

and benevolent societies, old age pensions, juvenile justice, and native education. To all this, Moscovitch and his colleagues add a subject and author index.

The bibliographies reviewed here acquaint the reader with the interests, literature, and archival sources pertinent to these new and burgeoning fields of study. Beyond this, however, these works underline the growing importance these researchers attach to historical and archival research.

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**Letter to the Past: An Autobiography.** GEORGE WOODCOCK. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1982. 329 p. ISBN 0-8890-2715-3 \$21.00.

In April 1983, the Archives of Queen's University acquired George Woodcock's personal papers. The collection (which contains correspondence, scripts, diaries, galleys, audio tapes, and copies of publications) mainly documents events outside the period covered by *Letter to the Past* (1912-1948). Some of the material that does fall between those years — business letters and technical communications — is not very revealing of the man. Also, Woodcock has quoted himself from the important juvenile letters, and draws on previously published sources for some key memories. Finally, the book itself, as the title implies, fills a gap in correspondence Woodcock intended to maintain with Marie Louise Berneri, a friend who died before they could write to each other. Nonetheless, here and there, selections from the archive passed over by the autobiographer himself round out the narrative or give hints about where it might be extended in the future.

For Woodcock, emigration to Canada in 1949 was actually a return, one that held importance for him as the proxy accomplishment of his father's unfulfilled wish to see the country again. The elder Woodcock had come out to escape some of the restrictions of life in Shropshire, England, had married Margaret Lewis, and seen the birth of his son in Winnipeg in 1912 before returning to the town of Market Drayton and the employ of *his* father, a coal merchant. George Woodcock calls the houses and landholdings of his grandfathers the "vital terrains" of his childhood. In these terrains, the boy watched the activities of traditional life, listened to his grandmother's rhymes, and became friends with J. Lance Godwin, the son of a neighbour and later a confidant whose correspondence occupies a file containing about one hundred pages in the archive.

The account of Woodcock's time "growing up poor," of his father's illness and premature death at forty-four from Bright's disease in 1927, and the strain of living with his mother's psychological demands is a sombre narrative, enlivened here and there by the sparks generated by an intellectual passion. After Woodcock left school in 1929 — having qualified for entrance into the ancient universities, but without the money to go — he was to spend more than a decade

in mundane positions with the Great Western Railway, work unsuited to his intellect and aspirations. There is an awesome courage behind his simple declaration:

From the beginning I evolved a plan to save money and build a fund to achieve my eventual liberation. Since I started work at a salary of £65 a year in 1929 and was earning only £205 when I finally left in 1940, it was obviously going to take a great deal of time, adding shilling to shilling while I allowed myself enough to buy the books I needed and otherwise feed my cultural appetites, but I calculated that with careful spending I could by the age of forty have enough to bring me about £100 a year, and that I believed would keep me alive to pursue my chosen career. (p. 151)

At first, that career was as a poet. If there is one corrective that *Letter to the Past* will supply to Canadian perceptions of George Woodcock's talents as a popularizer, it is that his first literary incarnation was as a poet, and that his abilities were — are — equal, if not superior, to those of many of his contemporaries who are more widely read and remembered today. The archive shows the workman in later years going back to his bench after time spent in other pursuits.<sup>1</sup>

In his off-hours, Woodcock roamed London, sating his cultural appetites in galleries, theatres, concert halls, and at bookstalls. His first poems got into print in the *New English Weekly* and received publication in *Twentieth Century Verse*. *Life and Letters Today* and other publications followed. His first volume, *The White Island*, appeared in 1940. (Woodcock recounts in amusing detail his meeting with the publisher Caton, a man who, when he was not issuing verse, made a marginal living selling pornography.) By the end of 1941, Woodcock had left the railway and formulated many of the dissident attitudes that would govern his life during the Second World War and after (as an objector he was forced to spend time ditching and market gardening in the countryside in lieu of military service). He had also begun editing *NOW* "which attempted a fusion of avant garde writing and militant pacifism." Woodcock adds that, "when anarchism was inevitably added to the mixture, *NOW* became a literary organ for the wartime dissident literary left, with George Orwell, Henry Miller, Herbert Read . . . all appearing in its pages." (p. 210)

The 1940s were an important time for Woodcock, marking the beginnings of his friendship with Orwell and, slightly before that, with an extraordinary woman called Marie Louise Berneri. The author's reminiscences of Orwell are lifted, with few exceptions, verbatim from Woodcock's own "The Man Remembered" section of *The Crystal Spirit*. There is nothing stopping a writer from quoting himself and Woodcock's portrait remains vivid and sympathetic:

At . . . times we would be guided by Orwell's passion for odd facts, and would converse on the strangest variety of subjects, hopping erratically from point to point. However banal our topic might appear when we first lit upon it, Orwell would usually discuss it with

1. Queen's University Archives, George Woodcock Papers, 2095, Box 1, Woodcock to Margaret Atwood, 4 March 1976.

a thoroughness and humour that lifted it completely out of its intrinsic dullness. He might talk about tea, for example, and the ways of making it, or about various kinds of fuel and their respective merits, and would bring in such a wealth of illustration and reminiscence and so many odd tags of information that one was stimulated to enter the subject as zestfully as he. And then, a week or two later, one would find that the conversation had become embedded in his writing as one of his highly readable essays in the *Tribune*. (p. 287)

Woodcock quotes at length from a 1946 letter Orwell sent him from the Hebridean island of Jura where “corn is still sown broadcast, then scythed and bound into sheaves by hand” and accurately summarizes the Orwell file in the archive as holding many more letters. Surprisingly, Woodcock does not mention a letter of greater potential interest (with regard to both Orwell as a writer and Woodcock as a critic) in which Orwell gives voice to his dissatisfaction with two early novels:

There are two or three books which I am ashamed of, and have not allowed to be reprinted or translated, and [*Keep the Aspidistra Flying*] is one of them. There is an even worse one called *A Clergyman's Daughter*. This was written simply as an exercise, and I oughtn't to have published it, but I was desperate for money, ditto when I wrote *Keep the A*. At that time I simply hadn't a book in me, but I was half-starved and had to turn out something to bring in £100 or so.<sup>2</sup>

With Marie Louise Berneri there is a different story. We have no letters from her. In essence, *Letter to the Past* is an *apologia pro vita sua* directed at her memory. She was the daughter of Camillo Berneri, an Italian anarchist whom the communists had murdered in Barcelona in 1937. She was part of the anarchist venture, the Freedom Press, and when the Press undertook to publish *NOW* in 1943, she and Woodcock became friends and colleagues — words that ill-denote the marriage of minds their thought, writing, and activism really consummated.

When during the Second World War Woodcock spirited a typewriter out of London on which a proscribed manifesto to the troops had been made and with it incriminating papers, he was participating with Marie Louise in dangerous disobedience to a government that had passed sweeping subversion laws. Together they worked on the Freedom Defence Committee, which acted as watchdog over civil liberties in the midst of wartime jingoism and suspicion. Still later, when some of the editors of *War Commentary* had been sent to jail over the manifesto, the two edited the paper:

They were crowded, urgent days, with all the satisfaction of working to the edge of one's strength in common cause with a woman whose mind and mine seemed in almost perfect timing and who into the bargain was the best of companions, her fine Tuscan gaiety

2. *Ibid.*, Box 4, Orwell to Woodcock, 28 September 1946.

mitigating a fierce political dedication. . . . In every way it was one of those times of heightened living when one's perceptions and one's mental responses are tuned to their highest level and one has the strange sense of being outside and above oneself. (pp. 268-69)

These intense experiences furnish the rationale for Woodcock's book. In 1948, the Woodcocks were preparing for departure from Britain. Woodcock was, on the eve of emigration, the author of two prose books of political philosophy and biography, *Anarchy or Chaos* and *William Godwin*, and one of biography and literary criticism, *The Incomparable Aphra*. The Godwin book was an immediate success which established his reputation as a promising young writer. Yet Woodcock chose to turn away from England and the Europe that had nurtured the subjects of his writing. He did so to satisfy his personal myth about Canada and to escape a society he felt had become confining. In a last conversation, Woodcock and Marie Louise decided to "write letters to each other telling about our respective childhoods which some day we might publish as a dialogue."

On 13 April, 1949, Woodcock and his wife made landfall in Halifax:

In a dream that night a male voice said to me, as I lay in an empty room, "Marie Louise is dead." I dismissed it laughingly next morning. It took us five days to traverse Canada by train from Halifax to Vancouver and to cross on the ferry to Victoria. A cable awaited us there. Marie Louise was dead, from heart failure. The book . . . is the substance of the letters I promised and at the time seemed to have no reason left to write. (p. 322)

A copy of the typescript of Woodcock's poem "To Marie Louise Berneri, Twenty Eight Years Dead" is filed in the archive. It includes these lines:

You never did grow old,  
you never lost your looks  
or felt your mind  
lapse out of confidence.  
The cause was always unsullied,  
our triumph was always assured!  
Bakunin had laid the word down;  
Kropotkin had proved it by science.

I dreamed of your distant death  
the very hour it happened.  
You came in another dream  
to complain of solitude  
in strange whine like the dead  
crowding around Odysseus.

Since then other women  
populate my dreams  
with their temptations  
and denials. You  
whom I loved and grieved  
like a self, never appear.

Yet it is as if  
 you were always there  
 on the edge of consciousness,  
 your ideas echoing  
 in what I write, my thought  
 still touching yours.<sup>3</sup>

Woodcock's thought still touches many people. *Letter to the Past* is the record of George Woodcock among some of those men and women. Readers will anticipate with interest additional volumes telling of the writer's excursion into the "vital terrains" of memory. After all, there is still the story of thirty years of Canadian literature and of travel to be told.

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**A Directory of Medical Archives in Ontario.** MARGARET DUNN, compiler, MARY BALDWIN, ed. Toronto: The Hannah Institute for the History of Medicine, 1983. 129 p. ISBN 0-9619429-1-9. \$25.00. Available from the Institute, 14 Prince Arthur Avenue, Suite 101, Toronto, Ont., M5R 1A9.

The Hannah Institute for the History of Medicine is to be commended for funding the compilation, editing, and publication of *A Directory of Medical Archives in Ontario*. The history of the development of medicine and its allied sciences is a new discipline within Canadian studies, and its practitioners will welcome a reasonably priced reference guide to materials available for the study of professional organizations, educational institutions, public policies concerning mental and public health services, and the role of private voluntary groups in the health care field. Archivists will appreciate the publicity which their collections will receive as a result of the *Directory*, and may well use it as a means of encouraging hospitals and other repositories of medical records and artifacts to develop effective records programmes.

The *Directory* contains not only detailed listings of holdings in the PAC and Archives of Ontario but also more limited descriptions of some of the items available in university archives and libraries, county and municipal archives, professional and other associations' head offices, hospitals, religious communities, and church repositories. The various manuscripts, records, publications, and artifacts are listed alphabetically in a standard format designed by the editor. Each institutional entry contains vital information such as the address and phone number of the repository, the nature and extent of the collection, and the conditions of access. All of this data is most useful to students and researchers planning grant applications and should encourage archivists and historians in other provinces to make a similar assessment of their resources.

One of the few problems which the researcher encounters in consulting this work, however, is a certain lack of consistency in covering the material. For example, in one of her references to the Canadian Medical Association collec-

3. *Ibid.*, Box 31, Woodcock typescript, undated.