

## **Love on the Dole and the Clergy**

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## ***Love on the Dole and the Clergy Expanded Version***

Walter Greenwood's unemployment novel (1933), subsequent play (1935) and film version (1941) have been seen as contributing to the formation of new social attitudes towards class and poverty which prepared the way for the establishment of the welfare state in 1945.<sup>1</sup> However, his texts have not been seen as linked in any way to organised religion or its ministers by historians, literary or film critics. At first sight, this does not seem surprising. Indeed, the church, whether Anglican, non-conformist or Catholic seems to have little presence in Hanky Park, Salford, in the story. There is an early acknowledgment of Christianity, churches and chapels in the novel in a paragraph giving an overview of Hanky Park in the brief introductory chapter:

On either side ... are other streets, mazes, jungles of tiny houses cramped and huddled together, two rooms above and two below, in some cases only one room aloft and aloft; public houses by the score where forgetfulness lurks in a mug; pawnshops by the dozen where you can raise the wind to buy forgetfulness; churches, chapels and unpretentious mission halls where God is praised; nude, black patches of land, 'crofts', as they are called, waterlogged, sterile, bleak and chill. (p. 11)<sup>2</sup>

However, in the novel we have very little further reference to churches nor to God being praised, and this brief reference has no almost equivalent at all in the play or film versions (there may be a church steeple among the factory chimneys in the film's opening aerial view of Hanky Park, but it is not exactly foregrounded).<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, a few characters such as Mr Hardcastle, Sally and even Larry do conventionally invoke God at some points in the play, and there is one brief discussion of religious belief in the play not present at all in the novel, and which the film does not retain.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise, religious activity is represented as comic and generally an imposture. Thus, the two characters, Mrs Scodger and Mrs Jike, who

accompany hymns at the 'North Street Mission Hall' (as a trombone and accordion duo) are seen as purely comic when carrying out this activity.<sup>5</sup> The only other 'spiritual' content is also linked to Mrs Jike – her séances, which are patently seen by the novel as fraudulent, part of the small-scale con-artistry which makes these older women into small-scale capitalist 'entrepreneurs'.<sup>6</sup> One might take this to suggest that for the author or his characters the church has little relevance in either deprived areas or in Britain more generally. Certainly Greenwood himself does not seem obviously to have engaged with the church in the early thirties – though he is said to have been helped in his writing ambitions while unemployed between 1929 and 1932 by the Reverend Samuel Proudfoot, vicar of St Thomas, Pendleton.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this lack of interest was not mutual, and the clergy of Britain paid considerable and high-profile attention to *Love on the Dole* (not mainly in fact to the original novel version in 1933, but more often to the play and film versions). Some of this attention was highly critical, and some highly supportive. Of course, though there may have been some decline in religious belief and engagement with organised religion after World War One, the Churches and their ministers were still important sources of social, moral and spiritual commentary on public matters.<sup>8</sup> In fact, as Bruce Wollenberg's comprehensive book *Christian Social Thought in Great Britain between the Wars* details, there was an enormous amount of discussion and writing about how the churches should engage with the social issues, many of which were seen as crises, arising after World War One.<sup>9</sup> Wollenberg says that a phrase in a speech in 1923 by the Anglo-Catholic Bishop of Zanzibar, was 'quoted again and again in the interwar years': 'You cannot claim to worship Jesus in the Tabernacle, if you do not pity Jesus in the slums.'<sup>10</sup> If some were worried that the church was not engaging with the poor and poorest, it was also true that one of the anxieties of the churches

was that working-people were no longer engaging with organised religion. This was an anxiety likely to have been fuelled both by experience and by some awareness of the sociological 'secularisation theory' which tended to see an inevitable decline in religious belief as societies developed into modern economies. Indeed, some historians of Anglicanism have argued that clergy often internalised this theory, developing a 'pathology' and beginning to be convinced that 'their failure to fill their churches [was] a sign that the age was against them, and that society was inexorably sinking into a pit of materialism and indifference' <sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, and perhaps partly generated by a dynamic arising from this anxiety, responses by the clergy to Greenwood's acclaimed yet also controversial work were numerous. However, this specific and extensive contribution to the reception of *Love on the Dole* in thirties Britain has surprisingly not even been noted by critics, let alone discussed, perhaps because they have often tended to assume that Christianity was spent as a major cultural force by the nineteen-thirties.<sup>12</sup> This article will put that omission and presumption right by exploring the significance of the considerable clerical commentary and public debate in various denominations about the meaning and implications of Greenwood's text and adaptations at the times of their appearance. The article will not be a comprehensive account of all clerical references to *Love on the Dole*, but will try to give a sense of the depth and extent of the Christian debate Greenwood's work inspired. I am going to quote from the articles and letters I have selected at slightly greater length than I might usually do, partly because this is completely unexplored material, and partly to evidence the depth of engagement and the clear articulation of critical views on the part of those responding negatively and positively to Greenwood's work in this context.

The first cleric to speak critically about the play was the Reverend J.H. Burry in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* on 30/9/1935 (p.3). His letter to the editor headed *Love on the Dole* is closely-argued and is confident that:

It is a thoroughly bad play ...the play ends on a defeatist note of the worst kind. Wrong is triumphant. It is not worth while being good. The only way is to give in to lust and greed and thus secure the necessities and luxuries of life. Everyone who has had any strength of spirit or nobility of purpose is discredited or defeated.

It is made to appear as if God Himself were favourable to such happenings. 'O God give me work', calls out Mr Hardcastle, in an agony of spirit. And the answer comes in the offer of a position secured through the fall of his daughter, Sally. There is a gleam of hope, let it be said, in the fact that there is no indication that Hardcastle accepts the post.<sup>13</sup>

This is an interesting reading of the play, based in a certain logic about the purpose of drama, and very much opposed to what seems to have been the usual reception of the play (though I see little implication in the play-text that Mr Hardcastle and Harry will turn down the jobs Sam Grundy has arranged for them). In general, Sally's terrible bargain on behalf of her family in accepting Sam Grundy's 'help' in return for becoming his mistress was usually seen as heroic and selfless, and a matter where she had little choice (as several letters quoted below suggest). The play was generally read as a critique of the social system, not of Sally. Here Sally's choice is seen as motivated by sexual desire and materialism, that is, as Burry glosses it, 'lust and greed', two of the seven deadly sins. Indeed, he argues that the whole work is

permeated by defeatism: it represents a world where the good are always betrayed and defeated. It is a world where only a perverse providence operates, rather than any evident divine working-out of reward, punishment or higher purpose.

This Christian interpretation against the grain of popular reception is worth paying some attention to, both in its own right, and as the opening thesis in a substantial public religious argument which did probe the meaning, significance and impact of Greenwood's work. My own sense of the features described above by Burry are that Greenwood does indeed represent Hunky Park as a world in which the deserving (the Hardcastle family, Larry Meath and Helen Hawkins) are not rewarded but instead put in positions where they cannot help but fail and enter into material decline and therefore moral compromise and harm. I argue in my book that the kinds of responses Burry produces should be largely deactivated by the way the text seems designed to prevent the reader from blaming Sally for her decision at the end of the play<sup>14</sup>. However, the way in which a text tries to construct 'the' reader's response needs of course to be distinguished from the ways in which a particular real reader interprets a text, and this may be especially evident where a real reader brings to bear a set of strong beliefs. This is one of the things which makes Burry's detailed response worth exploring.

In fact, Burry next goes on to query whether the play's understanding of realism is consistent with a Christian view of the purpose of drama and the nature of the world. Thus, the second part of his letter, headed 'Realism and the Sordid' argues that *Love on the Dole* is a bad play because it does not seek to improve the world nor its

audience, but only to promote the view that everything is desperate – indeed, its kind of realism notices only the ‘sordid’. Burry is unconvinced by the adequacy of the argument that the play reflects what really is a current reality:

It would be urged, I suppose, that *Love on the Dole* is typical of Lancashire life ... But the question may be asked - should the theatre portray typical life if by so doing it is adding nothing to the improvement of the evils it bodes forth? Should not the theatre be devoted to the highest ends, and, for instance, show what human spirits, such as George Lansbury, can accomplish under almost unbelievable hardship and poverty?<sup>15</sup>

George Lansbury was one of a family of nine children raised in considerable poverty in the East End of London in the second part of the nineteenth century. He became a Labour councillor in Poplar in 1893, an MP in 1910, and was leader of the Labour Party from 1932 to 1935. Burry no doubt chooses him as an exemplar because his politics were also known to be rooted in a strong Christian belief. Lansbury's example shows that poverty can be overcome (and perhaps also that Socialism and Christianity are not necessarily incompatible – Lansbury was a long-term member of the Christian Socialist League). However, as it is, the play's realism is said to be of a kind which is inherently defeatist and pessimistic and therefore ultimately lacking in Christian faith and hope in the redeemability of humankind. It is then a ‘bad play’ in several senses: its aesthetics are wrong and these make it morally and spiritually wrong too.

Burry is equally worried by what he sees as an incorrect ‘audience reaction’ (his words) to the end of the play. Instead of being appalled by the (im)moral choice

made by Sally and its implications that this is indeed a hopeless and fallen world, the audience greeted the end of the play in Aberdeen with 'almost rapturous applause'. I think this point is strongly registering his anxiety that most audiences will fail to see how devoid of spirituality the play's universe is. Burry uses the words 'spirit' in several senses in the article, but at this point the language does become explicitly Biblical: 'Should not the atmosphere at the end of the play have been sadness that such things ... were possible in our land and that unrighteousness should have succeeded and continues to do so?'. To my mind, Burry has a slightly odd sense of what is being applauded at the end of the play. I take it that it is the company's performance and the experience of the play (including a sense of it having a productive message about unemployment) which is being praised, rather than the fallen and corrupt world it depicts, and the triumph of the unjust. Nevertheless, Burry does have a point, which has been echoed later by other critics with strong beliefs (particularly the Marxist critic, Carol Snee in the nineteen-seventies): that within the world of *Love on the Dole* there is no obvious hope or possibility of change.<sup>16</sup> The Labour Party analyst (or prophet?) Larry Meath is killed off and his message remains apparently largely unheard.

Part of what is interesting about Burry's articulated response to the play is how many others wrote into the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* to dispute or uphold his logic and analysis of the play. He had caught a vein of public interest. In total, there were eight further letters engaging with Burry's letter – five supporting his view and three defending Greenwood's play. The day after Burry's letter was published there were four responses. One substantial reply from Stuart Easton argued against Burry's interpretation of the play, and another of some length, signed 'Elder, Aberdeen',



agreed that the play was un-Christian. The third was from 'Theatre-Goer', declaring that so-called modern realism was but a passing phase, while the fourth was from 'BW, Aberdeen', briefly thanking Burry for his excellent criticism and his plea for better plays. 'Theatre-Goer' clearly did not admire Greenwood's play, but was uninterested in religious arguments: he or she thinks that such kinds of play are superficial and unentertaining and will be quickly forgotten. The other three are much more interested in Burry's religious perspective. The Elder uses Biblical language even more intensively than Burry, but focuses like him on the conclusion of the play and on blaming Sally Hardcastle for her 'choice'

The play winds up short of true 'realism'. Another act showing the 'heroine' doubly disillusioned and cast aside in the gutter would bring it more in line. Mephistopheles, the Prince of Darkness and Selfish Desire, can say 'Lovest Thou Me', as did the Prince of Righteousness. A great gulf divides the interpretation in a material as well as a mystical sense. (1/10/1935, p. 3).

This precisely wants to see the play end as it should, in the letter writer's aesthetic, like a Victorian melodrama or narrative painting, with the fallen woman punished in this world, even before the next.

Stuart Easton in his letter argues that this kind of reading is a misinterpretation of the play and indeed of contemporary realities.

Concerning *Love on the Dole*. Sir, —I found the letter of your correspondent, the Rev. G. H. Burry, very interesting and certainly more than a little smug, although obviously, from his point of view, sincere. It is easy to write in a comfortable study of what should be, but one feels tempted to wonder if Mr

Burry has ever really been against it. Life itself is not what it should be, particularly for those poor devils. In the novel—and by comparison the play is very mild—poor Harry Hardcastle cannot even afford a two-penny packet of Woodbines, and a visit to the local “fleapit ” is about as inaccessible to him as a “winter” in the Canary Islands. The only one of Harry’s young friends who can get a job is a youth who has gone to prison for systematically stealing boxes of cigarettes, and that job has been found for him through the kindly interest of the court missionary ... The others trudging round faithfully, day in day out, looking for work are unable to secure it by honest methods. It was no pleasure to Sally to give herself to the loutishly odious Sam Grundy. The bottom had quite fallen out of her little world, poor girl; everything that made life worth living had gone. Only a Pharisee could find it in his heart to blame her — I do not imply that Mr Burry is a Pharisee. I said before, he is obviously sincere, though lacking in sympathy and understanding. One could only feel the deepest pity for Mr Hardcastle. It was natural that he should feel to a certain extent responsible for the misery of himself and his family— though God knows no blame attached to him —and it was equally natural that he should bitterly resent —even misunderstand—Sally’s sacrifice, but the point was, could he [Burry] suggest a better way? It seemed to me that all along his attitude was destructive, as opposed to constructive ... As for Mrs Hardcastle, she was little short of a saint. Courageous to a degree and uncomplaining of her harsh lot. Always with a word of sympathy to spare, and with understanding of, and tolerance for, everybody’s point of view. It is not a question of glorifying vice. Sally’s gloriously unselfish concession could hardly be described as vice. With regard to Mr Burry’s argument that the theatre

should present only what is noble and edifying, the public is not a baby-in arms to be spoon-fed and given only what is considered by a spinsterish board of censors, good for it. It should see life as it really is, in the Hanky Parks of this world as well as in the Streatham Hills, the Chelseas, and the Mayfairs ... - Stuart Easton, Aberdeen.

This nicely-written letter articulates much more the audience responses which I think the text is designed to invoke, and indeed refuses Burry's sense that drama should offer a more optimistic version of the world than is evident in contemporary reality. Easton stresses Sally's sacrifice and lack of choice, and similarly sees Mrs Hardcastle as a 'saint' in her sympathy for others (a quality which he feels Burry manifests much less clearly). Easton notably uses some religious ideas and language to counter Burry, and in this way accepts a range of Christian ideas ('saint', 'Pharisee', 'sacrifice').

Two letters on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1935 (p.3), headed 'Two Correspondents Strongly Approve of the Play', continue the defence of Greenwood's play, and again argue for what I take to be a more mainstream reading of Sally's actions:

*Love on the Dole.* Sir, —I am afraid your correspondent's susceptibilities (Burry) have been badly "jangled" witnessing the above play ...The scenes therein do not belong particularly to Lancashire. They apply to any town where stark want and unending poverty wear out and harden. Did good-looking generous Sally want wrong? No. Mark her pathetic leave taking of the stricken home and parents. Was it wrong for the young brother to want "claes like the lave," or Mr Hardcastle piteously praying for work that he might again

live decently with his family? Your correspondent wanted the play to end happily, good triumphing over evil. Well, there they are—hung up as it were—Sally not yet gone, the father still out of work. What are we going to do about it? Are the Churches and clergy helping? Or will they just utter a few old platitudes on Sunday to a few well-fed and well-clothed people, some of whom would shrug their shoulders at the play and whisper, "How sordid, how unutterably vulgar!"— E. Mackie, Aberdeen.

Mackie urges the match to reality of the drama and also criticises what he characterises as the inactivity and complacency of the Churches (the alignment of Sally's good-looks with her good nature is evidently dubious, but may still read-out something which does help make the play's social critique attractive to its audience). The second letter-writer also strongly reinforced this view that Burry had read the play entirely against its grain, and that it made a profoundly moral point, rather than encouraging immorality:

Sacrificing Herself. Sir, —After reading the letters of Mr Burry and his, apparently, many sympathisers, I am both amazed and horrified that Mr Walter Greenwood's play should so hopelessly misunderstood. We must remember that when Mr Greenwood wrote his book, he was himself on the dole, and that his book was a protest from his heart against a civilisation in which such events could take place. He was not concerned with any question of right and wrong, nor did he in the climax of the play, consciously glorify Sally Hardcastle's action. He was trying to impress on the minds of his readers consciousness of the terrifying plight of the unemployed, and horror that a young girl should be faced with such a terrible decision. The fact that a moral question was involved seems to have drawn a veil for some over the

deeper and greater issues which lie beyond. Had it been implicitly stated that Sally gave her life that her family might live in freedom from torture, the play would have unanimously been hailed a masterpiece of tragic writing, yet this is in effect she did. Was it not made sufficiently obvious that she knew she was sacrificing herself? In the last moving scene, she shed her mask momentarily under her father's angry blow and wept bitterly on her mother's lap, only to reassume it finally in her last defiant "Goodbye." I was left at the end of the play, not with the sense of vice triumphant, but with a feeling of overwhelming pity for Sally, who had 'Love on the Dole' ... A.R.T.J (2/10/1935, p. 3).

On the 3rd Oct another letter partially agreeing with Burry, but much more interested in dramatic than religious issues, was published, together with another criticising his views (and this the first by a female correspondent):

Sir, *Love on the Dole* is not a social document but a play. Several of your correspondents take it as if it were a record of what takes place in the Hanky Parks of our time. They are quite entitled to take it as the starting point for a discussion on unemployment and its miseries, but they should not confuse that discussion with the discussion of it as a play. I may sit unmoved and dull throughout the performance, and yet be as alive to the social problem as they are. Why should anyone be called "smug" because he refuses to accept *Love on the Dole* as the greatest human play of the century? Why breathe fire and storm against the Church because a minister refuses to accept it as a masterpiece? It is not a great play. The three Harpies are given too much

scope. The characters of the agitator and the Labour leader are ill-drawn, and drawn in such a way as to put to sleep the conscience of a West End audience. The dramatist cannot make Sally speak. I expected a scene where the struggle in her mind would be suggested, but instead had to endure still more of the excruciating farce of the Harpies. The father, the mother, the son and his girl, and the policeman are well suggested, and the play has the one great merit that though we leave the theatre annoyed at the mix-up of farce and the thinness of the dialogue, we yet cannot get it out of our minds that the people of Hanky Park are trapped and doomed. I suppose that the dramatist intended to leave this impression. He calls the last scene Resurrection. But that surely is ironical. Of course, when a clever good-looking young actress, who if she wished, you feel, might become Mayoress or turn the world upside down, takes the part, you are tempted to forget the horror of the fate that awaited her as one Sam's many mistresses .... But I think the author intended us to leave the theatre with a sense of horror. W.D Taylor (3/10/1935, p. 4).

This letter defends Burry, but on the grounds that he is correct to see the play as having theatrical deficiencies rather than because his ideas about the inherent hopefulness of a Christian drama are accepted. Indeed, having argued that the play has weaknesses, including uncalled for generic hybridity and its failure to allow Sally to articulate her moral dilemma, the letter actually does express considerable admiration for the play. It also draws attention to a curious textual addition to the play which was entirely absent in the novel – the scene title ‘Resurrection’, which is indeed, like some of Greenwood’s chapter headings in the novel, highly ironic. The Cape edition of the play of 1935 in its list of the acts adds titles to each of the play’s five scenes, none of which formed part of the text of the novel (though they are in a

similar style in their somewhat oblique ironic commentary on the events experienced by the work's characters). These scene-titles were not listed in the original 1935 Garrick Theatre programme, but must have been added to the programme for the touring production which went to Aberdeen. The list in the Cape edition ran thus:

Act I.

(*The Gods Defied*) The Hardcastle's kitchen in Hanky Park.

Act II. Scene I

(*Interlude*) An alley in Hanky Park

Scene 2

(*Worship in the High Places*). On the moors

Act III. Scene I

(*Catastrophe*) The Hardcastle's kitchen – a year later

Scene 2

(*Resurrection*) The same – Six months later [.]

It is notable that three of the scene-titles have religious resonances which, as we have seen, were generally absent from the original novel text. However, the first title seems more classical pagan than Christian, and thus links to the other Greek term used, one originally from theatrical terminology: 'Catastrophe' (the point of disaster in a tragedy). 'Worship in the High Places' could have both classical pagan and Christian resonances. It is notably a theatrical scene not present in the novel, and in which Sally asks Larry if he believes in God. He evades answering, except to assert that belief is impossible in Hanky Park anyway (picking up here the introductory chapter's reference to churches in the novel): 'There's no God there, with all their churches'.<sup>17</sup> These titles together do suggest the shape of classical tragedy more firmly than does the novel, but the final scene-title supplants this schema with the definite reference to the central event of Christianity, the Resurrection. As W.D

Taylor acutely suggested above, this was a deeply ironic reference, since the Hardcastle family's resurrection is purchased only through Sally's fall (and indeed, the play does seem to juxtapose Christian and classical tragic conceptions of a / the 'fall'). Perhaps such a framing of the play in the programme, even if ironic, did to an extent speak to religious belief, knowledge, feeling or sentiment among audiences.

Then followed the first intervention by a female correspondent which was concise but hard-hitting, and titled 'Good for Them':

I observe that a minister and elder of our beloved church were shocked and pained by witnessing a performance of *Love on the Dole*. I am sure that they will both ultimately realise that, for their spiritual welfare, it is better that this should be so. Had they been soothed by a happy and moral ending they might have been lured far along the pleasant primrose path to destruction.

- Jenny Geddes.

There was another anti-Burry letter on 4 Oct 1935 (p.3) which again strongly asserted his lack of understanding of the contemporary social realities of Britain and his ultimately unhelpful idealism in comparison to the play's capturing of a reality:

The Play's Object. Sir, —It has been said that there are none so blind as those who will not see, and it would appear that this was never more applicable to anyone than to the reverend gentleman who opened this discussion on *Love the Dole*. It is apparent from his derogatory letter that he is either blind to or will not see the point in this controversy-provoking play. He has, shall we say, caught the stick by the wrong end. Mr Burry appears to be somewhat uncertain that conditions such as those shown in "Love on the



Dole" exist. His blissful ignorance must be shattered. Unfortunately, in almost every industrial town in Britain, people are dragging out their lives in circumstances as straitened and sordid as those of the Hardcastles of Hunky Park. Mr Burry would rather have the idealistic side of life portrayed on the stage, but we cannot always feed on the sweets of life. The grim reality of *Love the Dole* ought to promote the urgent desire for betterment of social conditions. And herein lies the point of the play, *Love on the Dole* is played so that smug Victorian-minded people may become acquainted with the circumstances under which many of their fellow creatures are living, and may be galvanized into acting for creation of better conditions. To attach significance to the behaviour and reaction of the audience is in the face of it ridiculous. If an audience is unintelligent in its reaction, it does not necessarily follow that the play has not achieved its end ... I.E.R.

A further response to Burry in October 1935 came not through the letters' column of the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, but actually from the pulpit, though the contents of the sermon were also reported in detail in the paper.

**MESSAGE OF LOVE ON THE DOLE**

Discussed in Sermon Given at Aberdeen

**SLUM CONDITIONS MUST BE ENDED**

The correspondence in the *Press and Journal* concerning the play, *Love on the Dole*, was discussed last night by the Rev. R. W. Stewart, Ferryhill South Church, Aberdeen, when he spoke on 'Is Life Tragic?' Stewart defended the play, or rather its message, and closed by saying that the cry of horror of *Love*

*on the Dole* was surely that, while some said we could not afford to put end quickly to slums and idleness, the truth was that we could not afford not to end them. The cost of unemployment and slums was too great, and it was paid to-day not in loss, money or output, but in the shame and degradation of men and women and children who lived and tried to love on the dole in our Hanky Parks.

### **Inconsistent Argument.**

The first letter [by Burry], said Mr Stewart, began by calling *Love on the Dole* a thoroughly bad play, objecting to the defeat of all that is good that it shows, but quite inconsistently, he thought, it ended by saying that the audience ought to have gone away hushed and solemnised 'in a silence that comes after the performance of great music'. If that was the impression the writer [Burry] felt, it was difficult to see, first, why he would call it a 'thoroughly bad play'. 'If life is not tragic, it is trivial, meaningless', said Mr Stewart. 'Those who say it is not are the optimists. In answer to the happy-ending stories they quote, such novels as *The House with the Green Shutters*, and *Hatter's Castle* can be quoted to show the grim and evil facts of life'.

The purpose of the play is to make us understand what is happening in places like Hanky Park, to point out how in the slums the lack of money is the root of every kind of evil. 'Would you', asked Mr Stewart, 'if you lived in such circumstances, keep your dainty ways and all your virtues and graces? You would find it hard. The people in Hanky Park found it hard, and the question asked by the play is "What is to be done about it?" The lesson of *Love on the Dole* is that we cannot afford not to end such conditions' (7/10/1935, p.9).

Clearly the reporter felt that there was considerable public interest in Aberdeen in the debate Burry had started, and presumably felt that this specifically clerical disagreement about the meaning of the play was something which the newspaper's readers would be willing to follow in some detail (despite the sometimes awkward task of communicating what the Reverend Stewart said about what the Reverend Burry said about *Love on the Dole*). Stewart points out what he sees as an inconsistency in Burry's attitude to the play's own meaning in his sense that the audience response was not the 'correct' one. Stewart is also critical of Burry's aesthetic which requires some form of positive outcomes from works of fiction, and offers other examples of popular fiction which have dealt with the grim actuality of real life. *Hatter's Castle* was A.J. Cronin's first novel (Gollancz, London, 1931) and was about the cruel and bullying patriarch of a family, while *The House with the Green Shutters* by George Douglas Brown (John McQueen, London, 1901) was also about a cruel father, so neither is particularly close to *Love on the Dole* in theme. He also sees the play not as endorsing the behaviours of the people in Hanky Park, but as begging for the conditions which produce these behaviours to be addressed by local and national government. In short, unlike Burry, but like some other responses explored in this article, he sees human behaviour as conditioned by the social and economic environment. It is not the people who live in our Hanky Parks who are to be blamed, but those who blame them, and above all those who do not intervene to end such social conditions on the basis of costs, presumably chiefly local and national government, as well as those citizens who also put conventional economics before human dignity. There, but for the grace of God, go we all.

On October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1935, Burry replied one last time to all the criticism of his views of the play (*Aberdeen Press and Journal*, p.3):

Sir—I have read the correspondence that has followed on the publication of my letter regarding *Love on the Dole*. Nothing has been written so far that has led me to change my mind, which I try to keep open as possible. The strictures on myself I pass over with little comment. When anyone charges me with smugness and lack of sympathy and understanding, they can call me no harder names than I have called myself. At the same time, let no one think that I know nothing of adverse circumstances or even of grinding poverty. It might be interesting for some to know that, when in the home we discussed going to see the play I remarked, 'I think I ought to see this play, for I feel that might be a means of increasing my sympathy for the unemployed and for the down-and-out'. In other words, I went to the theatre, which I have time to visit but rarely, with a mind favourably inclined towards people undergoing extreme hardship.

### **Bad Appears Good**

Regarding the play itself, effective answer as far as I can see has been given to the criticism that the bad is made to appear good. Perhaps that is what the author intended, and that we should therefore be filled with horror that things should have come to such a pass in our country. On the other hand, that would seem to reading too much into the play. Several of your correspondents, who claim to see the deeper meaning of the play have referred to the self-sacrifice of Sally Hardcastle. They try to make out that she was being true to the spirit of the words, 'Greater love hath no man than this,

that he lay down his life for his friends'. They are, I feel, taking up the anarchist position in which there is abundant room for sacrifice, but which in no way helps to solve life's problems. The question may be asked, however, 'Did Sally take the hard way?' She claimed that all the girls in Hanky Park would have done as she was doing if they had had the chance—not, it would appear, because they were willing for a noble sacrifice, but because she was looked upon as fortune's favourite. No, she took the easy road, easy for the time being, for one of the most difficult things in life is to keep to the right path when you know that by so doing you are continuing or increasing the hardships of those whom you love.

### **No Eternal Background**

I grant that it was made to appear as if Sally were doing something noble and worthwhile—but then it is to that appearance and the attitude behind it that one must strenuously object. And besides, did she in reality give pleasure and relief to her parents? Did she not increase the torture of their lives? Acting as she did, she increased the misery of her father beyond description. The play also quite definitely gave me the impression that this life is all that there is ... the play has no background of the eternal values of justice, righteousness and purity ... The play may be a protest against the civilisation of our day. as is suggested, but all mere protests are largely ineffective unless accompanied by constructive and inspirational thought and action. I have made my protest, such as it is and unless something new is brought forward, I have no further time to devote to it. ... -- J. H. Burry.

Burry responds to comments in other letters about the breadth and dept of his sympathies by saying that indeed he expected the play to expand these towards the unemployed, and then restates his argument that the play is a great disappointment because it makes what is bad look desirable. He does not accept the point made by some of his correspondents that the play is precisely showing that under current social organisation unemployed people can only make self-destructive 'choices'. Burry does not accept that Greenwood and Gow's play could be complex enough to critique rather than simply champion the state of life it portrays (I do not really follow his points about anarchism and about true sacrifice always having positive outcomes). He ends with his strongest statement of his fundamental objection to *Love on the Dole*, that is a work which not only shows a godless world but is itself essentially without any belief in God or providence. About this, I think he is completely correct: the whole work is dedicated to showing that all schemes of conventional morality and belief are irrelevant under the material conditions of Hanky Park. The only good which be achieved is by the abolition of those circumstances – and that is not something which the people of Hanky Park can do through their own agency or within the world of the play, or where faith in life after death seems relevant.

While there was considerable vigour, (as well as, at times, a clarity in the underpinning aesthetic, theological and moral thinking) on both sides in this substantial exchange of views in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* in October 1935, the clerical critique of the play represented most strongly by Burry and his supporters was to prove a minority view over a longer period. For, actually, most clerical commentary on the play (and later the film) supported the view, articulated well by

the Reverend Stewart above, that its criticism of British social conditions in the thirties was compatible with Christian understanding of the Church's role in supporting the poor and addressing the social conditions which produced and reproduced poverty.

Even before the Aberdeen debate, the Sheffield *Daily Independent* reported a highly positive response from the Reverend Pat McCormick immediately after he had seen the play in its production at the Garrick Theatre, London (13/5/1935, p. 1). Indeed, its treatment of unemployment and poverty spurred him into using a regular monthly nationwide broadcast slot on BBC radio in order to publicise his quickly thought-out scheme to help people on the dole in the North. The article has three headings in a column: 'Adopting Hard-hit Families', 'Inspired by *Love on the Dole*', 'North Appeal'.

In a nation-wide broadcast from St. Martin-in-the-Fields to-night, the Rev. Pat McCormick outlined a scheme which he has framed which may ultimately benefit thousands of families in the North of England. He was prepared to provide "clearing house" in London through which these Northern families in distress may adopt well-to-do families who are members of his vast broadcast audience... Mr. McCormick revealed to the "Daily Independent" that he was inspired by the visit which he paid to Walter Greenwood's tragic play of life in Salford, *Love the Dole*. 'The tragedy of it simply tears out one's heart strings', he said.

McCormick was the successor (1927 to 1940) to Canon Dick Sheppard (1914 to 1926) as Vicar of St Martin-in-the Fields and followed his belief that the church should have at the core of its being a social ministry which would practically help the

poor. Indeed, Canon Shepherd had himself seen the play of *Love on the Dole* early in its London production and afterwards asked to be introduced to its author, suggesting his approval.<sup>18</sup> A critic of developing Anglican thinking about the Church's social responsibility had in the mid-twenties disapproved of this particular strand of thought asserting that 'the sentimental-socialist version of Christianity has its Vatican in St. Martin's ... [and] Dick Sheppard is its prophet.'<sup>19</sup> A somewhat kinder contemporary assessment is cited by a history of St Martins in the Fields: 'it is sentimental modernism backed by a tremendous enthusiasm for service and good works.'<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, such practical Christianity had many supporters and participating activists in the thirties and St Martin's was indeed a centre for such work.

Other ministers were also inspired to advocate adoption schemes by *Love on the Dole*, though in this case of churches by churches rather than as in McCormick's plan of families by families. Though citing *Love on the Dole* as a direct inspiration, it seems likely that the scheme outlined below also had some roots in the St Martin-in-the-Fields scheme of the previous year. The *Western Morning News* (31/12/1936, p. 5) reported, again with three headings, a scheme stemming from a Baptist minister's reading of Greenwood's work: 'Pastor's Plan at Plymouth', 'Adopt Church in Distressed Area; *Love on the Dole*':

A suggestion that Churches in Plymouth and other places where the members were in employment should adopt and help congregations in distressed areas was made by Dr T. Wilkinson Riddle, preaching at George-Street Baptist Church last night on *Love on the Dole*. 'The Churches; he said, 'might take an



example from the Christian Church of the first century, and adopt a Church labouring among the destitute. ... Dr Riddle's sermon was based on Mr Walter Greenwood's famous novel and play, which tells of the struggle of the Hardcastle family ... against the sufferings of unemployment. ... Poverty, he declared, was one of the oldest problems of the world. ... There were four words for poverty in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and two in the Greek of the new, and one of the latter meant extreme pauperism That was the word used to describe the conditions into which Christ was born, and the word was used four times in the New Testament. In the beginning, he said, God gave express commands that the people should care for the poor. ...The Christian people, declared the preacher, had never been anything else but Socialists. One could not possibly be a Bible Christian without being a Socialist. He was. he said defining the word in the sense of sharing privileges for the greater benefit of the community. ... Describing the story of *Love on the Dole*, Dr Riddle said in it one could never forget the grimy squalor, moral inertia, and spiritual suicide that was the result of prolonged unemployment. One of the greatest tragedies of the unemployed, he continued, was that they were rarely seen at church ... Yet some, he said, still went to prayer meetings in spite of their sufferings ... Dr Riddle spoke of a one-time fellow-student of his in South Wales, in whose church all the deacons and 100 per cent, of the people were unemployed and suggested that George-Street could make a start by adopting that church. He spoke of the faith that its congregation had retained, and said he could write a reply to Mr. Greenwood's book, showing how people's faith increased and how love on the dole became stronger than in favourable times.

The sermon reported on has a number of notable aspects. Firstly, the links made between Greenwood's work and the New Testament vocabulary of poverty is unusual, as is the direct claim that Christianity and socialism are indivisible (though the 'sharing privileges' definition which follows may reduce the identification of Christian socialism with contemporary socialism). Secondly, while there is a general approval of the fame, seriousness, accuracy and moving nature of *Love on the Dole*, there is also towards the end of the report a sharp and Burryesque criticism of its complete exclusion of continuing faith and engagement with the Church. From his own experience, Dr Riddle feels he could correct Greenwood's vision of the unemployed as godless, just as Burry could turn to George Lansbury as an exemplar of deprivation, humble origins, faith, and socialist belief combined. Finally, it is notable that while sermons about Greenwood's work are variously referred to, there are only a few examples as here where there is a summary of the argument and frames of reference of the actual sermon itself (for example, in contrast see the laconic report in the *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 27/5/1935,p.5, of another clerical use presumably of Greenwood's text: 'The rector, the Rev. T. H. Evan, conducted a men's service at South Normanton Church last night. The subject of his address was *Love on the Dole*').

On 29 April 1935 the *Daily Independent* reported that the play had formed the basis for a sermon by Canon A. J. Talbot Easter at St Paul's church in Sheffield and gives some detail. The Canon argued that the story was the result of 'bitter experience of life' and that 'it did not invite one to draw conclusions but placed certain people before the audience and asked them to understand their point of view'. In fact, he said that the story itself 'had all the essentials of a sermon'. Thus, the work showed

that 'love on the pictures was not the same as love on the dole' and the vicar also drew the conclusion that for Greenwood betting was 'a mug's game' (p. 7).<sup>21</sup> Later that year something termed not a sermon but a talk about *Love on the Dole* was given in a specifically Christian socialist group, and by a trade union official too:

*Love on the Dole*. Talk on Play to Plymouth Christian Socialist Church (Western Morning News, 30/9/1935, p. 5). A talk on the play *Love on the Dole* was given by Mr. E. V. Watering, district official of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, at the Plymouth Christian Socialist Church held at Beaumont Hall yesterday. Mr Watering pointed out that some of the scenes described in the play, and which gripped one with their stark reality on the stage, had a counterpart in some quarters in Plymouth. One of the impressions left by the play, he said, was that of men and women striving to be themselves in squalid surroundings, unemployed, and with the means test hanging over their heads, In subsequent discussion, Mr. Geo. Ebury declared that there were more children being murdered in the present system in the sense that intellect and talent were underdeveloped than there were under Herod.

Again, there is the comparison of the conditions shown in the play to those in the local area, a specific reference to a Biblical parallel, and the interpretation that the characters in the play cannot under these conditions in any way realise the selves they would want to be.

There is one further instance from 1937 in Coventry where the press reported the contents of a sermon in detail, and where the cleric in question engaged not only

with *Love on the Dole* as his text, but also quite explicitly, and in more detail than the Reverend Stewart, with the mechanics of national and local government policy. Indeed, political argument is more prominent than theological, though the underpinning Christian theme is the essential role of work in bestowing dignity on human life:

LOVE ON THE DOLE. Coventry Minister's Sermon: 'I realise that some people may think that a play in a theatre is hardly a suitable theme for a sermon, but I know that my Master did not shut his eyes to the ugly things of human life. I have rarely been so moved in all my life as when I watched that play, and I said: "Thank God that the theatre-going public is confronted with this as a change from the exotic opulence of Hollywood and the fantastic everlasting triangle." '

The Rev. S. Maurice Watts, Minister of Warwick Road Congregational Church, Coventry, last night preached on the play *Love on the Dole*, which, last week, played to packed houses at the Opera House, Coventry. He said the play seemed to leap at the audience with a challenge. Mr. Watts described the play as having been brilliantly acted, and it was vital, not simply for that reason, but because it was telling the complete truth about a section of life. Mr. Watts, however, suggested that if he had the ability to write a play such a theme he would have put 'in something else which he had learned from a lengthening experience. He would have put in a character such, as he had often known and for which he had a sincere admiration. It would have

been the character of a man who had the true strength of Christian courage in his soul'.

A NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY. 'The whole vexing problem of the play is a national responsibility', said Mr. Watts. 'I think that if I were a member of a National Government, I should ask for a national assumption of that responsibility, or I would go out of office. What is the use of talking vague hopes of industry going back to the distressed area? Would the people who say these things care to start an industry in Merthyr, where the rates are 30s. in the £? Why. are the rates so crippling? Simply because the local Public Assistance Committee have to provide for about three-quarters of the population, who are out of work. The rates cannot be otherwise, and so, by a vicious circle, industry is kept away. Surely the task of the maintenance of the unemployed is a national charge? It would not be an un-Christian thing if, by national resolve, the rates of Coventry and similar places, were put up a shilling, and thereby the rates of Merthyr brought down to the same level. It is the business of a Government, I believe, to secure that every member of the State is sharing the burden'.

DOLE NO SOLUTION. 'I am not merely suggesting an increased dole insofar as it goes beyond a sound insurance system. That is no solution and it is a bad principle. I am simply urging that every man has the right to serve in the community to which he belongs. It is a vicious principle that men should get something for nothing. I am claiming the right to work. But we go on in the old

ways of laissez faire -- letting men stick industries where they will without regard to the real needs of the community, letting men be treated as pawns, driving some men with excessive overtime and Sunday work, while others have nothing. It is all without a plan. Surely it should not be beyond our brain power so to plan industry that it serves the best interests of the whole community and not private gain. I am not blaming the private employers. They are as much in the bands of the system as anybody else. It is the system that is wrong -- or the lack of it. Quite possibly I shall be called a Socialist for saying that. That doesn't matter' (*Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 11/1/1937, p. 12).

First, Reverend Watts expresses his recognition that the play represents 'ugly things', but argues that both the 'ugly' and its representation in the theatre are part of the domain of the Church, and consistent with following the example of Christ. He then praises the emotional impact of Greenwood and Gow's play, and its startling realism when compared to the romances of Hollywood. He praises both the performance and the play itself for their truthfulness to a certain 'section' of life – with the one important reservation that in reality there would surely be an individual whose Christian faith sustained them through the sufferings of worklessness and the dole. From this commentary on the play he then switches attention to what (I think rightly) he sees as the central question the play poses to the audience – what can be done to alter the conditions which produce such characters and such situations?

This is a question both for theatre audiences and for the government, local and national, which in a democracy, they are part of. This leads to a close engagement

with the mechanisms of government – why not recognise the national rather than local responsibility for unemployment by asking for a national contribution through raising rates to help the most burdened towns, such as Merthyr Tydfil? Good government would ensure that every citizen contributed to sustaining life for those most affected by unemployment. However, unemployment benefit is only a palliative; larger solutions are needed – principally the central planning of industry and its location, and the regulation of labour so that it is fairly distributed across Britain. Reverend Watts indeed argues for a central command economy, an idea which some in the contemporary Labour Party also saw as the best way for Britain to address its own share in the current national economic failure in the context of an international and long-lasting slump. (21 a – see discussion of Labour Party attitudes to central planning in the thirties in Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain – a New History of the Labour Party*, the Bodley Head, London, 2010, Kindle edition, locations 4537-4613). Watt is aware that this may make him liable to being labelled a ‘Socialist’, but, perhaps in line with Congregationalist individual independence, he is willing to risk that. As with some previous clerical responses, Greenwood and Gow’s play is seen as a catalyst for considering relationships between Christianity and socialism.

Four years later, Greenwood’s text still provided a Christian reference point. On 30<sup>th</sup> June 1939, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* reported on the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement annual meeting at Cromer under the title: ‘*Love on the Dole: Crushed*’. Assuming a common recognition of the themes of Greenwood’s text, the Reverend Dr A. H. Gray (a former Presbyterian minister):

rebuked the Church for its toleration of 'love on the dole' social injustices... in sordid surroundings, amid dirt, overwork and crushing anxiety, love did not have the chance God meant it to have ... it could not be said that the Church as a whole had ever put forward its united force to insist on whatever change might be necessary ... There was something wrong with the very structure of our society. If they wanted to see happy sex-lives in England and happy successful marriages and real families ... they had an enormous task of social reconstruction ahead of them.

This seems a remarkable intervention with its stress on the relationships between happy sex-lives, good marriages and healthy family life, as well as its urging of structural social change. Greenwood's text here is treated as canonical, the basis for a sermon on the failings of modern England in terms of a modern Christian social vision. Other signs of clerical approval include a report that the Reverend H.B. Edwards was an outstanding Mr Hardcastle in an amateur production in Lancaster (*Lancaster Guardian*, 12/11/1937, p.3), and by 1946 the play was even considered suitable for a Methodist youth club drama group production at the Lloyd Park Methodist Church Hall, Walthamstow (*Walthamstow Post*, 4/12/1946).<sup>22</sup>

Both the film of *Love on the Dole* (1941) and other works by Greenwood were also well-received in reviews in church periodicals. Thus the (Anglican) *Church Times* was very much sympathetic to his short story collection *The Cleft Stick* (1937, with illustrations by the Sheffield-educated artist Arthur Wragg), which was in many ways a sequel to *Love on the Dole*:



If his young men see visions, it is of themselves winning football competitions, and if his old men dream dreams, it is backing the right horse for once. Liquor and brass are the only ways to escape to a better world; but it is grinding poverty, not original sin, that brings people to this pass.<sup>23</sup>

The reviewer sees that in Hanky Park there is no sense of the religious or spiritual and that the only imaginable visions, dreams and hopes of a better world are those supplied by the entirely secular and commercial realms of betting and alcohol. For this the reviewer does not blame the people of Hanky Park, but rather the material poverty which has led also to what is seen here as their mental and spiritual poverty. Iris Conlay, the reviewer of the film version in the *Catholic Herald* (13/6/1941), has a similar sense of the 'innocence' both of religion and of guilt among the working people depicted. She argues with great sympathy that the Hardcastle family are exactly the kind of people Pope Leo XIII had imagined being produced by the modern industrial world, following the logic of his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (15/5/1891) which argued that souls are formed 'from the form given by society' (Conlay's summary).<sup>24</sup> Her review is partly inspired by Pope Pius XIII's 1941 Whit-Sunday radio address which had revisited with approval *Rerum Novarum*. Conlay writes that this address:

is illustrated point by point by every shot of that most poignant and heart-rending British film ... They were not religious these Hardcastles. Life perhaps had been too hard on them to give them any opportunity of learning about God, but they inherited strong Christian principles and the big-hearted Christian generosity that clings to our English people long after doctrines and worship have been long forgotten.

Her sense that essential Christian principles will have survived what she naturally regards as the losses of theological understanding and ritual at the Reformation seems remarkably optimistic and indeed in harmony in some ways with the *Church Times*' sense of the wholly secularised inheritance of the characters in *The Cleft Stick*.

Perhaps the most unlikely linking of Greenwood's work to religion which I have seen is a poster sent out to readers (perhaps especially cinema professionals and managers) in the *Kinematograph Weekly* issue of 27/3/1941. The poster, taking up a double-page spread of the magazine, pictures in the background the scene early in the film where Larry is speaking in the street for the Labour Party and Sally is listening to him. In the foreground are two blown-up photographs of Sally (Deborah Kerr) and Larry (Clive Evans). The poster has a gold border at the top on which appear in black font the words: 'AND THEY SHALL BUILD THE OLD WASTES AND RAISE UP THE OLD DESOLATIONS AND THEY SHALL REPAIR THE WASTE CITIES [,] THE DESOLATIONS OF MANY GENERATIONS.' The text is not attributed, but most readers at the time would surely recognise it as of Biblical origin. It is in fact from Isaiah 61:4 (King James translation) and assures the reader that God will restore his people and their lands. This applies well to the rather desolate scene from Hanky Park underneath and clearly interprets the whole film as about the reconstruction of this depressed and poverty-stricken Britain of the thirties, thus linking it firmly into a nineteen-forties 'People's War' narrative.<sup>25</sup> It is also, so far, the only association I have seen of Greenwood's work with an Old Testament rather than New Testament text and context. The poster advertises in the lower right-hand corner the 'Trade Show' of the film at the Phoenix Theatre on 2/4/1941 (two months

before the UK public release on 30//1941).<sup>26</sup> The stern Old Testament text does not seem the obvious way to gain cinema managers' attention, but perhaps it both signalled the new wartime significance of the film version of Greenwood's Depression novel and play and may have countered the press stories about the censorship of the film during 1930 and 1940, which might have implied either sexual and/or political controversy likely to make exhibitors' nervous (and/or, of course, hopeful of publicity).

Indeed, though Greenwood does not in the main seem to have engaged closely with organised religion, he did invoke its assistance on occasion. In early 1940, the British Board of Film Censors was still putting what seemed insuperable obstacles in the way of a film version of *Love on the Dole*. Greenwood wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* (26/2/1940, p.10) protesting against the continuing censorship of his film about working people when Britain was meant to be fighting for democracy and freedom. Completely critically unnoticed is a letter published the following day in a Yorkshire newspaper, which did indeed invoke, among other things, the clerical reception of *Love on the Dole*: as a measure of its respectability and seriousness:

LETTERS to THE EDITOR Film Censors and a Book Sir, -- Honest people who value freedom home as well as abroad should be interested in the following: -- Over the past seven years I have declined all offers for the film rights of *Love on the Dole* because none of the many film companies who wanted to buy would guarantee an unadulterated version. Three weeks ago, a British film producer came forward and agreed to my terms. Contracts were drawn up and were, some days ago, to have been signed. Suddenly the

producer informed my agent that he could not proceed because a body called the British Board of Film Censors had written advising him against the proposal to make the film. Their decision was not addressed to me and inquiries of them have brought no satisfactory reasons why the film should not be made. I am quite at loss account for their decision. The book's history and that of the play is well known. It is still in as ready demand as its first appearance, and it appears in the official list of books recommended to the army. For the play, the King and Queen, in company with three million playgoers in this country, witnessed its performance. The Clergy preached hundreds of sermons throughout the land with the book's title as their text. Why, then, the ban? Is because of the war that the time is considered inappropriate for such a film? Since the theme of the book is unemployment one has only to recall that Mr. Winston Churchill has assured the country that in a few months there will longer be any unemployed to conclude that, in that case, *Love on the Dole* will be nothing more than a history of the bad old days of peace ... As an artist, it seems, I can enjoy perfect freedom to make a film of a book provided it is emasculated in accordance with the requirements of the British Board Film Censors, which, obviously, is no freedom at all. If this state of affairs is allowed to continue, then its effect on the art of the cinema will be (and is!) obvious. In this banning of *Love on the Dole* the Government might play the part of Pilate and excuse themselves on the grounds of not wishing to interfere with the domestic arrangements of the British film industry. But as an individual, am I not entitled to claim the protective privileges which we as a nation, have afforded smaller nations and for which principles we now are at War? The freedom of expression which now is denied me is not, I

submit, a personal matter exclusively, but one that concerns the community at large. We still have freedom enough to protest effectively—if there are a sufficient number of us energetic enough to do so. -Yours sincerely. WALTER GREENWOOD. The Warren. Polperro. Cornwall. Feb. 23 (*Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 27/2/1940, p.6).

I do not know if there were really hundreds of sermons preached on the text of *Love on the Dole*, but there certainly was a substantial response to Greenwood's work from the clergy, and the serious debates they led about the significance for Britain of the play and the film about the conditions of working people in the thirties deserve critical attention, as does the engagement of the churches with the crises of the interwar period. While for Burry, the play perhaps confirmed anxieties about the secularisation of modern society and displayed in every detail the 'death of Christian Britain' and the slipping away of theocentric understandings of society, for other clergy it may have provided a way back into the centre of contemporary social debate, by giving a popular platform for discussing whether economic understandings of life were in a narrow sense sufficient, and by showing that the churches could engage with central contemporary social crises, and, in some instances, the details of local and national government, and their underpinning political and economic ideas. The clerical audience and clerical respondents to his text suggest yet again Greenwood's extraordinary ability to raise urgent and controversial issues in ways which were able to engage almost any audience – though, as we saw in the first half of this article, there were some dissenters from approval. Greenwood's texts have often been seen as message-bearing ('fiction with a definite social aim', said the novelist and critic Phyllis Bentley), but they have also been seen by many critics as highly interpretable in various ways, particularly

because the critics have often had reservations about their coherence.<sup>27</sup> The clerical debate about *Love on the Dole*, among other things, gives us a valuable insight into how individual contemporary readers interpreted it, and how they framed their understanding, through their public and detailed argument about the work. If anything, the breadth and depth of the influence of *Love on the Dole* on its contemporary readers and audiences, as well as their precise character and social range, is still under-estimated and under-studied.

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<sup>1</sup> See 'Conclusion' to Chris Hopkins, *Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole: Novel, Play, Film*, Liverpool University Press, April 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Penguin edition: Harmondsworth, 1969, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> There are nine references to churches in the novel text, but these are mainly to physical locations without any much detail. Two more interesting uses refer to Harry Hardcastle's former membership of a church choir – he has left because he feels it feminises him, even though he thinks it might help him get an office job. However, he wants a real 'man's' job at Marlowe's engineering works.

<sup>4</sup> There are thirty-one invocations of God in the novel: not all lack seriousness, but none seem obviously part of a religious faith.

<sup>5</sup> See the novel, pp 58-60, for the way in which it refuses to take the two characters seriously in this respect. The fictional 'North Street Mission', which the novel equally does not take seriously by linking it to Mrs Scodgers, Mrs Jike and spiritualism, may be based on the actual Methodist Salford Central Mission in Ordsall (demolished in 2011), which was surely not so religiously marginal or lacking in substance as this comic portrayal suggests (see report of the demolition, 3/3/2011:

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/local-news/the-end-of-citys-iconic-mission-855438>).

<sup>6</sup> See Chris Hopkins, *Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole: Novel, Play, Film*, pp. 124-5, 128, 178.

<sup>7</sup> Working Class Movement Library web entry on Walter Greenwood by his communist Salford contemporary, Eddie Frow: <https://www.wcml.org.uk/our-collections/creativity-and-culture/drama-and-literature/walter-greenwood-and-love-on-the-dole/>; cited in Chris Hopkins, *Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole: Novel, Play, Film*, p. 205. There is one striking and critically unnoticed exception to Greenwood's lack of attention to Christian belief. His short story 'Magnificat' in *The Cleft Stick* does pay attention to working-class faith and the reading of the Bible. See my forthcoming article 'The Pictures ... Are Even More Stark Than the Prose' (*Sheffield Telegraph* 2/12/1937): Word and Image in Walter Greenwood and Arthur Wragg's *The Cleft Stick* (1937) (*Word & Image*, forthcoming 2020, with open access). The *Church Times*, perhaps not surprisingly, liked 'Magnificat' best of all *The Cleft Stick* short stories, but its account does not quite match my sense of the story or pick up potentially disturbing ambiguities: 'the best short story is 'Magnificat' in which a young girl, who had got herself into the usual trouble, found disgrace and

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misery swallowed up in a joy that a man must be born into the world' (3/12/1937 – see above for a further quotation from the same review). There is a further information about *The Cleft Stick* and a synopsis of its fifth story, 'Magnificat', at: <https://waltergreenwoodnotjustloveonthedole.com/walter-greenwood-and-arthur-wraggs-the-cleft-stick-1937/> .

<sup>8</sup> See Michael Snape's chapter 'War and Peace' for his argument that there was not so much a huge growth in atheism or a rejection of the authority of the church after World War One, but that there was wartime disruption of regular church attendance and social engagement among Anglicans (at least), which had long term consequences (in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, volume 4: Global Western Anglicanism, c.1910 - the Present*, Ed. Jeremy Morris, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2017, pp.236-8.

<sup>9</sup> (New York: University Press of America, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Wollenberg, *Christian Social Thought in Great Britain between the Wars*, pp.35-5. The speech was made at the third Anglo-Catholic Congress, at the Albert Hall, London.

<sup>11</sup> See *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, volume 4: Global Western Anglicanism, c.1910 - the Present*, pp. 5-6 for an introduction to the impact of this theory on Anglican belief, at least. Nevertheless, if there was a decline in religious belief and engagement in the interwar period, many historians of religion see the largest changes in behaviours as not happening till the nineteen-sixties – see Callum. G. Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain 1800-2000*, Routledge, London, 2001, second edition, 2009, Introduction, pp. 1–14.

<sup>12</sup> This may accord with Brown's scepticism about some of the ways in which secularisation theory has been used by historians, and his sense that they habitually started from a position of 'cynical secularism' (p. 28).

<sup>13</sup> Conventions for indicating the titles of texts varied widely between different newspapers, and included no use of any conventions, upper case, single inverted commas and double inverted commas. For consistency, I have in all quotations put the title *Love on the Dole* in italics whatever the original chose to do. All quotations and references to newspapers in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are from the invaluable British Library Newspaper Archive – a national treasure-house: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

<sup>14</sup> Chris Hopkins, *Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole: Novel, Play, Film*, Liverpool University Press, pp 77-80.

<sup>15</sup> At the date of Burry's letter Lansbury was still leader of the Labour Party, but resigned in October 1935 after failing to convince the majority at that year's party conference of the rightness of his more or less absolutist pacifist response to fascism. See Lansbury's *Wikipedia* entry, and/or *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online entry by John Shepherd, 2004 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Lansbury](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Lansbury); the *DNB* is still accessible only by subscription, but the *Wikipedia* article is of good quality).

<sup>16</sup> Snee, Carole, 'Working-Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?' in *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*, ed. Jon Clark, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), pp. 165–91, p.176.

<sup>17</sup> Cape edition, London, 1935, Act 2, Scene II, p.78. See discussion of the scene in Chris Hopkins, *Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole: Novel, Play, Film*, pp.127-9.

<sup>18</sup> As reported in an article by Hannen Swaffer in the *Daily Herald* (1/2/1935).

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<sup>19</sup> Herbert Hensley Henson's view cited in Bruce Wollenberg's *Christian Social Thought Between the Wars*, p.40.

<sup>20</sup> Sydney Dark in *St Martin's Review*, November 1927 (no page number supplied), cited in Malcom Johnson, *St Martin-in-the-Fields*, Chichester: Phillimore &co, 2005, p.36

<sup>21</sup> St Paul's, sited near what is now the Peace Gardens, was an eighteenth-century foundation, sold by the Church of England and demolished in 1937 (see: <http://chrishobbs.com/sheffield/stpaulschurchsheffield.htm>).

<sup>22</sup> *Walter Greenwood Collection* Press Clippings Book, volume 2, p.157, in the University of Salford Archives The review is by an unnamed reviewer and the clipping lacks a date and page number:

[www.salford.ac.uk/data/assets/xml\\_file/0007/530476/Greenwood.xml](http://www.salford.ac.uk/data/assets/xml_file/0007/530476/Greenwood.xml)

<sup>23</sup> Walter Greenwood's Press Clipping's book, Volume 1, p.153, *Walter Greenwood Collection*. The review is by an unnamed reviewer and the clipping lacks a date and page number.

<sup>24</sup> Named after its opening words, which mean literally 'of new things', but are often translated as 'of revolutionary change' (see the English text on the Vatican Documents web-site: [http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html)). The Encyclical is often referred to in the anglophone world as either 'On the Condition of Labour' or 'Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor'. Pope Pius XII's radio address had been published in English by the *Tablet* on 7/6/1941. There is some discussion in Chris Hopkins' *Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole: Novel, Play, Film*, Liverpool University Press, p. 178.

<sup>25</sup> See Chris Hopkins, *Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole: Novel, Play, Film*, pp. 149-153.

<sup>26</sup> I assume that this refers to the Phoenix Theatre in Charing Cross Road, London (opened in 1930), though it was and is not a cinema.

<sup>27</sup> Phyllis Bentley in 'Contemporary British Fiction', *The English Journal*, 28, 4, April 1939, pp. 251–61, p. 257. For further discussion of the coherence of Greenwood's work, see discussion in Chris Hopkins, *Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole: Novel, Play, Film*, p.264.