critics and over-protective towards her late husband's papers. Relicts have frequently not been the best custodians of the record, nor the best interpreters of it. So when John Saville made use of Margot Heinemann's Notes, especially in such extraordinary detail, he should have done more than acknowledge her help in an isolated footnote. His readers are entitled to know the extent to which his readily detectable set of ideological positions has been afforded by the special pleadings of highly sensitive and necessarily not always objective personal interestedness.

At one point in her annoyed correspondence with me, when she was urging me to get the **Cornford** letters reprinted 'in their proper order', Margot Heinemann said 'I suppose I could withdraw permission if you didn't'. She did add that 'that seems rather a silly way to resolve the issue': but the threat had slipped out. Thoughts of nobbling cross Saville's mind as well. When he declares that my Anthology is 'a disgrace' to its publishers, he is implying they ought not to keep it in print. So that he writes not only to wound but also with intent to ban; he shoots with, as it were, intent to kill off the author and also his book. This is exactly (comparing small things with great) what the party and/or Party of Margot Heinemann and John Saville tried to do to **Orwell** and his displeasing Spanish writings. If their **party/Party** had had its way **Orwell** would have been shot and his book and articles not written or, once written, not published. Equally, when Saville tries to drive a wedge between my (to him) unacceptable Introduction and the (to him) more acceptable anthologised materials that follow it, he's wielding the same scissors as the leftist critics who persuaded the Left Book Club to lop off the offensively personal second part of **Orwell's** *The Road to Wigan Pier*. And when Saville tries to turn my un-Communist but leftwards-turned Introduction and Anthology into 'Cold-War' anti-socialism he's trying the old Thirties' act, whose treachery **Orwell's** writings did much to expose, of labelling all critics of Communist orthodoxies 'objectively' Gestapo-fascist or whatever. The result of that, in the Thirties as now, is a loss not just to the cause of truth and of my kind of socialism but to Saville's own cause as well. For we are both, I take it, united against the real traducers of John Cornford, the real detractors from his art, people such as Hilary Corke (in the *Listener* review I cited earlier) who chooses Cornford's 'Full Moon at Tierz' as the basis for a slashing bout of jeers and sneers against Cornford, Cornford's poetry, his politics, that particular poem, people like me who like it, the Spanish resistance to fascism, and ends up praising Francophilic Evelyn **Waugh** as the soundest man around in

English Letters of the Thirties. Attacking me, John Saville lets his real opponents get clean away with almost everything.

But so in the Spanish War period did the people Saville tries so utterly to defend. He berates me for implying that the Spanish issues, the Thirties' issues, are over. I agree; I did exaggerate the extent of which they belong to *Another Country* from our own. One has only to observe his unembarrassed continuation of old Thirties' arguments, his redeployment of the basest Thirties' polemical tactics, to see how right he is: at least in that.