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Chapter 7

Hulme Among the Progressives

Lee Garver

The name T. E. Hulme conjures up a variety of violent, belligerent, and misogynistic images. One thinks immediately of his ostentatious carrying of a set of knuckledusters carved by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, his suggestion that ‘personal violence’ would be the best way to deal with rival art critic Anthony Ludovici, and his repeated admonition to a talkative lady friend, always emphasized by a tap of his knuckle-duster on her arm, ‘Forget you’re a personality!’ (Hynes, 1962, p. x). Among Hulme’s early writings, no work is probably more troubling in this respect than his 1911 essay ‘Notes on the Bologna Congress’. In this autobiographical piece, Hulme depicts himself as an almost archetypal reactionary, someone of authoritarian inclinations who is dismissive of progress, democratic consensus, and the entrance of women into the public sphere. The essay begins with Hulme mocking congresses, especially reformers and wealthy American women who believe that by bringing together all the brightest philosophical minds in one location some previously undisclosed truth will finally be discovered. Denying that philosophy can lead to a shared, reasoned understanding of the world, Hulme asserts, ‘Metaphysics for me is not a science but an art – the art of completely expressing certain attitudes which one may take up towards the cosmos. What attitude you do take up is not decided for you by metaphysics itself, but by other things’ (*CW*, p. 106). The piece then moves to Bologna, the site of a 1911 international philosophy congress, where Hulme describes his delight at discovering a military procession in honor of the Duke of Abruzzi complete with shouting crowds, bands, great red banners, and ‘officers in wonderful sweeping blue capes’ (*CW*, p. 108). Torn between following this procession and attending the opening of the philosophical congress, Hulme ultimately attends the congress, but not without a sense of pained regret. ‘Inside’, he tells us, ‘I knew from the programme that Professor Enriques would speak of Reality. But alas! Reality for me is so old a lady that no information about her, however new, however surprising, could attain the plane of interest legitimately described by the word gossip’ (*CW*, p. 198). Furthermore, attendees at the congress would invariably speak of progress and the ‘harmony of the concert of the cosmos’, whereas the only progress Hulme claims that he can stand is ‘the progress of princes and troops, for they, though they move, make no pretence of moving “upward”’ (*CW*, p. 108). Worst of all is the sight that greets Hulme when he first enters the lecture hall – ‘a regular garden of extraordinary hats’ and ‘great numbers of pretty women’

(*CW*, p. 109). It is here, where he dramatically concludes his piece, that Hulme fully realizes that by attending the congress he has abandoned the virile world of military parades and troop movements for a feminized realm of intellectual discussion (*CW*, pp. 108-9).

The picture of Hulme that emerges from this essay is a familiar one, and it confirms many of the worst stereotypes about this important early modernist. His contempt for progressive opinion, his enthusiasm for princely and military processions, and his resentment of women's intrusion into the domain of philosophy suggest that he was from the outset of his writing career an unapologetic reactionary. Even his self-identification as a pluralist – someone who, in contrast to most intellectuals of his time, believed that there was no single truth or good – leads him not to be suspicious of those in power, but instead to praise soldiers and those who would send them off to war. 'I am a pluralist, and to see soldiers for a pluralist should be a symbolic philosophical drama. There is no Unity, no Truth, but forces which have different aims, and whose whole reality consists in those differences' (*CW*, p. 108).

Since T. S. Eliot's 1924 review of *Speculations*, the posthumously assembled collection of prose that established Hulme's reputation, modernist scholars have done little to complicate this reactionary self-portrait. Even those critics who have been aware of his longtime affiliation with the English socialist magazine the *New Age* position Hulme unambiguously on the political Right, aligning him with a small but influential strain of anti-Liberal conservatism in this weekly publication.¹ While I do not wish to downplay or excuse Hulme's less attractive qualities, I do want to suggest that the picture of him that we have inherited is in many ways incomplete, especially as it concerns his early Bergsonian phase. Although Hulme was from the beginning enamored of violence and skeptical of congresses, he was not always as hostile to socialism and the Left as has been assumed. Nor was he as unambiguously misogynist and militarist as his self-portrait in 'Notes from the Bologna Congress' might suggest. When his earliest published writings – specifically his *New Age* essays of 1909 – are examined in their original socio-political context, a more populist and labor-friendly portrait of the man emerges, one that confounds conventional ideological categorization. Though it might seem improbable that Hulme could ever find common cause with socialists and progressives, the *New Age* reveals that late Edwardian English politics facilitated surprising rhetorical collusions and alliances. Hulme was particularly intrigued by the possibilities of aligning himself with and addressing a large, radicalized working-class readership. In his 1909 essays, he employed rhetoric similar to that of a now forgotten socialist agitator named Victor Grayson, whose brief tenure as co-editor of the *New Age* had given the publication a huge boost in readership and a powerful influence among rank-and-file laborers. In addition, Hulme showed a remarkable readiness to employ language and imagery associated with radical feminists and opponents of British military authority, who were understood by many in the magazine to be natural allies of Grayson in his fight against Liberal parliamentary corruption.

Hulme's early essays, in particular those written for the *New Age* between July and December 1909, make up a distinct body of work. As a number of critics have noted, they are heavily influenced by the French philosopher Henri Bergson and differ significantly from Hulme's later classicist and anti-humanist writings.² Instead of emphasizing the importance of tradition and objectivity, these essays ground authority in intuition and individual perception. They also offer an important critique of language that proved influential in the development of Imagist poetics and remain to this day an important point of reference in theoretical discussions of Anglo-American modernism. The main targets of criticism in these essays are intellectualism, conceptual logic, and prose. Drawing on Bergson, Hulme argues that reality is 'alogical' (*CW*, p. 90), a 'flux of immediate experience' (*CW*, p. 86) that resists being translated into any kind of intellectual or conceptual order. 'I always figure', comments Hulme, 'the main Bergsonian position in this way: conceiving the constructs of logic as geometrical wire models and the flux of reality as a turbulent river such that it is impossible with any combination of these wire models, however elaborate, to make a model of the moving stream' (*CW*, p. 86). Much of this criticism was directed at traditional Hegelian metaphysics, especially its tendency to assume that reality could be resolved into logical concepts. But the most interesting critique focused on the limitations of ordinary language. Drawing a sharp distinction between 'visual' and 'counter' languages, poetry and prose, Hulme argued for the greater truthfulness of poetry:

In prose as in algebra concrete things are embodied in signs and counters, which are moved about according to rules, without being visualised at all in the process. There are in prose certain type situations and arrangements of words, which move as automatically into certain other arrangements as do functions in algebra. One only changes the x 's and y 's back into physical things at the end of the process. Poetry, in one aspect at any rate, may be considered as an effort to avoid this characteristic of prose. It is not a counter language, but a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. It always endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you from gliding through an abstract process. (*CW*, p. 95)

For Hulme, poetry was superior to prose because it was more physical, more concretely based in individual experience. Although poetry was always only a 'compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily', its 'fresh epithets and fresh metaphors', especially when rooted in the faculty of sight, came closer in his opinion than prose to conveying the turbulent, pre-linguistic texture of human experience. Such language also provided, he believed, an important guarantee of human freedom. By recovering 'an alogical element [in reality] which cannot be reduced to law', it reminded readers that life was defined more by change and chance than order or systematization (*CW*, p. 90).

All this is well established. But Hulme's ideological intentions in espousing such views at this specific moment are less well understood. Currently, the most persuasive interpretation is provided by Michael Levenson. He identifies Hulme's

skeptical interrogations of traditional metaphysics and prose with an anti-democratic strain of individualism that achieved its most radical formulation in Dora Marsden's little magazines the *New Freewoman* (1913) and the *Egoist* (1914-19). Besides publishing the work of a number of important early modernists, including Imagists Ezra Pound, H.D., and Richard Aldington, Marsden was a tireless champion of Max Stirner, a nineteenth-century German thinker who rejected all intellectual systems and asserted the primacy of the individual ego. Like him, she believed that individual subjectivity alone was real, and she considered abstractions such as 'humanity', 'divinity', and 'law' chimerical, life-denying constructs that enslaved those who believed in them. Marsden also shared Stirner's disdain for progressive and humanitarian politics, arguing that selfishness was the only principle which was life-affirming. Although Levenson never claims that Hulme's early writings were specifically Stirnerian, he astutely notes that both Hulme and Marsden privileged individual perception and liberty, disdained abstraction, and played key roles in the formulation and promotion of Imagism. In his view, Marsden simply gave extreme expression to a propensity already present in Hulme – a desire to retreat from those forces of modernity that threatened to undermine writers' traditionally privileged place in the social hierarchy. 'In the face of working-class militancy, religious and philosophical scepticism, scientific technology and the popular press', Levenson comments, 'there was a tendency – especially among artists and intellectuals – to withdraw into individual subjectivity. . . . [W]here liberal ideology had made the individual the basis on which to construct religion, politics, ethics, and aesthetics, egoism abjured the constructive impulse and was content to remain where it began: in the skeptical self' (1984, p. 68).

Levenson's interpretation is in many ways quite valuable. By identifying several striking affinities between Hulme and Marsden, he is able to trace a developmental teleology in early modernism that superseded any single individual. In addition, by extending his analysis to include Ezra Pound and other Imagists, he is further able to grant an ideological coherence to Imagism that might not otherwise be perceptible. Unfortunately, taken in isolation, Levenson's analysis presents a rather distorted picture of Hulme, especially insofar as it suggests that he from the outset disdained progressive politics and felt threatened by working-class militancy and the popular press. While it might seem logical to assume as much, given Hulme's later ideological interests, it is important to remember that Hulme never published in the *New Freewoman* or the *Egoist*. Nor did he ever show even a passing interest in Stirner or egoism. By the time Marsden even began publishing the *New Freewoman* in 1913, Hulme had generally abandoned interest in Bergson and poetry and shifted his attention elsewhere. Hulme's early essays took shape in a very different cultural environment. Besides predating the Marsden-led Stirner revival by almost three years, these writings appeared in the *New Age*, a socialist weekly with a much larger circulation and more progressive editorial outlook. Whereas Marsden's little magazines sometimes had subscription bases of as little as 300 individuals, the *New Age* maintained a circulation of at least 3,000-4,000 from its inception in 1907 to the outbreak of war in 1914.³ Furthermore, when

Hulme first appeared in the magazine in 1909, the *New Age* was unapologetically progressive, placing its faith in the constructive possibilities of revolutionary socialism. Although it gave space to alternative viewpoints and was often scathingly critical of numerous aspects of the labor movement, including among its contributors a number of vocal critics of the Labour Party and the Fabian Society, the *New Age*'s editorial voice remained committedly socialist.

Of greatest significance to Hulme in these respects was a series of dramatic developments that took place in the magazine between October 1908 and April 1909. From its inception, the *New Age* courted notoriety and publicity. During its first year of publication, the magazine's editor, A. R. Orage, had tirelessly fostered and even at times stage-managed a lively public debate between Edwardian literary titans George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, G. K. Chesterton, and Hilaire Belloc, thereby winning the publication scores of new readers and a reputation for excitement. But starting with the 10 October 1908 edition of the *New Age*, when Orage announced that recently elected Minister of Parliament Victor Grayson would shortly become co-editor, the magazine ventured into far bolder promotional territory. Grayson is now little remembered, but for a brief period in 1908, this uncompromising socialist was a national *cause célèbre*. He first made a name for himself by winning a by-election in the face of not just Tory opposition, but also that of the Labour Party, quickly becoming a rallying point for those disaffected socialists who believed that the Labour Party leadership was insufficiently radical and too much under the influence of the governing Liberal Party. But his real claim to fame rested with his subsequent violent disruption of Parliament, an act clearly planned in advance and timed to give his arrival at the *New Age* maximum public exposure. In the same issue of the *New Age* in which it was announced that Grayson would become co-editor, there appeared an article by regular contributor Edwin Pugh titled 'Wanted: A Martyr or Two'. Pugh decried the unwillingness of the Labour Party or Parliament to address the problem of unemployment and claimed that 'it would be better for the genuine unemployed person if he were responsible for a few disturbances now and then', even going so far as to assert that any such person should 'be prepared to meet violence with violence'. He then concluded his article by quoting the following statement by Grayson: 'I say with all the calm of which I am capable, if a hungry multitude wants food and the trained forces prevent them from getting it, I wish the unemployed every success if they come into collision with the authorities' (Pugh, 1908, p. 470).

Grayson lost no time in making good on these incendiary statements. In the very next issue, the last before the reopening of Parliament, he contributed an angry piece titled 'The Coming Session', where he attacked the proposed legislative program of the special autumn session of Parliament in which he would make his debut. 'For many days', he commented, 'a minimum of members will sit, bored to death through the weary hours, laboriously beating out obscure details of [a brewery] Licensing Bill Meanwhile the country writhes and groans under its terrible incubus of poverty and unemployment Can anyone imagine a body of men less capable of apprehending the awful significance of these figures than the British House of Commons?' (Grayson, 1908a, p. 483). Then, before the next

issue of the *New Age* arrived on newsstands, he staged his protest, forcibly disturbing this special session of Parliament. Interrupting debate to protest the unemployment problem, Grayson spoke out of turn, refused to be silenced or to sit down, and after being suspended by voice vote and shouted down by repeated cries of 'order', left screaming that the Commons were 'a House of murderers'.⁴

Grayson's timing could not have been better. While he was making his protest, large crowds of suffragettes and unemployed workmen were confronting police outside Parliament, giving added authority to his criticisms.⁵ Nor could the results have been more spectacular for the *New Age*. Coinciding with his assumption of editorial duties, Grayson's suspension brought an entirely new readership and influence to this largely intellectual magazine. In the first issue under his co-editorship, the *New Age* published more than 60 telegrams, postcards, and letters of support, mostly from rank-and-file laborers pledging encouragement and backing.⁶ Dozens of additional letters and union resolutions were published in the following issue, providing further evidence, in the words of the magazine, that 'Mr. Grayson alone among the Parliamentary representatives of Socialism and Labour has expressed the spirit animating the majority of the members of the movement'.⁷ Three weeks later, as Grayson continued to fan the flames of anger through fiery broadsides in the magazine, the *New Age's* circulation had swelled by more than 6,000 to reach an unprecedented 22,000 readers, thereby entering the ranks of mass-circulation weeklies.⁸

In addition to expanding the magazine's readership, Grayson made the *New Age* a key powerbroker in a struggle for control of the Labour Party. When literary historians discuss early twentieth-century Labour politics, they tend to depict the Labour Party as a single, united organization under stable leadership. The truth of the matter, however, was that it was frequently wracked by divisions, and rarely more rancorously than just after Grayson's protest. Many younger members of the Labour Party were horrified that party leaders countenanced Grayson's expulsion, and when Grayson refused to appear on the same stage as Labour leader Keir Hardie, long an untouchable icon of the party, the *New Age* became the rallying ground from which he and like-minded radicals called for new and more vigorous leadership. Besides Orage and Grayson, Labour historian and activist G. R. S. Taylor was probably the most outspoken and articulate voice in this struggle. In a series of columns, he encouraged readers to make Grayson's fight their own and boldly predicted on the eve of the Labour Party's Ninth Annual Conference in Portsmouth that this gathering would inaugurate a great battle for control of the party. 'The business of the delegates', he commented, 'will not be to pass more pious resolutions: but to see how they can make their leaders in Parliament do something for the resolutions which were passed last year and the year before. It will be a great fight between the rank-and-file and the leaders who have lost their nerve and skill in appealing for popular support' (Taylor, 1909a, p. 238).

By the time Hulme began writing for the *New Age* in July 1909, some of this euphoria had subsided. Grayson's failure to appear at the Portsmouth conference undermined a good deal of his credibility, and on 25 February 1909, five months after joining the *New Age*, he quietly departed the magazine. But if Hulme's arrival

postdated Grayson's tenure, it nevertheless took place at a time when the *New Age* remained committed to Grayson's radical populist policies, and Hulme's essays were clearly part of a larger effort by the magazine to continue to capitalize on his celebrity.

Most critics who attempt to explain why Hulme published almost exclusively in the *New Age* during his lifetime tend to align his writings with various strains of anti-liberal conservatism in the magazine.⁹ They note that the *New Age* harbored a number of reactionary thinkers, most notably Nietzsche translators and defenders of 'aristocracy' J. M. Kennedy, Anthony Ludovici, and Oscar Levy, and they suggest that Hulme naturally belongs in their company. But what these critics fail to note about Hulme's early writings is their deliberately populist sympathies. Although Hulme was in 1909 himself something of a Nietzschean, arguing that the German philosopher preceded Bergson in critiquing conceptualism, he did not share Kennedy's, Ludovici's, and Levy's elitist views or find inspiration in their writing. Indeed, he deeply disliked Ludovici and would later dismiss him as a 'charlatan' and 'light-weight superman' (*CW*, p. 260). Hulme instead allied himself rhetorically with working men and found inspiration in popular rebellion.

Throughout his 1909 essays for the *New Age*, Hulme defined philosophical truth in populist terms, deliberately employing diction that echoed Grayson's own. In explaining why philosophers and artists typically clung to smooth counter words of abstraction in the face of the alogical flux, the turbulent pre-linguistic ground of everything he considered true and real, Hulme suggested they did so out of displaced class fear and anxiety:

Reaction from its confusion may take two forms: the practical, which requires a mechanism to enable it to move easily in fixed paths through the flux and change, and the aesthetic which shrinks from any contact with chaos. The practical attitude, by the universals of thought, arranges the flux in some kind of order, as the police might arrange a crowd for the passage of a procession. The next step for the man who admires order is to pass from the practical to the aesthetic, to assert that what puts order into the confused flux of sensation alone is real, the flux itself being mere appearance. The mind that loves fixity can thus find rest. It can satisfy its aesthetic shrinking from the great unwashed flux by denying that it is real. (*CW*, p. 93)

In this passage, Hulme first compares the individual who uses the universals of thought to arrange the flux into something less threatening to a policeman who imposes order on a potentially unruly crowd. Next, he compares this same individual to an aesthete who shrinks from contact with the 'great unwashed' masses, or, as Hulme cleverly phrases it, the 'great unwashed flux' (*CW*, p. 93). Although in neither instance is Hulme making a specifically political declaration, his prose bespeaks larger sympathies. The references to policemen and crowds would have immediately reminded readers of protests against parliamentary injustice by unemployed workmen and suffragettes, who continued to have tense standoffs and confrontations with law enforcement officials. And the reference to the 'great unwashed flux' would have both served as a critique of those timid souls who feared the working classes and called to mind Grayson, who took ironic

pleasure in embracing the idea that he and his followers were, in his words, 'of a coarse and vulgar grain, with a fundamental objection to aspirates and a congenial prejudice against soap' (Grayson, 1908b, p. 43).

Hulme's discussion of the image, the central doctrine in his effort to give language greater immediacy and directness, was equally populist. In criticizing traditional philosophers, he accused them of 'never moving on the physical plane where philosophy arises, but always in the abstract plane where it is finished and polished', thereby mocking the idea that there was a 'mysterious high method of thinking by logic superior to the low common one of images' (*CW*, p. 96). This clear preference for a low common form of language, as opposed to one more finished and polished, not only would have reflected Hulme's pride in his rustic background and North Staffordshire accent but also would have signified his identification with the British working masses. Aside from being considered by many in power 'low' and 'common' in birth and manners, British laborers' exertions were often unfavorably contrasted with the more refined work of businessmen, intellectuals, and professionals. By reversing this hierarchy, Hulme lent indirect support to Grayson's followers. He also gave tacit blessing to the *New Age's* criticisms of Labour Party officials, who Grayson bitterly argued had betrayed their class roots by becoming more interested in studying 'Parliamentary form and demeanour' and mastering the chamber's 'exquisite etiquette' than in representing the everyday interests of their constituents (Grayson, 1908b, p. 43).

In addition to being populist, Hulme's essays valorized Graysonian-style lawbreaking and revolt. One of Hulme's recurrent criticisms of intellectualism was that it regarded freedom with repugnance. Under its influence, he argued, '[c]hance is abolished, everything is reduced to law' (*CW*, p. 90), and 'the whole world [is] made trim and tidy' (*CW*, p. 100). In contrast, one of the key grounds on which Hulme praised Bergson, Jules de Gaultier, and other philosophers of flux was that they were opponents of order and celebrants of 'individual idiosyncrasy', 'bold speculation', and 'adventure' (*CW*, p. 100). Such comments not only offered a philosophical defense of Grayson's intemperate protests but also echoed those of G. R. S. Taylor, who in criticizing the Labour Party as an organization where 'timid men hide themselves from all such risky adventures as political revolt', made it clear that he was 'speaking on behalf of a journal which [had] no superstitious belief in "order"' (Taylor, 1909b, p. 296). Indeed, Hulme's essays affirmed in more strictly philosophical terms the arguments of Grayson himself, who had earlier criticized 'law and order' on the grounds that such principles were responsible for 'hungry and desperate men' being 'bludgeoned by the police' (Grayson, 1908a, p. 43).

Hulme's rhetorical affinities with radical feminists, who were regarded by many in the *New Age* as natural allies of Grayson, were more mediated but no less striking. They suggest that his dislike of middle-class 'emancipated women' (*CW*, p. 21), expressed as early as 1906 in notebooks posthumously collected under the title 'Cinders', did not necessarily extend to suffragettes and other enemies of social peace.¹⁰ That Grayson and his supporters might find common cause with the suffragettes would have occasioned little surprise to most Edwardians. Grayson's

protest directly mirrored several earlier suffragette demonstrations, in which demonstrators had heckled speakers in Parliament, and would have invited immediate comparison. What is more, because his outburst inside the House of Commons coincided with militant feminist protests outside, his actions would have been easily conflated with their own. Certainly, the *New Age* did all it could to stress the affinities. Though not all contributors were in favor of giving women the vote or looked kindly on the Women's Social and Political Union, the organization behind the protests, the magazine as a whole viewed the suffragettes positively and often suggested that organized labor had much to learn from them. 'Would that we could imbue Socialists with something more of the energy shown by the militant suffragettes', commented Orage, who approved not only of the W. S. P. U.'s methods but also their deep-seated distrust of Liberal Party promises to address their demands in due time (Orage, 1908b, p. 195):

Militant action of the women has abundantly justified the refusal to take Mr. Lloyd George or any of the Ministers at their word. 'The Great Betrayal' writes Mr. Keir Hardie. But the women have not been betrayed; they understand far better than the Labour members, who are, however in closest proximity to the members of the Government, the character of the men who now rule our destinies. This is merely another instance of the political perspicacity of women as compared with men. (Orage, 1909b, pp. 353-4)

For Orage and others like him, the suffragettes had blazed the path down which Grayson was trying to lead the Labour Party, a path of direct confrontation with a corrupt and untrustworthy government that paid weak lip service to the needs of labor and women.

Hulme's rhetorical affiliation with radical feminists and suffragettes took three forms. The first was rooted in his insistence that philosophy was a violent subjective pursuit, not a rational intellectual science. '[T]hroughout the ages', asserted Hulme, 'philosophy, like fighting and painting, has remained a purely personal activity. The only effect the advance of science has on the three activities is to elaborate and refine the weapons that they use. The man who uses a rifle uses it for the same purpose as a man who uses a bludgeon' (*CW*, p. 101). While such views might appear to have little to do with feminism, especially insofar as they conjure images of weapon-toting men, they directly echoed comments made by his editor about the suffragettes. In Orage's opinion, one of the most important influences women had on modern times was that they reminded socialists and other political radicals that all thought was at root subjective. This is particularly evident in a critical dialogue he published shortly before Hulme began writing for his magazine:

Then your reasons for advocating Woman's Suffrage are purely personal?
 Certainly; what other reasons would you have? At bottom the most impartial opinions are partial, and the most impersonal personal.
 How feminine!

Yes, but how true! That is indeed the first contribution made by women to modern thought: her discovery that personality underlies even mathematics.

Nietzsche said that.

I always thought Nietzsche was a woman. Otherwise he would not have pretended to despise them so.

But if your reasons are personal, they carry no weight.

On the contrary, only personal opinions have any weight at all. Only for personal reasons will men act, and action, after all, is next to everything. (Orage, 1909a, p. 300)

By employing the same phrase that Orage uses here – ‘purely personal’ – and more importantly asserting, like his editor, that no thought or reason could be impartial, Hulme implicitly tied his philosophical views to those of Orage and by extension the suffragettes. Furthermore, by suggesting that philosophy was an ‘activity’ tied to violent ends, Hulme made explicit what Orage had only hinted at when he claimed that ‘action, after all, is next to everything’: he insisted on the necessary role of militancy and violence in contemporary politics.

The second way in which Hulme affiliated himself rhetorically with radical feminists was by speaking of his philosophical views in politically gendered terms. In the following passage, Hulme describes the emergence of Bergsonian philosophy out of the straightjacket of scientific rationalism in terms that playfully parallel the rise of modern feminism: ‘Philosophy, tempted by science, fell and became respectable. It sold its freedom for a quite imaginary power of giving sure results. . . . But with this modern [Bergsonian] movement, philosophy has at last shaken itself free from the philosophical sciences and established its right to an independent existence. . . . She has once more escaped the spirit that would make her a dull citizenness [*sic*]. Once more, without the expedient of turning herself into myrtle, Daphne has escaped the god’s embraces, which promising love would but result in ungraceful fertility’ (*CW*, pp. 100-1). Provided we recognize that philosophy is cast in a female role, something that is not entirely obvious until the personal pronoun ‘she’ is employed later in the passage, it becomes evident that Hulme is equating modern philosophy with a woman who has cast aside the heavy hand of convention and seized independence. At first, philosophy enjoyed freedom, much as a young unmarried woman might without the burden of a husband. However, philosophy then was ‘tempted by science’ and ‘fell’ – succumbing to this discipline’s embraces and promises of love – and finally she ‘became respectable’, settling into a tedious and restrictive marriage with this paternalistic partner. Only with the arrival of Bergson, de Gaultier, and other modern philosophers, Hulme suggests, has philosophy – still understood to be a woman but now identified with Daphne, a Greek river god’s daughter – escaped science’s hold and established her ‘right to an independent existence’ (*CW*, p. 101). Like the suffragettes, she refuses any longer to be a ‘dull citizenness’ who finds fulfillment in childbirth or ‘ungraceful fertility’, the scientific equivalent of ‘giving sure results’, and spurns the advances and blandishments of those who would remove her from her natural element: the disorderly, river-like flux of reality.

The final way in which Hulme affiliated himself with radical feminists was through his praise of ‘intuition’, a word traditionally associated with women and a

concept which he identified with feminism. This identification is most obvious in 'Bax', his July 1909 essay-review of E. Belfort Bax's *The Roots of Reality* (1907), a now-forgotten work of philosophy that proposed, much as Hulme did, that reality was at root alogical and resistant to conceptualization. E. Belfort Bax was an executive in the Marxist Social Democratic Federation and a former associate of William Morris. He was also a regular contributor to the *New Age* and the magazine's resident anti-feminist, often single-handedly upholding this unpopular position against a range of hostile critics.¹¹ In reviewing Bax's work, Hulme knew that readers would be aware of his opposition to women's enfranchisement, and he had great fun in tracing the flaws of Bax's philosophy to its anti-feminism, most notably its resistance to intuition.

In his review, Hulme praised Bax for exposing the flaws of intellectualism and asserting the ultimate reality of the alogical. However, he could not help but feel that Bax ultimately lacked the courage of his philosophical convictions. In a dig that was surely intended to shame this militant Marxist, he accused him of becoming 'alarmed at his own audacity' and seeking to make his philosophy 'perfectly respectable by giving it as a companion a curious mixture of all the German idealists' (*CW*, p. 89). The sticking point, in Hulme's view, was intuition, something that became evident when Bax was compared to Bergson. Whereas Bergson believed it was possible through intuition to overcome the limitations of the intellect and identify oneself with the flux, Bax nervously balked at such a possibility and retreated back into a muddled mix of Kantian idealism and modern nominalism. For Hulme, this failure of will was principally a result of Bax's fear and dislike of women:

By many toilsome ways Bax, like Moses, leads us to the Promised Land; then, having privately surveyed it, informs us that, after all, it isn't really interesting, tells us to go back again, but always to bear in mind that there is such a place . . . What did he see in the promised land of the alogical which prevented him from wandering there? We can only surmise maliciously that somewhere in its pleasant valleys he saw a woman. Is not intuition too dangerous a process for an anti-feminist to suggest as the ultimate philosophical process? (*CW*, pp. 91-2)

Although Hulme would later distance himself from Bergsonian thought for much the same reason he suggests Bax did – the philosophy's overly close association with women – Hulme's essay clearly demonstrates that in 1909 he was not only quite happy to acknowledge this association but also eager to exploit it for debating purposes.¹² Perhaps more importantly, it establishes that Hulme equated the freedoms and dangers of the Bergsonian flux not just with the great unwashed masses, but also with those feminists who possessed the 'audacity' and contempt for the 'respectable' that Bax so clearly lacked.

The same concerns that led Hulme to employ language and imagery associated with radical workers and feminists in his 1909 essays also encouraged him to ally himself with opponents of British military authority in the *New Age*, another group thought to be a natural ally of Grayson in his battle against Liberal parliamentary

malfeasance. The crucial article in this instance is 'Haldane', Hulme's August 1909 essay-review of Richard Burdon Haldane's *The Pathway to Reality* (1903-4), a philosophical work that incorrectly sought, in Hulme's words, to prove that 'Reality is a system; further, that it is an intellectual system, and the flux only has reality in so far as it fits into this system' (*CW*, p. 93). The most important thing to note about this essay, something that has gone unmentioned upon since its republication in *Further Speculations* in 1955, is that Haldane was best known in 1909 not as a philosopher but as War Secretary for the governing Liberal Party. His political speeches and policies, especially those concerned with army reform, were deeply unpopular in the *New Age* and garnered vastly more attention than his philosophy. In choosing to critique a five-year-old set of philosophical writings by this Liberal cabinet member, Hulme was commenting at least as much about Haldane's politics as his metaphysics.

The most important reasons for Haldane's unpopularity in the *New Age* were the perceived class biases of his reforms, his indifference to the plight of the working man, and his weakening of the British military. Among Haldane's most significant innovations were his restructuring of Britain's various volunteer and non-regular forces into a single Territorial Army and his effort to effect this reorganization along business and professional lines. However, while the idea of creating a true citizen army appealed strongly to many socialists, who had long regarded the military as an outdated refuge for class privilege, most contributors to the *New Age* considered his reforms undemocratic. Orage claimed that Haldane's reservation of commissions to public-school trained men was 'a gross piece of "class" legislation' ('Magazines of the Month', 1908, p. 137), and T. Miller Maguire, a former member of the army, published a long series of articles titled 'Our Army Organisation: A Contemptible Anachronism' in which he accused 'Haldaneism' of being nothing less than 'the cult of Snobbery and incapacity' (Maguire, 1908b, p. 219). 'The War Office', he exclaimed, 'is largely an adjunct of fashionable Society, and is often influenced by ignorant and self-seeking snobs' (Maguire, 1908a, p. 208). Just as galling to contributors was Haldane's indifference to the economic havoc his reforms imposed on working men. An anonymous reviewer of Haldane's *Army Reform and Other Addresses* (1907) found it horrifying that he defined his most important goal as 'keeping down the cost of the army', and many tracked with disgust his steady dismissal of laborers from the Woolwich Arsenal.¹³ Orage charged the Liberal government under his guidance of 'treating its workmen like the worst type of employer' (Orage, 1908b p. 193) and suggested that the Woolwich men had been 'remorselessly driven out onto the street to swell the ranks of the unemployed' for the sake of a mere 'paper economy' (Orage, 1908a, p. 3). This last criticism in turn fueled doubts as to whether his reforms had even done anything to strengthen the British military. Maguire was of the opinion that Haldane was all fancy talk and bitterly rejected the idea, tirelessly promoted by the War Secretary in speeches, that he and his office had imposed renewed order and organization on the military. What, Maguire asked his readers, did Haldane actually mean by 'reorganisation' when he went on platforms and 'puff[ed] clouds of philosophical obscurantist twaddle all over the

land'? 'Absolutely nothing beyond calling things by different names', Maguire declared (1908c, p. 267). 'He has been spending about £29,000,000 a year on a mere metaphysical army – "a thing of shreds and patches" – which could not influence international policy in the least if serious war broke out in any part of the world tomorrow' (Maguire, 1908a, p. 209).

Haldane's purported snobbery and disregard for the common man made him an obvious enemy of Grayson and his supporters, and Hulme criticized his philosophical thought on many of the same grounds. It was Haldane who occasioned Hulme to deny that there was 'a mysterious high method of thinking by logic superior to the low common one of images' (*CW*, p. 96). It was also Haldane who inspired Hulme to mock the mind that would 'satisfy its aesthetic shrinking from the great unwashed flux by denying that it is real' (*CW*, p. 93). But it was Haldane's treatment of the masses as so many chits in a paper economy and Maguire's accusations of name-changing sleight of hand that inspired Hulme's most pointed criticisms. Among Hulme's dismissive comments about the War Secretary was that he was a counter-word philosopher rather than a visual one:

He has the monotonous versatility of the soldier, who in many lands employs the same weapon. It is the very prose of philosophy. He moves his counters, and certainly gets them into new and interesting positions. All the time, however, we cannot believe in their validity, as we are conscious that he is treating as fixed entities things which are not so – which run into one another in inextricable blurs, and are not separate and distinct. He treats the world as if it were a mosaic, whereas in reality all the colours run into one another. For the purposes of communication we must label the places where one colour predominates, by that colour, but then it is an illegitimate manoeuvre to take these names and juggle with them, as if they were distinct and separate realities. (*CW*, p. 97)

In criticizing Haldane for mistaking words for real, fixed entities that might be moved about in new combinations like colored counters on a board, Hulme affirmed Orage's claim that the Liberal cabinet member failed to appreciate the difference between a money economy and one made up of living, breathing individuals. Furthermore, by emphasizing that it was illegitimate to take names and juggle with them as if they were distinct realities, he gave sanction to Maguire's assertions that Haldane's army reorganization was just so much 'dialectical hoodwinking' (1908a, p. 208).

One final way in which Hulme allied himself rhetorically with opponents of British military authority in his 1909 *New Age* essays was by identifying the flux with 'uncivilized' victims of British imperialism. Again the key essay is 'Haldane'. In addition to being responsible for the creation of a Territorial Army, Haldane was an outspoken Liberal Imperialist and the guiding hand behind the restructuring of the Regular Army into an expeditionary force ready to be sent abroad at a moment's notice. In several places in his essay, Hulme takes subtle jabs at Haldane's role in establishing British rule and order around the globe. One of the most important is when he imagines Haldane's efforts to rid philosophy of 'the unfortunate particular, the alogical', or, as Hulme describes it, 'the untameable

tiger' of reality. 'How is it to be murdered', Hulme has Haldane ask, 'that we may at last get a civilised and logical system into the cosmos?' (*CW*, p. 94). By identifying the alogical or flux with a fierce natural predator relentlessly hunted down by the British in Africa and India, Hulme identified his philosophy with those forces that stood to lose most as a consequence of Haldane's pacification efforts overseas. This is further emphasized by another key passage later in his essay. Conceding that 'dialectic' was sometimes necessary so that a philosopher might 'develop the primary intuition, and to put it into concepts for purposes of communication', Hulme nevertheless insisted that 'metaphysics could exist without it, and if I may be allowed to express a personal opinion, I think what we require now is a race of naked philosophers, free from the inherited embellishments of logic' (*CW*, p. 97). Taken together with his comment that 'as in social life, it is dangerous to get too far away from barbarism', Hulme was clearly associating himself as a philosopher with those half-clothed, uncivilized 'savages' across the globe who had no interest in seeing the world forcibly shaped into a place of system and logical order (*CW*, pp. 97-8).

As should now be evident, Hulme's earliest published essays were far more popularly conceived and politically progressive than critics have assumed. Far from being the obscure elitist compositions of a radical individualist, as were Dora Marsden's essays for the *Egoist*, or the self-consciously reactionary musings of a proto-fascist, as Hulme's 'Notes on the Bologna Congress' might lead us to believe, these seminal modernist texts were products of popular socialist journalism. Despite their difficult subject matter, they employed language and imagery associated with Edwardian working-class and feminist militancy, and were clearly trying to piggyback on the celebrity of Victor Grayson and the suffragettes. Not only does this require us to revise the commonly accepted notion that Hulme was from the beginning of his career irremediably reactionary, misogynist, and anti-democratic, but it also obliges us to reexamine his later work. Hulme's interest in Georges Sorel, for example, has often been explained in terms of his enthusiasm for the right-wing *Action Française*, which had established a loose alliance with this idiosyncratic defender of working-class violence. However, it might reasonably be asked if Hulme's interest in Sorel was not at least as much a result of his early identification with Grayson. Similarly, Hulme's venomous attacks on Bertrand Russell in 'War Notes' have often been explained in terms of his reactionary militarist sympathies. Yet it might reasonably be asked if this dislike was instead populist in inspiration. Indeed, I would argue that Hulme's early sympathy with the political and promotional aims of the *New Age* colors all his later work and speaks to the ambiguous allegiances of modernism more generally, whose aesthetic principles were able to encompass seemingly contradictory positions – the political Left and Right, misogyny and feminism, pro and anti-militarism – and are not easily compartmentalized in any of these camps.

Notes

¹ See, in particular, Miriam Hansen, 1980, pp. 355-85.

² See Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism*, 1984.

³ See Mark Morrisson, 2000, p. 91 and Wallace Martin, 1967, p. 10.

⁴ For a full account of what transpired, see the London *Times* report of the demonstration reprinted in the *New Age* the following week. 'Anno Domini I', *New Age* 3 (16 October 1908), p. 504.

⁵ 'The combined demonstrations of Suffragettes and Unemployed outside the House of Commons on Tuesday was [*sic*] a much bigger affair than even its promoters expected. The crowd not only far exceeded all the previous records in numbers, but its temper was quite different from that of the usual light-hearted affair. It was markedly an ugly crowd, ready for anything, and it needed but a spark to have set it alight. Had the spark been forthcoming, there would almost certainly have been a serious riot and more bloodshed than has occurred in London in the memory of the present generation.' See A. R. Orage, 'Notes of the Week', *New Age* 3 (24 October 1908), p. 503.

⁶ See 'Mr. Grayson's Protest', *New Age* 4 (29 October 1908), pp. 4-5.

⁷ See 'In Support of Grayson', *New Age* 4 (5 November 1908), p. 24.

⁸ 'To our Readers', *New Age* 4 (26 November 1908), p. 81.

⁹ See Miriam Hansen, 1980, pp. 355-85; Alan Robinson, 1985, pp. 90-118; Louise Blakeney Williams, 2002, pp. 74-90; and Charles Ferrall, 2001, pp. 13-20.

¹⁰ Most 'emancipated women' were, in Hulme's view, bloodless and insipidly emotional. '[E]mancipated women . . . remind me of disembodied spirits, having no body to rest in. . . . They feel all the emotions of jealousy and desire, but these leading to no action remain as nothing but petty motives. Passion is action and without action but a child's anger' (*CW*, p. 21).

¹¹ See, for example, E. Belfort Bax, 'Mr. Belfort Bax Replies to his Feminist Critics', *New Age* 3 (8 August 1908), pp. 287-8.

¹² See his 1911 essay 'Bergson Lecturing', in which he reacts with horror at discovering that the audience at a Bergson lecture is made up almost entirely of women, 'most of them with their heads lifted up in the kind of "Eager Heart" attitude, which resembles nothing so much as the attitude of my kitten when gently waking up from sleep' (*CW*, p. 154).

¹³ 'Reviews', *New Age* 1 (8 August 1907), p. 234.

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