

# HISTORY AT LARGE



## E. P. Thompson and the Drama of Authority *by Jonathan Rée*

The other day I came across a brittle, yellowing copy of *The Spectator*, dating from March 1962. The headline on the cover advertised 'THE TWO CULTURES? LEAVIS ON SNOW', and the inside pages contained the text of a lecture in which the literary critic F. R. Leavis attacked his colleague C. P. Snow. Snow was a successful novelist and a well-known public advocate of technology and scientific research, and he had argued, in a lecture on *The Two Cultures* given in 1959, that science is 'a culture' just like the arts.<sup>1</sup> Leavis, claiming to speak on behalf of English literature, took great offence at this suggestion, and the lecture on 'The Significance of C. P. Snow' was his belated response.

I expected to be irritated by this relic of a once-notorious quarrel between two cantankerous Cambridge dons, but, to my surprise, I found Leavis's treatment of Snow insightful and devastating. And funny too. Leavis scorned Snow's idea that science and the arts are two separate 'cultures' standing side by side like rival clubs or pubs, each with its own independent standing and its own group of loyal supporters. To see it that way was to traduce not only literature, but also (though Leavis could have made more of this point) the sciences. It was to forget that, before we can make a choice between alternative 'cultures' in the plural, we must first inhabit culture in the singular: we

cannot even understand our cultural options unless we already exist within what Leavis called 'the human world, including language'.

The dispute between Snow and Leavis was also a conflict between rival kinds of leftism. Snow defended science and modern industry in the name of internationalism, equality, and the elimination of poverty: 'in any country where they have had the chance', as he said, 'the poor have walked off the land into the factories as fast as the factories could take them'. But Leavis pointed out that – to judge at least by the testimony of 'the creators of English literature in the nineteenth century and the twentieth' – the industrial revolution had not been an unambiguous boon to the poor and the oppressed. He cited Joseph Conrad and Charles Dickens, and all the other great English novelists 'leading down to [D. H.] Lawrence', and he invoked John Ruskin as well, with his distinction between wealth and well-being – a distinction which, Leavis pointed out, 'runs down through [William] Morris and the British Socialist movement to the Welfare State'.

But Leavis's performance does not lend itself to summary in terms of cultural and political doctrine. With its confident colloquialisms and delays, the tempestuous rhythm of its sentences – self-interruptions bursting through their dashes and brackets – his prose is a fair imitation of a force of nature, gales and mountainous seas crashing down onto the shore. Snow's poor little phrases – his 'panoptic pseudo-cogencies' and 'all the mess of clichés and sentimental banalities that constitutes his style' – are occasionally glimpsed through the tumult like tiny sandcastles about to be wiped out by Leavis's pounding prose.

And style was not incidental to the argument that Leavis picked with Snow. His objections were directed not so much at the content of what Snow said, as at the tricks by which he tried to establish authority over his readers, and persuade them to entrust their judgement to his care. Snow liked to describe himself as one of those thinkers who have 'the future in their bones' (an expression Leavis may have caused him to regret), and he always let his readers know that he possessed an easy familiarity with both 'science' and 'literature', not to mention 'the corridors of power'. He thus left them with the impression that if they did not follow him, it must be their fault and not his. The only way of disagreeing with Snow, it seemed, was by being an ignorant reactionary or a 'natural Luddite'.

If Leavis set about demolishing Snow in a conspicuously personal style, it was because the object of his criticism was not an argument or a theory, but the role and persona that Snow had created for himself as one of the 'authoritative intellects' of his time. Snow, as Leavis put it, was 'a portent'.

He is a portent in that, being in himself negligible, he has become for a vast public on both sides of the Atlantic a master-mind and a sage. His significance is that he has been accepted – or perhaps the point is better made by saying 'created': he has been created an authoritative intellect by the cultural conditions manifested in his acceptance.

This is how the lecture began:

If confidence in oneself as a master-mind, qualified by capacity, insight, and knowledge to pronounce authoritatively on the frightening problems of our civilisation, is genius, then there can be no doubt about Sir Charles Snow's. He has no hesitations. Of course, anyone who offers to speak with inwardness and authority on both science and literature will be conscious of more than ordinary powers, but one can imagine such consciousness going with a certain modesty – with a strong sense, indeed, of a limited range and a limited warrant. The peculiar quality of Snow's assurance expresses itself in a pervasive tone; a tone of which one can say that, while only genius could justify it, one cannot readily think of genius adopting it. It is the tone we have (in so far as it can be given in an isolated sentence) here:

The only writer of world-class who seems to have had an understanding of the industrial revolution was Ibsen in his old age; and there wasn't much that old man didn't understand.

Clearly, there is still less Sir Charles Snow doesn't understand: he pays tribute with authority. We take the implication and take it the more surely at its full value because it carries the *élan*, the essential inspiration, of the whole self-assured performance. Yet Snow is in fact portentously ignorant. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Snow may indeed have been ignorant, but Leavis was taking a rhetorical gamble by pursuing this sarcastically personalized line of attack on him. For in lampooning portentous authority, he appeared to be promoting himself as a kind of counter-authority – a singular, spiky, proud and Leavis-like persona, riding out to confront the terrible endless vistas of universal Snow. Or alternatively an arrogant and waspish egotist bent on causing hurt and offence. Leavis could not hit his portentous target without making a similar one of himself.

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As I read through Leavis's brilliant tirade, I found something strangely familiar in it. His reckless technique of projecting himself into the argument as a kind of stalking-horse, and puncturing bogus intellectual authority by treating style as substance, was known to me from somewhere else. It was, in fact – as I realized after a while – exactly the same method that had always impressed me in the polemical works written by E. P. Thompson in the 1970s.

It was in the spring of 1974 that Thompson wrote his 'Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', and I read it as soon as it came out.<sup>3</sup> It amazed me. I remember feeling directly accosted by it, as if its eyes were following me as I read. At that time I was involved in running the magazine *Radical Philosophy*, and it was in crisis: a two-year-old toddler which looked like it was already on its last legs.

It was clear that *Radical Philosophy* was trying to hold together two rather different ambitions: on the one hand, to cultivate high philosophical theory of a kind that professional academic philosophers in Britain seemed to have given up on; and on the other to foster a socialistic intellectual culture by means of a libertarian movement 'from below'. But how could we be theoretically rigorous, even sophisticated, not to say avant-garde, without putting up implicit No Entry signs for people lacking a higher degree in philosophy and an unwavering confidence in their own intellectual superiority?

Thompson's 'Open Letter' struck me as an attempt to tackle that problem. Like Leavis, Thompson drew his readers straight into a drama that seemed personal as much as doctrinal. 'Dear Leszek Kolakowski', he began: 'First, I must introduce myself, since this is an unusual kind of letter. You don't know me, but I know you well.' Thompson then recalled how, back in the fifties, dissident British communists like himself had looked admiringly towards their counterparts – dissenting poets, film-makers and intellectuals – in Eastern Europe, in the hope of constructing an international anti-Stalinist movement under the banner of 'socialist humanism'. One of their heroes, he went on, had been Kolakowski himself – a Polish historian of philosophy whose work and example seemed to demonstrate (Thompson said) what it might mean, philosophically, to be a politically committed socialist historian.

In 1968 Kolakowski had had to leave Poland. But once he got to the West he refrained from renewing the old socialist ties of the previous decade, and fell into the classical cold-war posture of an 'I Chose Freedom' refugee, complete with a fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford. Thompson confessed that he observed the progress of his former hero with 'a sense of injury and betrayal'. What had become of the political friendships of the fifties, and the ebullient sense of the variousness of socialist theory and practice, in which Kolakowski had once been (or so Thompson thought) a vital participant?

Thompson drew on Kolakowski's early writings to reconstruct the intellectual world they once seemed to share.<sup>4</sup> The main aim of their 'socialist humanism', he recalled, had been to resuscitate Marxism by treating it not as an immaculately complete 'science' that could be imposed on history from outside, but as a complex living 'tradition' rooted in the conviction that historical knowledge could never be separated from social hope. Natural processes might be governed by external deterministic 'laws', but human history was completely different, developing in accordance with its own internal 'logics'. Like Jean-Paul Sartre in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), the socialist humanists believed that the task of the historian, as of the politician, was to cultivate an understanding of such internal 'logics'. The Marxism of the socialist humanists, Thompson concluded, was not a matter of 'imposing' values on a neutral historical record, but of getting into some kind of discussion with the aspirations that it already contained.

As well as inviting Kolakowski to keep faith with his humanist Marxism, Thompson filled him in on what had happened to the British New Left in the fifties and sixties – a story which, as Thompson told it, turned on the fate of the journal *new left review*. As an occasional reader of *nlr* for some years, I had always been conscious of something strange about it. I was impressed by the smart austerity of its design (the use of lower-case initials for example), the chilly classicism of its prose, and the infinite altitude of its editorial omniscience. And I could understand, to some degree, its sustained theoretical disagreements with ‘humanism’, and ‘English empiricism’. But the whole enterprise was driven by a behind-the-scenes animus which I could not fathom at all.

Thompson’s description of the British New Left in the fifties supplied me with an explanation. I learned about the great exodus from the Communist Party in 1956; about the *New Reasoner*, the ‘quarterly journal of socialist humanism’ which Thompson had edited with John Saville from 1957 to 1959; and about the network of Left Clubs with which it was associated. I learned about the *Universities and Left Review*, also founded in 1957 and dedicated to the cause of ‘socialist humanism’. And I discovered how the two journals merged to form *new left review* in 1960 – a project which promised to be not just an intellectual journal, but a ‘socialist action which runs athwart the normal drives of capitalist society’. Finally, I learned how Edward Thompson had found himself, to his fury, excluded from the editorial board two years later.

Thompson told the story from the point of view of several hyperbolic versions of himself. In particular, since he had been shouldered aside by a younger generation (the thirty-five-year-olds by the twenty-five-year-olds), he portrayed himself as pathetically ‘square and out of date’, an old bore whose voice was ‘doomed in the end to tail off into silence’, or a forlorn old bustard flapping its wings in the hope of a wind that would lift him to a final elegiac flight. The caricatures were absurdly exaggerated, but they offered me some perspectives on the situation I found myself in with *Radical Philosophy* in 1974.

I spent months reading everything I could about the ‘socialist humanists’ of the fifties – Charles Taylor, Doris Lessing, Ralph Miliband, Alasdair MacIntyre and many others, as well as Thompson himself – and I admired nearly all that I discovered.<sup>5</sup> I thought my friends and colleagues would be impressed or at least intrigued by what I found; but they were not. They regarded socialist humanism as obsolete, and E. P. Thompson as an obsessive individualist stuck in the past. To put it politely, the ‘Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski’ bored them.

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I still think they were wrong. The self-dramatizing rhetoric of Thompson’s ‘Open Letter’, like that of Leavis’s lecture on Snow, was not a symptom of maudering narcissism, but an attempt to shine a torch on the contrivances

by which intellectual authority is constructed – both Kolakowski's status spanning East and West (rather like Snow with his two cultures), and the kudos of *new left review* with its impressive contempt for the socialist humanism of the fifties. The 'Open Letter' was not so much a declaration of theoretical allegiance as an exploration of the contours of intellectual intimidation and credulity on the left, and the uses and abuses of cultural power.

In May 1974, immediately I had read the 'Open Letter', I wrote to Thompson and Kolakowski inviting them to develop the debate in *Radical Philosophy*, and also to Tom Nairn, a leader of the group that had, in Thompson's view, stolen *nlr* from its original owners. Kolakowski politely refused, which was not very surprising. Tom Nairn declined too, but in terms which took me aback. He explained that he had accumulated a lot of material on the politics of 'left-wing Romanticism' in England and the 'history of the EPT-*nlr* polemic'. He had set out to explain 'why marxism had had so little effect in England' but ended up accumulating materials for 'a history of Thompsonism'. He had now shelved this research project in favour of 'more important and urgent tasks' – the campaign to maintain Britain's membership of the European Economic Community in the face of 'our forms of national romanticism, right-wing (Powell) and left-wing (Thompson)'. The general issue of Thompsonism was 'undeniably parochial', Nairn wrote, and 'frankly I'm still hoping that we won't ever be plunged back into a situation where that sort of village-idiot tradition again becomes politically pressing'.<sup>6</sup>

Thompson's reply to my invitation was more positive. He said he was still preoccupied with questions 'as to value and direction in social process', and – whatever doubts philosophers might have about the usefulness of philosophy – he felt the need 'for collaboration with someone whom one must still define as a philosopher'. He said he was encouraged by the signs of such dialogue in the pages of *Radical Philosophy*, and even enclosed a cheque for some backnumbers and a year's subscription.

But then he mentioned the French Communist philosopher Louis Althusser – whose concept of Marxism as 'the science of history' was a principal inspiration of the new régime at *new left review* – and the skies darkened.

Nothing makes me more angry than the supposition that these same questions can be either answered or dismissed as non-questions by people pretending to be philosophers, without recourse both to historical evidence and to specifically historical discipline. That is why much of Althusser and Althusserians makes me cross . . . – and why I have a certain persisting affection for Kolakowski (and what he stands for) for he did have a go at some of these large questions – and still may do so.<sup>7</sup>

He concluded by saying that he would like to write something about

'Althusser and Althusserians' in *Radical Philosophy* some time – but not quite yet.

At the end of 1974, I witnessed an encounter between Thompson and Kolakowski at a joint seminar held in Oxford. I remember him begging Kolakowski not to be deceived by the Cold-War equation between socialist possibility and Soviet reality. 'The English disease', he said 'is a thwarted and denied socialist potential . . . breeding defensiveness', and he concluded (if I decipher my notes correctly) by describing the popularity of Althusser in England as a further symptom of that English disease.<sup>8</sup>

Following the seminar I wrote to Thompson again, repeating my request that he write something about 'historical process' for *Radical Philosophy*. In his reply he said that he did indeed want to do 'some accounting with Althusser and Marxist-structuralism' and that he might well cast it as a 'Communication to *Radical Philosophy*', provided we could agree to take a piece of up to 10,000 words. Then he sent a series of notes in February and March, warning respectively that he might miss our deadline, that he could miss it, and that he had missed it already. In any case, he added, 'the piece has broken any possible length bounds'.

The 'Communication' eventually became the notorious essay 'The Poverty of Theory: or an Orrery of Errors', which took up two hundred pages of *Socialist Register* at the end of 1978. In a way the most interesting passages in 'The Poverty of Theory' are those where Thompson analyses what you might call the situation of the creative historian. In fact I even had the nerve to write to Thompson again (he must have been surprised by all these letters from someone he did not know), suggesting that the essay contained the elements for a marvellous book about historical method. These elements included explorations, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Agnes Heller, of the ways in which 'meanings' and 'values' inhabit the historical record, and reflections on the idea of historical 'sources', which (contrary to Karl Popper) can say far more than their creators ever conceived, provided the historian knows how to get into 'dialogue' with them. Then, drawing on Lucio Colletti, Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, Thompson argued that there was a profound difference between Marx's early and his mature work: a shift from a moral and philosophical attempt to discredit 'Political Economy', to a proposal to replace it with 'another Political Economy', an option which Thompson found less appealing. Thompson also argued that what he called the 'eventuation' of historical processes throws light back on to the conditions from which they sprang, and that historians must investigate possibilities which never reached 'eventuation' as well as ones that did. Finally, he insisted that the relation of past and present in historical inquiry is reciprocal: he criticized the aspiration towards 'closure' in historical narrative, and called on historians to be conscious of their own historicity, since 'we inhabit the same element ourselves (a present becoming past)'.<sup>10</sup>

This was, in short, a sketch of a hermeneutical theory of historical

inquiry. Thompson said he would like to make a book of it all, but could not promise to do so: 'I have so many books which are now *years* late in completion that I can't take on any more'.<sup>11</sup> I think it is a shame: amongst the small collection of works where historians reflect on the nature of their craft, it would surely have been one of the most sophisticated and profound.

But 'The Poverty of Theory' was only incidentally an inquiry into the interpretative responsibilities of the historian. It was mainly a diatribe, conducted in the same stage-personal style as the 'Open Letter', against Althusser and his British followers. According to them, socialist politics and marxist theory had nothing to gain from studying the past. As Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst put it in 1975:

Marxism, as a theoretical and a political practice, gains nothing from its association with historical writing and historical research. The study of history is not only scientifically but also politically valueless.<sup>12</sup>

Given that Marxism is, on any definition, a theory of history, and that politics is about historical change too, you would not have to be a Thompsonian socialist humanist to find this statement improbable. But Hindess and Hirst asserted it with such flawless self-confidence that it acquired an allure of awful authority, and many British leftists succeeded – even if they could not actually understand it – in convincing themselves that it must be completely correct.

By the time 'The Poverty of Theory' was published, the influence of British Althusserianism was waning, and many readers seem to have felt that Thompson was making a fool of himself – again – by going to such lengths to fell a negligible opponent. Thompson's main criticisms of Althusserian doctrine were good enough: he showed, in effect, that for all Althusser's pious invocations of 'the political', his concepts were so puritanically unempirical that they had no purchase on either politics or historiography, both of which are doomed to breathe an atmosphere filled with the impurities of common sense and ideology. On the other hand Thompson made no allowance for the fact that the 'socialist humanism' that Althusser scorned was not the same entity as the 'socialist humanism' that Thompson defended (one was a kind of Stalinism, the other, a kind of anti-Stalinism); and he was inadequately briefed on Althusser's awkward intellectual situation as a Marxist philosophy professor working in a culture that was deeply ignorant about Marx – where thinkers like Sartre, for instance, could raise inspired philosophical constructions on Marxism without ever reading *Capital*.

But Thompson was not very interested in doing justice to Althusser's doctrines in their French context; he was more concerned with his status as a philosophical oracle in Britain. Referring to Althusser's curiously severe polemic against the humanism of John Lewis, he wonders who on earth Althusser's real enemy could be:

And then, as I screw up my eyes, and gaze intently in the nearest mirror, the terrible realisation comes. There I am staring into the bloated visage and bared fangs of the most hideous of ogres. And it is myself! M. Althusser has done me the incomparable tribute of addressing an article to *me!*

As in the 'Open Letter', Thompson was determined to remind his readers of the battles and international alliances of dissident communists in the fifties through which his own humanist Marxism had been formed. In order to explain the significance of Althusser in Britain, he quoted Soviet sources which, in 1958, had excoriated 'Edgar Thompson, the acknowledged leader of the British revisionists' and attempted to expose his 'socialist humanism' as a smokescreen for 'traitors . . . renegades and anarchists'. Thompson scarcely needed to spell the point out: the comminatory phraseology of British Althusserianism in the seventies was, consciously or not, in uncannily close harmony with the Stalinist propaganda against dissident Marxism in the fifties. Althusser's rhetorical anti-Stalinism, Thompson concluded, was only a veil concealing his 'attempt to reconstruct Stalinism at the level of theory'.<sup>13</sup>

In 'The Poverty of Theory' Thompson cast himself in the role of an 'English historian', and pretended that he therefore entered into any theoretical engagement at 'a manifest disadvantage'.

Few spectacles can be more ludicrous than that of an English historian – and, moreover, one manifestly self-incriminated of empirical practices – attempting to offer epistemological correction to a rigorous Parisian philosopher.

But it was preposterous, even in a moment of palpable theatricality like this, for Thompson to map his quarrel with Althusser's conception of history on to some division between 'England' and 'Paris' (or indeed between 'historians' and 'philosophers').

It is true that Thompson's own historical researches were mostly about England, but as he put it in the preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*, he omitted Scotland and Wales 'not out of chauvinism, but out of respect'.<sup>14</sup> It is also true that he shared Leavis's appetite for a corpus of English literature which articulated an anguished response to industrialization: he admired William Blake and the young Wordsworth, for example, and his first major book – *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* – began by laying out a very English-sounding choice between 'Sir Launcelot and Mr Gradgrind'.<sup>15</sup>

But none of that could justify defining Thompson as a 'romantic nationalist'. The socialist humanism with which he always identified was a resolutely international movement, and the theoretical springs of Thompson's characteristic views (his idea of the historian as an engaged interpreter, and of historical processes as governed by 'logics' rather than

'laws') actually lay in European philosophical movements transmitted to British leftists in the fifties by commentators like Kolakowski, Taylor and MacIntyre. The range of Thompson's political activities and reading, from the fifties to the eighties, would put most other cosmopolitans to shame.

Thompson made a final assault on the questions of theory, authority and historical method at a plenary session of a History Workshop conference in Oxford in 1979. It was the end of November, a cold dark night, and the meeting took place in a half-wrecked derelict church. The audience swarmed up the builders' scaffolding which lined the walls, and the only lighting came from three theatrical spotlights trained on the altar table where the three speakers stood.

The debate was meant to be about Thompson's attack on Althusserianism in 'The Poverty of Theory'. With the roar of emergency gas heaters as background music, Stuart Hall spoke about the need for theory, then Richard Johnson spoke about Thompson and his place in an English 'culturalist' tradition. And then Edward Thompson exploded. Johnson was told off for bracketing him with Raymond Williams, and Hall for accusing him of 'fighting old battles'.<sup>16</sup> My memory suggests that it was an exhilarating, heroic exchange, but the notes I took at the time say something very different: I found vanity and delusion in every quarter, and it struck me that Thompson's dramatization of himself as a stage-Englishman was making sensible discussion impossible. He was crediting his audience with a sense of irony which they did not have, and which perhaps he was losing too. His polemic boomeranged and he was reduced to his caricature of himself as a crusty English buffoon. 'I was disgusted', I wrote.

In retrospect, the question of Thompson's Englishness looks vexatious and insubstantial. The English working class whose biography he wrote comprised a huge range of creative resistances and revolts, and – given the unprecedented emphasis he gave to the influence of the French Revolution – one might be forgiven for thinking that it was Made in France. Moreover the British switch from socialist humanism in the fifties to New-Left Marxist theory in the sixties was not a progress from English isolationism to multi-lingual cosmopolitanism. (It may have led to a wider dissemination of foreign books; but it is not what you read that matters, so much as the way that you read it.) Indeed Thompson may have been right when he described this switch as 'a very English transition'.<sup>17</sup> The real problem is not that one side or the other was 'very English', or indeed that both were, but that they got themselves fixated on a national, nationalistic, or nationalitarian interpretation of the issues that divided them.

Despite some miscalculations, Thompson's dramatic polemics against intellectual authoritarianism still seem to me both brave and correct. He was right to object to the 'tone' he found in Althusser and his British followers, just as Leavis objected to a similar tone in Snow. He was arguing not over Englishness or foreignness but over arrogance itself. He may have

become a bruiser himself in the process, but it was against *that* that he was fighting.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

This is the text (lightly amended) of a talk given at the History Workshop Conference on 'E. P. Thompson and the Uses of History' held in Conway Hall, London, 8–9 July 1994. A summary version appeared in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2 June 1995, p. 19.

1 C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, The Rede Lecture, Cambridge University Press, 1959.

2 F. R. Leavis, 'The Significance of C. P. Snow', *Spectator* no. 6,976, 9 March 1962, pp. 298–303; reprinted in *Nor Shall my Sword*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1972, pp. 41–74.

3 E. P. Thompson, 'An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', *Socialist Register 1973*, edited by Ralph Miliband and John Saville, London, Merlin, 1974, pp. 1–100. The 'Open Letter' is reprinted in E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London, Merlin, 1978, pp. 93–192.

4 For a selection of his anti-Stalinist essays of the 1950s, see Leszek Kolakowski, *Marxism and Beyond*, translated by Jane Zielonko Peel, London, Pall Mall Press, 1969.

5 My conclusions were presented in 'Socialist Humanism', *Radical Philosophy* 9, winter 1974, pp. 33–6.

6 Letter from Tom Nairn, 26 May 1974, in my possession, quoted with his kind permission.

7 Letter from E. P. Thompson, 24 May 1974, in my possession.

8 For an account of this seminar, held in Balliol College on 5 December 1974, see the note by Jean McCrindle in *Radical Philosophy* 10, spring 1975, pp. 43–4.

9 Cards and letters from E. P. Thompson, December 1974, 3 February, 17 February, and 6 March, 1975, in my possession.

10 'The Poverty of Theory: or, An Orrery of Errors', in *The Poverty of Theory*, pp. 193–397, pp. 211, 227, 240, 290, 252.

11 Letter of 29 April 1979, in my possession.

12 Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, 1975, cited in 'The Poverty of Theory', p. 194.

13 'The Poverty of Theory', pp. 321–323.

14 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1963, p. 13.

15 William Morris, *Romantic to Revolutionary*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1955.

16 The texts of these talks (delivered on 30 November 1979) are available in Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory*, London, Routledge, 1981, pp. 376–408.

17 *Open Letter*, p. 10; see also E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', *Socialist Register 1965*, reprinted in *The Poverty of Theory*, pp. 35–91.