

ARTICLE

“The Regeneration of Society”: Thomas Ernest Hulme and the Early British Reception of Georges Sorel

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The article examines T. E. Hulme’s reading of Georges Sorel as a politically transversal thinker of moral renewal. It argues that, by distancing Sorel from syndicalism and by reading him as a thinker of moral absolutes, this interpretation constituted an act of resignification. This is shown by contrasting Hulme’s reading with the dominant patterns of the British reception of Sorel. What emerges is the striking, and self-aware, originality of Hulme’s positions. This originality, we argue, was made possible by the European scope of Hulme’s intellectual horizon, which gave him the resources to read Sorel differently. Finally, we ask why Hulme read Sorel in this way. We suggest that Hulme was working through a contradiction between his relativistic philosophical education and an increasing need for political commitment. Sorel’s ethics of commitment grounded in myth were a way to move from Bergsonian openness to a metaphysics capable of conceptualizing moral and political absolutes.

The first English-language translation of a work by Georges Sorel arrived in Europe in the middle of the Great War. Lagging an abundant year behind its American version, Thomas Ernest Hulme’s translation of *Réflexions sur la violence* appeared in London at the beginning of 1916.¹ Originally the book was to be published in late 1912 by Charles Granville’s Stephen Swift and Co., Ltd, with a preface written by the more established Graham Wallas.² The bankruptcy of Swift and Co. meant, however, that the publication had to wait.³ As we shall see later, this delay proved of some importance: when Allen and Unwin finally published the volume, it

¹Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. Thomas Ernest Hulme (London: Allen and Unwin, 1916). As publication history is relevant to our argument, publication details are given in full when dealing with historical sources. All citations from the body of Sorel’s text will be taken from the following modern edition: Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T. E. Hulme, ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge, 1999).

²Advertisements for the volume mentioning Wallas’s preface can be found in *The Athenaeum*, 14 Sept. 1912, 285; and in the feminist magazine (also owned by Swift and Co.) *The Freewoman*, 26 Sept. 1912, 380.

³See Faith Binckes, *Modernism, Magazines, and the British Avant-Garde* (Oxford, 2010), 24–7.

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contained a different introduction, penned by the translator himself.⁴ By 1915, when he wrote the text, Hulme had established himself as an emerging literary figure in London, where he had contributed to the formulation of imagist poetics around 1908. Educated at Cambridge before he dropped out in 1904, Hulme had complemented his poetry and literary writings with a series of articles on philosophy and, occasionally, politics appearing in publications ranging from the socialist *New Age* to the conservative *The Commentator*. In his “Translator’s Preface” to the *Reflections*, Hulme sketched with some precision the way in which Sorel should be interpreted. Distancing the French thinker from syndicalism, he suggested that the real importance of Sorel rested in his fixed, pessimistic view of human nature, his opposition to a “rational and sceptical ethic,” and, above all, his concern with the urgent need for a “regeneration of society.”⁵ The significance of this short text largely lay in the fact that it introduced to the English-speaking world a specific reading of Sorel, in which he is cast not so much as a theorist of revolutionary syndicalism but as a critic of bourgeois society and of its ethical decadence.

The image of Georges Sorel painted by Hulme—that of a thinker of moral decadence and renewal rather than a Marxian revolutionary syndicalist—will undoubtedly strike many readers as essentially accurate: not, in other words, as an act of resignification but as a more or less correct interpretation of, if not Sorel’s whole *oeuvre*, then at least the *Reflections on Violence*. The reason for this is that a specific image has come to dominate both scholarly and non-scholarly discussions of Sorel in the anglophone world: that of a social thinker concerned much more with the moral effects of political struggle than with its outcomes, a thinker for whom, to paraphrase Eduard Bernstein, the movement is everything and the goal not so decisive. American political theorist Corey Robin, for example, writes that for Sorel, “ardor is everything. From ardor alone, from that splendid indifference to reason and self-interest, an entire civilization, drowning in materialism and complacency, will be reawakened.”⁶ The main concern, on this reading, is neither revolution nor the working class, but instead reversing a tendency towards civilizational moral decadence. As A. James Gregor claims, Sorel “charged himself with the responsibility of advocating a rebirth of value, a reformulation of ethical principles.”⁷ Connected to this overarching preoccupation with moral regeneration comes, logically, a tendency for political transversality, a certain indifference towards both the agents of revolutionary politics and their aims. If the end is, after all, moral regeneration, then who effects it, for what reasons, and even what society will come afterwards are secondary. What matters is the intensity of the

⁴It is worth noting that the American version does not contain Hulme’s preface. Both versions are based on the third French-language edition published in 1912 by Marcel Rivière, with the exception of the appendix, “Unity and Multiplicity,” which had been added in the second French edition from 1910 but which is absent from both English-language versions. See Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. Thomas Ernest Hulme, 1st edn (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1914).

⁵Thomas Ernest Hulme, “Translator’s Preface,” in *Reflections on Violence* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1916), v–xi, at x–xi.

⁶Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump*, 2nd edn (New York, 2017), 77.

⁷A. James Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism* (Stanford, 2009), 87.

struggle and its capacity to reawaken a stultified moral sense.⁸ It is worth underlining how neither Robin nor Gregor make any reference to Hulme, while at the same time taking important aspects of his interpretation for granted. Other scholars are more aware of their indebtedness to Hulme, such as Zeev Sternhell, for whom “no one has given a more precise account of the place of Sorel in the history of ideas” than the British intellectual.⁹

Examples of interpretations of this kind abound and it is beyond the scope of this article not only to illustrate their shortcomings, but also to develop a substantial historical account of their rise to prominence.¹⁰ It is, however, within our scope to suggest that they suffer from a tendency to conflate Sorel with certain Sorelianisms, and to read the former from the perspective of the latter. To read Sorel through these accounts, however, means assuming a continuity between a writer and some of their reception: a continuity which it is methodologically risky to take for granted as it may obscure the agency of Sorel’s younger readers. Accounts of Sorel as a thinker of ethical renewal, as Hulme’s example will show, were the creation of a younger generation of writers, who used specific Sorelian inputs to articulate their need for a philosophy of absolutes in contrast to what they perceived as a prevailing relativism.

In this article, first, we want to highlight Hulme’s intellectual agency. We want to show that this framing of Sorel as a thinker of moral renewal constituted an act of resignification. It did not automatically follow, in other words, either from Sorel’s text or from the way in which this text was being interpreted in Britain. Instead, it resulted to a substantial extent from Hulme’s own developing concerns. Second, we outline a broader explanation of this resignification. Though we acknowledge the importance of national contexts, we argue that geographical lenses in this case have to be abandoned in favour of generational ones. The European scope of Hulme’s intellectual horizon—in terms of readings, interests, and networks—renders interpretations predominantly in terms of national contexts unsustainable. It is, in fact, precisely this European horizon which, as we shall show, decisively influenced Hulme’s reading of Sorel.

Rather than geography, what constitutes the salient aspect of the story we are examining is the ease with which certain Sorelian themes could be used to voice a generational contestation across different national milieus in Western Europe. In particular, it was the Sorelian ethics of commitment which attracted figures like Hulme: an ethics originally embedded in a precise strategy of proletarian agitation and without pretensions of absolute objectivity but capable of transcending its framework of origin and of capturing the imagination of younger intellectuals. Decisive to this process of resignification was the philosophical education of these

⁸Clearly, this interpretation is reinforced not only by Sorel’s own biography—which includes a period of marginal involvement with the Action française—but also by the evolution of some of his younger disciples. On this see the works of Zeev Sternhell, especially Zeev Sternhell, Maia Asheri, and Mario Sznajder, *Naissance de l'idéologie fasciste* (Paris, 1989).

⁹Zeev Sternhell, Maia Asheri, and Mario Sznajder, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. by David Maisel (Princeton, 1994), 241.

¹⁰For a text dealing with these questions in the anglophone world see Eric Brandom, “Violence in Translation: Georges Sorel, Liberalism, and Totalitarianism from Weimar to Woodstock,” *History of Political Thought* 38/4 (2017), 733–63.

younger figures, who had been nurtured by Nietzscheanism, by Bergsonism, and by American and European pragmatisms. These highly relativistic epistemologies proved increasingly incapable of sustaining the need for personal, existential, and political commitment engendered by the coming of the Great War and exacerbated during the interwar period. The “absolute view of ethics” which Hulme saw as Sorel’s most important contribution incisively illustrates this process of resignification.¹¹

Sorel the moralist

Thomas Ernest Hulme’s preface to his translation of the *Reflections* provides an extremely clear case of resignifying agency. The text opens with an attempt to drive a wedge between the workers’ movement and the “system of ideas” which it adopts, and which Hulme hesitantly calls democracy—adding, however, that “liberal might have been a better word, were it not that Socialists, while proclaiming their difference from liberalism in policy, at the same time adopt the whole liberal ideology.”¹² The peculiarity of Sorel, for Hulme, consists in his attempt to detach the two, unmasking democratic ideology for what it is: “an organic body of middle-class thought dating from the eighteenth century” which has “no necessary connection whatever with the working-class or revolutionary movement.”¹³ The overlap between Hulme’s preface and Sorel’s ideas is, up to this point, conspicuous: the attack on liberal democracy and on the acceptance, on behalf of the workers’ movement, not only of its parliamentary methods but, more radically, of its ideology and culture is a central theme of Sorel’s syndicalist writings. The historical genesis of bourgeois ideology sketched by Hulme, moreover, closely follows Sorel’s own, articulated in the *Reflections* and, more elaborately, in the *Illusions of Progress*, which Hulme mentions in the preface.

Hulme’s key move consists, however, in reframing these Sorelian ideas away from the Marxian assumptions in which they were originally developed and into a much less immediately political but still strongly ideologically charged narrative centred on the overcoming of nineteenth-century bourgeois civilization and of its core beliefs. In simpler words, whereas for Sorel the struggle to overcome bourgeois democratic ideology has as its ultimate goal the development of the proletariat as an autonomous historical subject, for Hulme the struggle against this ideology becomes the crux of the matter. A good starting point to examine this subtle but decisive shift consists in noticing the replacement of the language of proletarian autonomy with vaguer expressions concerning the “regeneration” or “transformation” of society. In what direction, however, must society be transformed, and on what terms must it be regenerated? To answer these questions, Hulme employs a dichotomy borrowed from Pierre Lasserre—an important Action française intellectual—distinguishing between a modern, democratic, “romantic” spirit and an older “classical” one. Hulme explains the difference between the two in terms of opposing views on human nature: whereas romantics have an open conception

¹¹Hulme, “Translator’s Preface,” x.

¹²Ibid., v, original emphasis

¹³Ibid., viii.

centred on the perfectibility of humankind, adherents to the “classical” spirit endorse a fixed, pessimistic anthropology based on the conviction that “man is by nature bad or limited.”¹⁴

Now, what follows from embracing the fixed anthropology of the classical spirit is both a need for and the possibility of absolutes, dependent on the belief that man “can only accomplish anything of value by disciplines, ethical, heroic, or political.”¹⁵ From the eternal limitations of human nature, in other words, “comes naturally the view that the transformation of society is an heroic task requiring heroic qualities.”¹⁶ What must be underlined is not simply the focus on an ethics of intensity and commitment, but the fact that this ethics becomes a self-standing goal, and is divorced from the role which Sorel assigns to it in the *Reflections*, namely to “confine employers to their role as producers” and to “restore the class structure” envisaged by Marx.¹⁷ This amounts not just to a removal of Sorel’s syndicalist perspective but, more radically, to the transformation of a reasoning based on the fundamental openness of the historical process into one grounded in a fixed view of the human subject. The central concern of Hulme’s Sorel is not the proletariat but the rebirth of a certain “classical” manner of approaching moral questions: proletarian agency becomes a mere vehicle for moral regeneration. According to Hulme, Sorel

expects a return of the classical spirit *through* the struggle of the classes. This is the part of his thesis that is concerned with facts, and it would be impertinent on my behalf to offer any commentary on it ... Given the classical attitude, he tries to prove that its present manifestation may be hoped for in working-class violence, and at the same time the complementary notion that only under the influence of the classical attitude will the movement succeed in regenerating society.¹⁸

The reasoning on class development in times of social peace and economic concentration, foundational to the argument of the *Reflections*, is left unaddressed, and the insistence on proletarian agency reduced to a mere illustration of a wider and, for Hulme, more decisive line of reasoning concerned with moral decadence.

This reading of Sorel proved influential. In 1917 T. S. Eliot reviewed Hulme’s translation of the *Reflections* for *The Monist*, not only fully embracing the latter’s interpretive line, but even radicalizing it.¹⁹ As in Hulme’s preface, the work is

¹⁴Ibid., ix.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 78.

¹⁸Hulme, “Translator’s Preface,” xi, our italics.

¹⁹In the review, Eliot explicitly refers to Hulme’s introduction, recommending, significantly, the reading of its footnotes, in which Hulme had developed the implications of, and background to, his antiromantic argument. Speaking in general, the proximity of interests and readings between Hulme and Eliot since 1910 is remarkable, so we have to bear in mind that we are dealing with intellectuals treading very close paths. Nonetheless, if we compare the review of the *Reflections* with an earlier text written by Eliot on Sorel, important differences are noticeable. Whereas in the earlier text—a paper from spring 1914 delivered at Harvard University’s Philosophical Club—Sorel is seen, negatively, as a vitalist and a relativist, in the review of the *Reflections*, a mere three years later, he is presented in the opposite way, as a champion of the

divided into two separate parts: on the one hand, “Sorel’s own political propaganda” and on the other hand “his philosophy of history formed under the influence of Renan and Bergson.” Readers, argues Eliot, “will be disposed to consider the book under its first aspect only,” but this would be a mistake, given that the political dimension is excessively embedded in the French context, and this does not “make the work of importance to the English or American public.”²⁰ It is the latter aspect, the “philosophy of history,” Eliot suggests, which is not only more universal, but also more central to the book itself. What is really relevant, in simpler words, is Sorel’s disgust with contemporary bourgeois civilization:

his creed does not spring from the sights of wrongs to be redressed, abuses to be cured, liberties to be seized. He hates the middle classes, he hates middle-class democracy and middle-class socialism; but he does not hate these things as a champion of the rights of the people, he hates them as a middle-class intellectual hates. And the proletarian general strike is merely the instrument with which he hopes to destroy these abominations, not a weapon by which the lower classes are to obtain political or economic advantages.²¹

As in Hulme’s reading, proletarian agency is reduced to being “merely the instrument” through which something larger and more decisive is to be accomplished. Once again, we witness a process of resignification: anti-bourgeois rhetoric developed within a Marxian perspective is removed from its original context of production and given a new significance. As in Hulme’s reading, the book becomes not so much about possible avenues to socialism but, instead, a work that “expresses that violent and bitter reaction against romanticism which is one of the most interesting phenomena of our time.”²²

But what does this reaction against romanticism consist in? Is it merely the destruction of liberal institutions and culture, as could be evinced by the previous passage, that is at stake, or is there more? Following the reference to Renan, Eliot suggests a decisive difference between the intellectuals of Renan’s generation and those of today, like Sorel: “with Renan and Sainte-Beuve scepticism was still a satisfying point of view, almost an esthetic [*sic*] pose ... But the scepticism of the present, the scepticism of Sorel, is a torturing vacuity which has developed the craving for belief.”²³ This passage is fundamental, because it shows clearly what, for Eliot, is

“classical view.” In autumn 1916, moreover, Eliot had already cast Sorel in this way in his University Extension lectures in Yorkshire, discussing him in relation to a reaction against romanticism in French literature and politics. It is hard not to see the effects of Hulme’s preface—assigned in the reading list for the 1916 lectures—in this change of opinion. See Thomas Stearns Eliot, “The Relationship between Politics and Metaphysics” (1914), in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: Apprentice Years, 1905–1918*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker and Ronald Schuchard, vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD and London, 2014), 90–105; and Eliot, “Syllabus for a Course of Six Lectures on Modern French Literature” (1916), in *ibid.*, 471–7.

²⁰Thomas Stearns Eliot, “Review of *Reflections on Violence*,” *The Monist* 27 (1917), 478–9, at 478.

²¹*Ibid.* It is, of course, true that Sorelian syndicalism is predicated on the basis of the rejection of social-democratic accommodation. The gap between this and the conclusion that the proletarian perspective is purely instrumental remains, however, large.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*

the principal problem with contemporary liberal society: not positivism but relativism, the inability to offer solid points of moral and spiritual reference to individuals. Sorel's longing for the "classical view" is, therefore, a "healthy" one for the poet.²⁴ Eliot's account goes further than Hulme's in the more explicit appropriation of the concerns that he believes animate Sorel's writings. Overlooking the four decades that separate Sorel from both himself and Hulme, Eliot writes of the Frenchman as a "representative of the present generation, sick with its own knowledge of history."²⁵ This, we believe, is indicative of a wider dynamic concerning the reception of Sorel, namely a process of transgenerational appropriation of some Sorelian tropes in order to articulate the concerns of a younger generation, born between the 1870s and the 1880s.

Another example of this generational appropriation of Sorelian motives is given to us by Wyndham Lewis, who in 1926 would describe Sorel as "the key to all contemporary political thought."²⁶ Echoes of Hulme's Sorel, and of the concern for moral regeneration, appear in Lewis's writing, such as when he proclaims that Sorel, together with Bakunin, Proudhon, and others, are to be appreciated for "their moral teaching" and for the "moral force which makes them interesting."²⁷ Moreover, Hulme's "Translator's Preface" is quoted directly by Lewis.²⁸ And yet Lewis's account of Sorel is substantially different from Hulme's and Eliot's, as the ethical dimension is ultimately only one element amongst many. Emphasis is placed much more on Sorel's contradictions, aporias, and confusions, traits which bring Lewis to find some—possibly autobiographical—delight in examining this "fabulous hybrid."²⁹

It is no surprise that there is a tonal proximity between Lewis's and Hulme's portraits of Sorel, given that these writers worked closely in the same networks: both spent time in Paris, were familiar with French literature of the time, and became involved with the *New Age* circle, in which they met around 1914.³⁰ Equally, the differences between the two accounts should not be surprising, considering the historical weight of the ten years separating 1915 from 1925. A striking difference is in evaluation. Whereas both Hulme and Eliot see Sorel as an "emancipator," as the anticipator of a regeneration to come, Lewis writes about the Frenchman much

²⁴Ibid., 479.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), ed. Reed Way Dasenbrock (Santa Rosa, CA, 1989), 119.

²⁷Ibid., 278.

²⁸Ibid., 119.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰See Reed Way Dasenbrock, "Editorial Afterword," in Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, 432–47, esp. 434–5. For relevant monographs on Lewis see Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven, 2000); and Paul O'Keefe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis* (Berkeley, 2015). Hulme, as we shall see, first wrote about Sorel around 1910, whereas Lewis only refers to him much later, during the interwar period. In 1972, Isaiah Berlin mentioned a conversation with Lewis from the 1930s, in which the latter had revealed that Sorel, for him, had been a mere "passing fancy," whose attacks on democracy were "offset by an unfortunate addiction to Bergson." See Isaiah Berlin, "Sorel," *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 Jan. 1972, 40. Whether or not we choose to trust Berlin's memory, sources remain insufficient to assess the interplay between Hulme's and Lewis's readings of Sorel.

more detachedly, outlining his merits and his faults.³¹ For example, Sorel's insistence on violence, seen after "the blood-bath of the Great War," appears as a form of "vanity" to Lewis.³² "All the emotional and 'heroic' section of Sorel" is equally suspicious, being judged "romantic" and "untrue."³³ Conversely, as Hulme had, Lewis makes much of Sorel's "very interesting" analysis of bourgeois ideology from the *Illusions of Progress*, which he uses to sketch a history of the "Phantom man of the democratic Enlightenment."³⁴ Lewis's reading of Sorel, in simpler words, reflects a quite different set of problems typical of the interwar period: the rise of totalitarian regimes, both finding their origins in Sorel's multiple insights, and a critique of liberal civilisation, different from the one developed by Sorel and Hulme because formulated in a context in which parliamentary democracy was confronted with concrete fascist and Bolshevik alternatives.

As should be clear, the purpose of this article is not to pass judgement on the accuracy, even less the legitimacy, of given historical figures' readings of Sorel's work. It is, instead, to trace shifts in meaning. Confronting Eliot's and Hulme's interpretations with Sorel's own writings, in other words, yields both substantial overlaps—a language of decadence, anti-parliamentarism, and, above all, the anti-bourgeois stance—and important discrepancies. To trace processes of resignification, it is on the latter which one must concentrate. Two elements emerge. The first one concerns a political resignification: Sorel's syndicalist perspective is marginalized, and replaced with a more politically vague critique of relativistic liberal morality gesturing towards a politics of order. The resignification of the language of decadence—employed by Sorel, Hulme, and Eliot—is worth underlining. For Sorel, bourgeois decadence is to be understood as the failure of the European bourgeoisie to live up to its Marxian role of productive expansion and technological innovation. For the proletariat to step onto the stage of history, in other words, what is required is a "bourgeoisie which was energetically engaged on the paths of economic progress, which regarded timidity with shame and which was proud of looking after its class interests."³⁵ For both Hulme and Eliot, instead, decadence is above all ethical. Consequently, both reduce syndicalism to a mere illustration of a dynamic centred around the possibility of moral regeneration, despite Sorel's insistence that that the uptake of his book be that "discussions [on socialism] must deal with the conditions which allow the development of specifically proletarian forces [*puissances spécifiquement prolétariennes*]."³⁶

The second resignification occurs at a philosophical level. What is at stake in the moral crisis evoked by the two anglophone writers? What form does this crisis take? For both Hulme and Eliot, it is essentially a question of overcoming the limits of relativism. Eliot laments the "scepticism of the present" precisely because it is unable to offer points of reference capable of orienting action, generating that "craving for belief" which for the American is the dominant drive of his generation. Hulme is even more explicit that this is what is at stake: "regeneration can ... only

³¹Hulme, "Translator's Preface," xi.

³²Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, 122.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 28.

³⁵Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 72.

³⁶Ibid., 251.

be brought and only be maintained by actions springing from an ethic which from the narrow rationalist standpoint is irrational, being not *relative*, but absolute.”³⁷ On this point, too, the distance from Sorel is substantial. The ethic of commitment articulated in the *Reflections* leaves little space for the presence of real moral absolutes. The language employed is Bergsonian, or at any rate that of historical subjectivity and never that of fixed metaphysical truth.³⁸

Sorel and syndicalism in Britain, 1906–1914

A possible explanation for this recasting of Sorel as a thinker of moral regeneration would appeal to a difference in national contexts. Whereas Sorel’s association with syndicalism was well known in France, this may not have been the case in Britain. There would consequently be a space if not to completely reinvent the French theorist *ex nihilo*, then at least to develop an alternative reading. Despite its apparent plausibility, this argument must be rejected. As we shall show in this section, and partially in the following one, the opposite is true: whereas in France a multiplicity of interpretations of Sorel were available, in England he was consistently and almost exclusively read as a syndicalist. Hulme’s reading thus constituted a radical break with virtually the entirety of Sorel’s British reception up to that point. The identification of Sorel with syndicalism was so persistent that his fortunes in England follow closely those of that political movement: seen as a French oddity and scarcely discussed between 1906 and 1910, Sorel’s writings subsequently found a new relevance, reflecting an increase in social conflict and the concern that French syndicalists might have found British imitators.

We have seen how, in his review of the *Reflections*, Eliot warned his readers not to focus on Sorel’s “political propaganda,” this remark hinting at his awareness of a pre-existing pattern of reception. A stronger indication in this direction comes from an earlier version of Hulme’s preface, published in October 1915 in the *New Age*, where he laments the presence of a misunderstanding of Sorel in Britain, meaning that “the sympathetic accounts have been as wide of the mark and as exasperating to the disciples of Sorel as the others.”³⁹ He proceeded to explicitly declare that his intention was that of removing this misunderstanding. But to what is he referring?

If we exclude a brief notice of one of his publications in America, the introduction of Sorel to the British public occurred in spring 1906.⁴⁰ Its immediate context was the unrest following the mining catastrophe at Courrières, an event which caused over a thousand deaths and engendered a wave of strikes which, in the words of an unnamed *Times* correspondent, tended “to assume a dangerous, if

³⁷Hulme, “Translator’s Preface,” x, original emphasis.

³⁸See Hisashi Fujita, “Anarchy and Analogy: The Violence of Language in Bergson and Sorel,” in Alexandre Lefebvre and Melanie White, eds., *Bergson, Politics, and Religion* (Durham, NC, 2012), 126–43; Tommaso Giordani, “On Sorel and Bergson: The Impact of Bergsonian Ideas on Sorel’s *Reflections on Violence*,” *Lo Sguardo: Rivista di Filosofia* 26/1 (2018), 163–81.

³⁹Thomas Ernest Hulme, “The Translator’s Preface to Sorel’s ‘Reflections on Violence,’” *New Age* 17/24 (1915), 569–70, at 569. The passage was substantially shortened in the version of the preface published in the book.

⁴⁰“Recent Publications upon Economics,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 16/3 (1902), 460–72, at 462.

not indeed a revolutionary, character.”⁴¹ Commenting on the significance of the “labour crises” occurring on the other side of the channel, it was the liberal weekly *The Speaker* which, in April, first introduced Sorel as “one of the ablest of the younger Socialist writers in Europe.”⁴² The text pointed to the *Reflections on Violence*—at the time an article “in a recent number of *Le Mouvement Socialiste*”—in order to read “what can be said for the new gospel.”⁴³ If the framing of Sorel as a thinker of syndicalism is evident, it is remarkable how presciently the British press had understood that the labor unrests in France signaled the emergence of a “new school” of French socialism, i.e. syndicalism.⁴⁴

The fundamental questions animating the British discussion of these “labour crises” were comparative ones. What is the significance for England of these French events? Do they provide useful indications for the evolution of British socialism? Overwhelmingly, syndicalism was seen as irrelevant for Britain, largely in virtue of the antipodal political situation of the two countries at the time. While in France, in 1906, the first serious cracks had begun to appear in the Bloc des gauches—the republican–socialist alliance in power since 1902—Britain had seen the landslide victory of a Liberal Party favorable to social reform. The Labour Representation Committee, moreover, had won twenty-nine parliamentary seats.⁴⁵ The situation, described by a commentator as the “see-saw of French and English socialism,” was the following.⁴⁶ While on one side of the Channel British socialists hopefully embarked on their first substantial parliamentary experience, on the other side a part of French socialism—which had had not only parliamentary, but also governmental, experience—was moving in the opposite direction, opening up anew a space for socialist politics not merely outside of the Bloc, but beyond parliamentarism *tout court*.⁴⁷

⁴¹“The French Labour Troubles: Violence of the Miners,” *The Times*, 19 April 1906, 3. It should be noted that, on the following day, the correspondent backpedalled on the “revolutionary” label applied to the unrest: “The strike movement ... is serious enough without attributing to it a character which, according to trustworthy information derived on the spot, it does not possess. It is not really revolutionary, as was supposed.” See “The French Labour Troubles,” *The Times* 20 April 1906, 3.

⁴²“The Labour Crises in France,” *The Speaker: The Liberal Review*, 28 April 1906, 84–5, at 85. It is telling that Sorel—aged fifty-nine at the time—should be characterized as amongst the “younger Socialist writers.”

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵For an account of the welfarist evolution of British liberalism in the period see Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford, 1978). Even though, unlike in France, the two parties did not enter into a coalition government, the good results of February 1906 were to some extent due to a secret pact of nonbelligerence forged between the two forces in 1903.

⁴⁶“The See-Saw of French and English Socialism,” *Review of Reviews* 34/201 (1906), 287.

⁴⁷The repeated and stern repressions of labor uprisings by interior minister Georges Clemenceau were decisive. In October, with the appointment of Clemenceau as prime minister and the victory of the syndicalists at the Amiens congress of the Confédération générale du travail, these new cleavages appeared on their way to consolidation: on the one hand, a progressive government, with socialists in the Cabinet, willing to defend the republic against the mobilizations of workers, while on the other a revolutionary unionism proclaiming “full emancipation, realizable only through the expropriation of capitalists,” as its goal and “direct economic action against the employer class” as its method, to be pursued in complete independence from “parties and sects.” *XVe Congrès national corporatif et Conférence des bourses de travail tenus à Amiens du 8 au 16 octobre 1906: Compte rendu des travaux* (Amiens, 1906), 171, translation ours. The

In this context, discussions of syndicalism—and, by extension, of Sorel—were, to start with, limited and, second, embedded in specific frameworks which appealed to precise, specialist publics. One of these frameworks was, naturally, coverage of French political developments. Some saw syndicalism as safely readable through the lenses of British experience, insisting that it should be seen as a repeat of “past episodes of English social history.”⁴⁸ *The Speaker*, on the other hand, was more perceptive of the novelty and specificities of French syndicalism, emphasizing, for example, its anti-parliamentarism, observable in the use of the general strike “not for the instalment of constitutional democracy ... but as a sort of substitute for it.”⁴⁹ Overall, the dominant element was, across the political spectrum, that of distance, with French developments seen as ultimately of small relevance to British politics. In the liberal press, this distance at times emerged in the view of syndicalist violence as expressive of the turbulent character of Latin peoples.⁵⁰ In the socialist press, naturally more sympathetic to the syndicalist cause, we see the same distance. In presenting a review of Sorel’s *Décomposition du marxisme* in 1908, the *New Age* characterized the work as a “statement of the political theory which lies at the root of revolutionary trade-unionism ... opportune at the moment when it is the foremost question in France.”⁵¹

Another important framework of reception was the specialist literature dedicated to the evolution of socialism across the Continent and in the world. Books like the English translation of Werner Sombart’s *Sozialismus und soziale Bewegung* and Jane Stoddard’s *The New Socialism*, both appearing in 1909 and both overviews of the various aspects of global socialism, came with chapters dedicated to syndicalism in which Sorel was extensively discussed.⁵² It is worth noticing that even though both authors tackled the issues that Hulme would later put at the centre of his interpretation, neither saw them as fundamental aspects of Sorelian thinking, but instead as embedded in a syndicalist project. Thus Stoddard wrote that Sorel “loves to write of the decadence of the well-to-do classes,” but this is because he “seeks ... to stir up the spirit of class warfare.”⁵³ Sombart, while dismissing Sorel’s insistence on “psychological and ethical conditions” as “utopian,” nevertheless refused to present this moral concern as an autonomous, foundational aspect of Sorel’s work, detached from the political objective.⁵⁴ Both authors opted instead for a view of Sorel as a neo-Marxist, with Sombart labeling him “the Marx of the new doctrines” and Stoddard talking about “the new Marxian revival under Sorel.”⁵⁵

order of the day proposed by Victor Griffuelhes, a document which was later to become known as the Charte d’Amiens, was passed with 834 in favour, eight against, and one abstention.

⁴⁸Laurence Jerrold, “England, France, and Socialism,” *Monthly Review* 24/72 (1906), 1–13, at 10. On the previous page Jerrold remarked, “Trade Unionism with us is leading, or has led, to [parliamentary] Socialism; French Socialism is developing ‘Syndicalism’, i.e. Trade Unionism.”

⁴⁹“The Labour Crises in France,” 85.

⁵⁰Ibid. It is remarked that violent tactics would appear as “foolish, far away unrealities” to “thoughtful people with national temperaments so unlike the French,” such as English and Germans. But, the article added, “with thoughtful Frenchmen or Italians it is otherwise.”

⁵¹“La décomposition du marxisme by Georges Sorel,” *New Age* 3/24 (10 Oct. 1908), 474.

⁵²Werner Sombart, *Socialism and the Social Movement*, trans. Mortimer Epstein (London, 1909); Jane T. Stoddard, *The New Socialism: An Impartial Enquiry*, 2nd edn (London, 1909).

⁵³Stoddard, *New Socialism*, 194.

⁵⁴Sombart, *Socialism*, 119. See, for the wider argument, 119–23.

⁵⁵Sombart, *Socialism*, 99; Stoddard, *New Socialism*, vi.

We see a pattern emerging: Sorel is read as a renovator of Marxian thought and as the thinker of a French political movement whose relevance for British politics is scarce. Between 1906 and 1910, with the political situation staying roughly the one sketched above, the reception of Sorel thus remained modest and marginal, relegated to specific publics, precisely because embedded in the syndicalist framework. But while the syndicalist reading remained dominant in the following years, what changed after 1910 was the perception of its relevance for Britain, as the country entered the “Great Unrest,” a cycle of mobilizations and strikes recently described as “the biggest since the Chartist movement.”⁵⁶ In a context of near full employment and stagnating wages, trade union membership soared from 2.5 million in 1909 to 4.1 in 1914, resulting in a situation of diffused social conflict and “proletarian effervescence” whose high points were arguably the 1911 Liverpool transport strike and the 1912 national coal miners’ strike.⁵⁷ Beyond the rise of social conflict, what is relevant to us is the appearance in Britain of what Henry Pelling called “a new philosophy of industrial action,” i.e. the appearance of what can reasonably be called British syndicalism.⁵⁸ Publications like Tom Mann’s *The Industrial Syndicalist* attacked parliamentarism, claiming that socialists in Westminster had developed “a degree of studied respect for bourgeois conditions, and a toleration of bourgeois methods, that destroys the probability of their doing any real work of a revolutionary character.”⁵⁹ A much-discussed contemporary pamphlet openly embraced class struggle, demanding that “the old policy of identity of interest between employers and ourselves be abolished, and a policy of open hostility installed.”⁶⁰ Though there are historiographical disagreements concerning both the scale and the revolutionary nature of the movement, this question is, for our purposes, moot, as an equivalence between the British and the French movements was seen as a matter of fact by the vast majority of the British public.⁶¹

This can be appreciated by examining the first substantial change in reception, which is a quantitative increase in references to and discussions of the French thinker (see Fig. 1). Sorel was now seen as the ideologue of a movement which had crossed the Channel: “the movement,” wrote the *Fortnightly Review* in 1912, “is mainly French in origin, but has spread throughout the Continent ... and has been, for at least two years, actively propagated in England.”⁶² To the increase in coverage corresponded a widening of the audiences to whom discussions of Sorel

⁵⁶Yann Béliard, “Revisiting the Great Labour Unrest 1911–1914,” *Labour History Review* 79/1 (2014), 1–17, at 1.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 3. The figures for union membership are taken from Henry Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*, 2nd edn (London, 1979), 149.

⁵⁸Pelling, *Popular Politics*, 147.

⁵⁹Tom Mann, “Prepare for Action,” *Industrial Syndicalist* 1/1 (1910), 1–24, at 6.

⁶⁰Unofficial Reform Committee, *The Miners’ Next Step* (Tonypany: Robert Davies and Co., 1912), 25.

⁶¹Connections between the French and British movements are undeniable and have been examined in Constance Bantman, “The Franco-British Syndicalist Connection and the Great Labour Unrests, 1880s–1914,” *Labour History Review* 79/1 (2014), 83–96. Henry Pelling, however, disputes both the scale of syndicalist action and the presence, amongst the British working class, of genuine anti-parliamentary feelings, seeking in this way to portray British syndicalism as more in line with a domestic reformist tradition of trade unionism. See Pelling, *Popular Politics*, 156–62.

⁶²G., “Strikes,” *Fortnightly Review* 91/542 (Feb. 1912), 235–47, at 243–4. See our bibliographical appendix for an appreciation of the increase of discussions of Sorel after 1910.

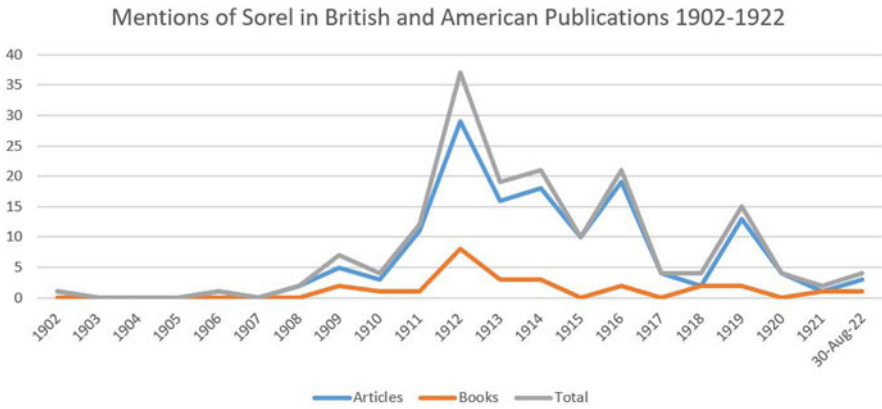


Figure 1. Mentions of Sorel in British and American publications, 1902–22.

were offered, reflecting the newfound relevance of the subject. Thus we find Sorel appearing, always as the philosopher of syndicalism, in magazines such as *The Spectator*, the *Contemporary Review*, and the *Fortnightly Review*. We find him mentioned in parliamentary debates and discussed at a meeting of the Sociological Society by Graham Wallas, future prime minister Ramsay MacDonald, and former prime minister Arthur Balfour.⁶³ Finally, we find him in a new type of specialist literature, dedicated not to socialism in general, but to syndicalism specifically, in which he figures as a “learned commentator on Syndicalist developments”; as one of the “great theorists of Syndicalism” alongside “Berth and Lagardelle”; and, not without some irony, as “the most considerable ‘intellectual’ on the Syndicalist side,” according to the Webbs.⁶⁴

Did this sudden relevance amplify the angles of reception? Only partially. Increased coverage did imply a more extensive treatment of various aspects of Sorelian thought, and thus the incorporation of new perspectives, as exemplified by the moniker “philosopher–poet” used by the chairman of the Labour Party to describe him in 1912.⁶⁵ Taken philosophically, Sorel was seen as firmly in the Bergsonian camp, so it is easy to find instances of “Bergsonian general strikes” and references to “Sorel’s application of Bergsonism to social change.”⁶⁶ Beyond Bergson, Sorel was usually associated with American pragmatists like James: the most substantial philosophical treatment of Sorel was written by Florence-based Vernon Lee (real name Violet Paget), first in a lengthy article in the *Fortnightly*

⁶³HC Deb, 27 March 1912, vol. 36, col. 536, available at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1912-03-27/debates/ef51df59-c3f5-4bc1-8dea-ab8a149cc3d0/Syndicalism> (accessed 18 Oct. 2021); “The Sociological Society: Annual Meeting,” *Sociological Review* 5 (1912), 247–57, at 254–5.

⁶⁴Arthur D. Lewis, *Syndicalism and the General Strike* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), 37; John Hunter Harley, *Syndicalism* (London: T. C. and E. C. Jack, 1912), 43; and Sydney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *What Syndicalism Means: An Examination of the Origin and Motives of the Movement with an Analysis of Its Proposals for the Control of Industry* (London: National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution, 1912), 20.

⁶⁵Ramsay Macdonald, *Syndicalism: A Critical Examination* (London: Constable, 1912), 23.

⁶⁶Harley, *Syndicalism*, 60; Macdonald, *Syndicalism: A Critical Examination*, 19.

Review in 1911 and a year later in a two-volume work.⁶⁷ Lee read Sorel as part of the school of Jamesian “will-to-believe” pragmatism, which she unfavorably contrasted with the Peircian “making our ideas clear” pragmatism.⁶⁸

Despite this slight diversification in reception, the vast majority of treatments of Sorel remained anchored in the syndicalist framework. Testifying to the transfers between these two spheres, we see a certain “tendency to present syndicalism as a revolt against reason, a species of anti-intellectualism.”⁶⁹ Expressions of this charge of irrationalism ranged from descriptions of syndicalism as “a method for realizing the Millennium by the actions ... of Trade Unions” to more ethnic explanations, like Ramsay Macdonald’s definition of the movement as “British realism captured by French idealism.”⁷⁰ But seen in its entirety, Sorel’s reception remained overwhelmingly that of the ideologue of syndicalism. Interestingly, this also included voices on the left critical of the French influence, such as the guild socialist G. D. H. Cole, who in his 1913 *World of Labour* declared that while “the actual experience of the French *syndicats* can help us,” British imitators found it “easier to copy M. Sorel’s opinions out of one book into another.”⁷¹ It was, as should be clear, the topicality of French agitations which determined the dominant perspective on Sorel. As one commentator remarked, “the ideas of Sorel ... lie very near the animating source of the labour unrest not only in this country but all over the Continent of Europe.”⁷²

Hulme’s European Sorel

In the light of this outline of Sorel’s British reception, the originality of Hulme’s interpretation emerges forcefully. As we have seen, some of the elements on which Hulme would insist in his preface had been noted by other commentators, and yet nobody, with the exception of Vernon Lee, had attempted such a radical resignification.⁷³ This severance of Sorel from syndicalism flew in the face of virtually all previous British reception, above all insofar as it insisted, much like Lee did, on approaching Sorel through precise philosophical perspectives which we shall examine in the next section. It was, at any rate, an originality of which Hulme was lucidly aware. As he wrote in November 1911 to C. K. Ogden,

⁶⁷Vernon Lee, “M. Sorel and the Syndicalist Myth,” *Fortnightly Review* 90/538 (Oct. 1911), 664–80; Vernon Lee, *Vital Lies: Studies of Some Varieties of Recent Obscurantism*, 2 vols. (London: John Lane, 1912).

⁶⁸Lee, *Vital Lies*, 1: 5.

⁶⁹James Thompson, “The Great Labour Unrest and Political Thought in Britain, 1911–1914,” *Labour History Review* 79/1 (2014), 37–54, at 43.

⁷⁰Harley, *Syndicalism*, 7; Macdonald, *Syndicalism: A Critical Examination*, 1.

⁷¹George Douglas Howard Cole, *The World of Labour. A Discussion of the Present and Future of Trade Unionism* (1913) (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd, 1917), 127.

⁷²John Hunter Harley, “Syndicalism and the Labour Unrest,” *Contemporary Review* 101 (March 1912), 348–57, at 353.

⁷³It is significant that amongst the many articles dedicated to Sorel, Hulme would acknowledge Lee’s piece in a letter to C. K. Ogden, describing it as a “very inadequate one” which has, however, “advertised him a little.” Hulme to Ogden, 27 Nov. 1911, McMaster University Library Archives, Ogden Papers, Box 108 F.2.

Personally I find Sorel a great deal more interesting than Syndicalism itself. I think that after Bergson, he is the most interesting person writing at the present time. I think it is a mistake entirely to get at him merely as a writer on Socialism. He is much more a person of Nietzsche's stamp, whose main interest is in general ethical criticism.⁷⁴

But how was such originality possible? And, more importantly, why did Hulme seek to read Sorel in this way? In the remainder of the article, we deal with these two crucial questions. In this section, we answer the "how" question by examining a series of British and European milieus, networks, and readings which were indispensable to Hulme in the construction of his Sorelianism. We shall contend that without these, it would not have been possible for him to develop a reading as original as the one he produced.

We have already seen that Hulme was dissatisfied with "accounts of Sorel ... which have already appeared in English."⁷⁵ We must not forget, moreover, that the intended date of publication of the translation was 1912, at the peak of Sorel's British reception, and that its postponement was due to the bankruptcy of Swift and Co. It is true that, had things gone according to plan, the introductory note would have been penned by Graham Wallas. Given Sorel's fame, the way in which this fame was linked to syndicalism, and Wallas's profile—a founding member of the Fabian Society, then lecturing at the London School of Economics—it is likely that the intended introduction would have been very different from Hulme's, and would have echoed the frameworks of reception examined above. The delay, therefore, worked to Hulme's advantage, and his preface responded to a change in the British public's interests, concerned more by European war than by labor uprisings.

Despite this, in 1912 Hulme was eager to publish the translation as soon as possible. In an undated letter to Sorel, probably written in April 1912, Hulme asked why Marcel Rivière, Sorel's French publisher, had interrupted communications with Swift and Co., fearing that this might have been because of "arrangements with another publishing house."⁷⁶ He asked Sorel whether, were this to be the case, he could retain his role as translator. He reminded him that he had been the first to show interest in 1910, but that at the time "it was difficult for me to find a publisher, since nobody had heard of it. But now the situation has changed,

⁷⁴Hulme to Ogden, 27 Nov. 1911.

⁷⁵Hulme, "Translator's Preface," *New Age*, 14 Oct. 1915, 569.

⁷⁶Hulme to Sorel, undated, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands, Archives Éditions Marcel Rivière, Box 496b. That the letter was from April 1912 can be deduced from sources from the same archive (499b). On 13 March 1912, Swift and Co. acknowledge the deal reached with Rivière and ask for a copy of the *Reflections* in order to start the work. Two further letters from Swift and Co., dated 21 March and 2 April, testify Rivière's silence and that the book was not sent. A third letter, dated 25 April, clarifies the issue: "We hear from Mr. Hulme," write the British company, "that your objection to signing the contract we sent you on March 13th ... is that you desire us to pay the 400 francs on the signing of the contract instead of on the day of publication." It is likely that the impasse was resolved by Hulme and Sorel, thus placing the undated letter from Hulme in April 1912. A further communication from Swift and Co. to Rivière (4 May 1912) contains the new contract. Not only were Rivière's demands met, but the price rose to 500 francs: considering Swift and Co.'s later bankruptcy, a good business decision for Rivière.

and the book should be translated as soon as possible.”⁷⁷ What had changed was, of course, the relevance of Sorel’s work in Britain, given that, as Hulme says, “recently many articles have appeared with references to your book, particularly after the latest strikes.”⁷⁸ Hulme, as we see, was aware of Sorel’s newfound relevance and, consequently, assured of the originality of his own reading of the syndicalist.

But how was such originality possible? An important locus of discussion not only of Sorel and syndicalism, but of wider philosophical and political issues, was the eclectic socialist publication the *New Age*, for which Hulme wrote from 1909 until his death. Established in 1894 as a Christian, liberal, and progressive publication by Frederick Atkins, it quickly moved towards socialism, hosting the writings of a young Ramsay Macdonald and calling itself, as early as 1895, “A Journal for Thinkers and Workers.”⁷⁹ In 1907, with the financial backing of George Bernard Shaw, it came under the control of A. R. Orage and Holbrook Jackson, formerly members of the Leeds Art Club, a provincial avant-garde grouping with close links to the Independent Labour Party. The Leodensian experience goes some way towards explaining the change in the editorial line of the *New Age*, which turned to philosophical questions, reflecting the manifold cultural influences accumulated by the two editors in Leeds, mixing Continental inputs such as Nietzsche with autochthonous ones such as William Morris and John Ruskin.⁸⁰

This interest in a European philosophy of life scarcely practiced in the nation’s great universities was attractive to Hulme, who had been expelled from Cambridge in 1904. A former mathematics student, already in his unpublished notebooks from 1906 and 1907 Hulme had articulated what we may call quasi-Bergsonian dualisms between the fluidity of reality and the artificial fixity of language: “there is a kind of gossamer web, woven between the real things ... For purposes of communication [animals] invent a symbolic language.”⁸¹ In 1909, when he started writing for the *New Age*, Hulme was twenty-six years old and had begun launching his literary career. Involvement in the *New Age* did much to help Hulme establish himself, and in return Hulme proved capable, as we shall see, of giving substance to the paper’s philosophical ambitions. What is decisive for our purposes is how this collaboration allowed Hulme to develop further a gaze of Continental scope which, by transcending the boundaries of the British discussion, made it possible for him to read Sorel in a different manner.

Looking at Hulme’s first writings for the *New Age*, the focus on philosophical questions is immediately evident. These articles set out a precise philosophical line, telling the story of the “defeat of the old intellectualist philosophy” at the hands of a “new philosophy,” represented by William James’s pluralism, Jules de Gaultier’s *bovarysme*, and, above all, by Henri Bergson’s insight that “reality has

⁷⁷Hulme to Sorel, undated, IISG, Archives Éditions Rivière, Box 496b.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Wallace Martin, *The New Age under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History* (Manchester, 1967), 23.

⁸⁰The weight of foreign influences on the Leeds Art Club is of some interest. The presence of Nietzscheanism as early as 1903 is remarkable, and seems to constitute a textbook case of the advantages of peripherality. For an argument to this effect see Tom Steele, *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Arts Club 1893–1923* (Aldershot, 1990), 1–24.

⁸¹Thomas Ernest Hulme, “Cinders” (1906), in *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford, 1994), 7–22, at 8.

a fulness [*sic*] of content that no conceptual description can equal.”⁸² In this opposition between the old intellectualism and the newer vitalism, Hulme attempts a critique of some of the main streams of British philosophy from the vantage point of the “general movement of European philosophy.”⁸³ The opposition between “intellectualism” and the “new philosophy” is, in other words, also an attempt by Hulme to provincialize British philosophy armed with his knowledge of Continental currents. This element emerges most clearly in Hulme’s defenses of Bergson against the accusations of Gallic obscurity coming from British commentators, whose work “is calculated to give an entirely wrong idea of Bergson to anyone who hears of him for the first time” and derives “not from a reading of this philosopher’s actual books and essays, but ... second-hand.”⁸⁴

This exhibition of cultural capital and of in-depth knowledge of Bergson and his French context was not a bluff. By 1911, Hulme ranked amongst the most active advocates in Britain of Bergson’s philosophy, both in terms of awareness of the intricacies of Bergson’s philosophical project and in terms of its promotion in British philosophical debates. His knowledge of French and his precocious experience abroad explain this European dimension of Hulme’s intellectual horizon.⁸⁵ In 1910, furthermore, he had contributed a bibliography to the first English translation of the *Données*. This text is important because, beyond offering a list of all of Bergson’s writings, it contains a lengthy section dedicated to commentary on Bergson from across the Continent. Even if the lion’s share of the works was francophone, it is worth underlining that important sections were dedicated to English, German, and Italian readings.⁸⁶ What this document shows, in other words, is the grasp of European Bergsonism that Hulme possessed as early as 1909–10, a vantage point from which he could speak authoritatively on the topic. In 1912, having met Bergson personally and having even secured a letter of reference from him, he produced the first English-language translation of the *Introduction à la métaphysique*.⁸⁷

As Hulme himself revealed, “I came across him [Sorel] through Bergson.”⁸⁸ The point we are making is that Hulme’s travels and personal acquaintances with French intellectuals allowed him to have a view of Sorel informed by greater

⁸²Thomas Ernest Hulme, “The New Philosophy,” *New Age* 5/10 (1 July 1909), 198–9.

⁸³Thomas Ernest Hulme, “Searchers after Reality I: Bax,” *New Age* 5/13 (29 July 1909), 265–6, at 265. It is worth noting that the philosophy attacked by Hulme in his early *New Age* articles is the British idealism of Bax and Haldane. This marks an interesting difference from Sorel’s French context, in which the “intellectualist” enemy is not Hegelianism but an admixture of Cartesian rationalism, neo-Kantianism and, to a lesser degree, positivism. Politically speaking, however, the functions of Hegelianism in Britain and Cartesian rationalism in France were similar, and pointed towards progressive social reform. See Freedren, *The New Liberalism*, 25–38.

⁸⁴Thomas Ernest Hulme, “Bax on Bergson,” *New Age* 9/14 (3 Aug. 1911), 328–31, at 329.

⁸⁵According to his biographer, he likely first encountered Bergson’s work in 1907, while teaching at a language school in Brussels. See Robert Ferguson, *The Short Sharp Life of T. E. Hulme* (London, 2002), 70.

⁸⁶Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, trans. Frank Lubecki Pogson (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1910), xiii–xxii. A final section includes Romanian, Spanish, and Polish works.

⁸⁷Henri Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Thomas Ernest Hulme (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912). The book would come out in March 1913 for the British market, published by Macmillan. For the reference letter by Bergson see Hulme, *The Collected Writings*, xvii.

⁸⁸Hulme to Ogden, 27 Nov. 1911.

knowledge of the French context. To give an important example of this, at a time when in Britain Sorel's association with syndicalism was virtually unquestioned, Hulme was aware of his move to the right, mentioning in a letter to Ogden from November 1911, "an article on Joan of Arc" published in *Action française*.⁸⁹ A few months earlier, in an unsigned review of Sir Arthur Clay's *Syndicalism and Labour* appearing in the *New Age*, it was claimed that Sorel "has lately abandoned his belief in the theory [of syndicalism]."⁹⁰ Where had this opinion come from? From Hulme, as he admits in the same letter to Ogden:

The statement you saw in the *New Age* about Sorel having left the Syndicalists and become a Neo Royalist was in a review by Orage. I happen to have told him something of the kind in conversation. It isn't quite accurate, but it is fairly so ... It was Jules de Gaultier as a matter of fact who told me that Sorel had become a Neo Royalist.⁹¹

Hulme, as we can see, did not approach Sorel through the syndicalist lenses dominant in other British accounts, but through the prism of Bergsonian philosophy in its European context. This element is of great importance, for it implies access to aspects of Sorel's work which would have remained obscure if seen exclusively through a syndicalist framework. It is significant that Hulme should write to Ogden, "if you read Italian there is a brilliant little book on him I have of Prezzolini," adding that he possessed a "very interesting little book on metaphysics he [Sorel] wrote in the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*."⁹² Prezzolini's work, despite its title, very much explores the philosophical connection between Bergson and Sorel. The "Préoccupations métaphysiques des physiciens modernes," on the other hand, is a work which pleads for the uselessness of a deterministic cosmology to the practice of contemporary physics.

Determinism, flux, absolute values

This more philosophical perspective on Sorel is important because it allows us to answer the question of why Hulme chose to read Sorel as he did. What is the connection between an opposition to determinism in physics, an interest in Bergsonian

⁸⁹Ibid. The article, a bombastic review of Péguy's *Mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc*, is Georges Sorel, "Le réveil de l'âme française," *Action française*, 14 April 1910, 1–2.

⁹⁰[Alfred Richard Orage] "Sir Arthur Clay: Syndicalism and Labour," *New Age* 9/21 (21 Sept. 1911), 496.

⁹¹Hulme to Ogden, 27 Nov. 1911. The reason why Hulme has to admit that claiming that Sorel is a royalist "isn't quite accurate" is because, a month before, Sorel himself, prompted by an inquiring letter in response to Orage's review from British socialite intellectual Alberta V. Montgomery, had denied this being the case: "I have in no way changed my opinion," he stated, adding, however, that the C.G.T. had. See Alberta V. Montgomery, "M. Sorel and Syndicalism," *New Age* 9/26 (26 Oct. 1911), 619.

⁹²Hulme to Ogden, 27 Nov. 1911. The books Hulme refers to are Giuseppe Prezzolini, *La Teoria Sindacalista* (Naples: Francesco Perrella Editore, 1909); and Georges Sorel, *Les préoccupations métaphysiques des physiciens modernes* (Paris: Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 1907). This latter book is in fact a reprint of an article published two years earlier in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* and dedicated to the issue of determinism in physics. Hulme had shown interest in the philosophy of science, and in anti-deterministic theories such as Karl Pearson's "descriptionism." See Michael H. Whitworth, "Physics: 'A Strange Footprint'," in David Bradshaw, ed., *A Concise Companion to Modernism* (Oxford, 2003), 200–20, at 204.

philosophy, and the reading of Sorel as an anti-relativist moral reformer? An important clue to answering this question comes from a passage first published in the *New Age* in 1915, after Hulme had returned from his first posting on the western front with the Honourable Artillery Company: “Let us assume that reality is divided into three regions separated from one another by absolute divisions, by real discontinuities. (1) The inorganic world, of mathematical and physical science, (2) the organic world, dealt with by biology, psychology and history, and (3) the world of ethical and religious values.”⁹³ Though presented as a general division of realms of experience and knowledge, this tripartite scheme constitutes, as we shall show, an implied autobiography. It traces, in other words, Hulme’s view of his own intellectual development, beginning with his early enchantment with the image of a fully deterministic universe. Having studied mathematics at Cambridge, it is not, perhaps, surprising that he should have been so inclined in his youth. As he would later reminisce, “at a certain stage of one’s mental evolution the delight in finding that one can completely explain the world as one might a puzzle is so exciting that it quite puts in the shade the disadvantages of the conception from other points of view. It is not a nightmare to us—far from it. We delight in it.”⁹⁴ Yet this deterministic vision will, for Hulme, become a nightmare. The role of Bergson and of the “new philosophy” will consist in the liberation from such a nightmare. It is a testimony of Hulme’s self-awareness that he should insist that Bergsonian liberation presupposes a deterministic past: “You must have been sophisticated and have sinned before you can experience the relief of repentance. You must have been a Hegelian before you can get enthusiastic about the general anti-intellectualist movement in philosophy throughout Europe.”⁹⁵

What complicates the picture, and makes it more interesting, however, is a second movement: a movement away from Bergsonism and philosophies of becoming and towards some form of objectivity.⁹⁶ It is crucial to underline that this objectivity could not be framed in terms of nineteenth-century scientific determinism: “I have a horror of change and a desire for a fixed and solid system of belief. Unfortunately, materialism—the only belief in the region of philosophy which seems to have any kind of fixity—is one that is repugnant to me.”⁹⁷ It is within this second movement that the reading of Sorel as a preacher of “absolute ethics” must be placed. It is a yearning for an objectivity which concerns the political and ethical sphere of human agency which begins to preoccupy Hulme from late 1911—a yearning which cannot be satisfied by Bergsonism.

This move away from Bergsonism, initially, seems to be nothing more than a snobbish displeasure at Bergson’s growing popularity. In a 1911 article defending Bergson against his British critics, Hulme devoted some paragraphs to a reflection on the damages of the “flood reputation” that Bergson had accumulated: “articles appear in newspapers about him, the propagandists of the different sects utilize him for their own purposes ... and, finally, chatter makes his name stink in the

⁹³Thomas Ernest Hulme, “A Notebook (2),” *New Age* 18/6 (9 Dec. 1915), 137–8, at 138.

⁹⁴Thomas Ernest Hulme, “Notes on Bergson (4),” *New Age* 10/5 (30 Nov. 1911), 110–12, at 112.

⁹⁵Hulme, “Searchers after Reality I,” 265.

⁹⁶See Henry Mead, *T. E. Hulme and the Ideological Politics of Early Modernism* (London, 2015), esp. 183–218.

⁹⁷Thomas Ernest Hulme, “Bergson Lecturing,” *New Age* 10/1 (2 Nov. 1911), 15–16, at 15.

nostrils of everyone who cares seriously for philosophy.”⁹⁸ As this dynamic accelerated, Hulme’s doubts grew. Anxieties over appropriation by “propagandists of the different sects” increased, and we begin to notice a distinctly political dimension to Hulme’s misgivings. The ease with which Bergsonism entered the language of the progressive left irritated him. While still nominally defending the position that “Bergson has in reality no connection with politics,” it is significant that he should not object to Sorel’s syndicalist politicization of Bergson but would react indignantly at the suggestion that in Bergson it is possible to find a “complete theory of Democracy.”⁹⁹ It is, in fact, to Sorel that he refers to combat this democratic reading.

In April 1911, as we have seen, Hulme had traveled to Bologna, stopping in France on the way. As well as meeting Jules de Gaultier, his French sojourn had involved an encounter with Pierre Lasserre, a key theorist of the *Action française*, who in 1910 had written in the newspaper of the movement a long anti-Bergsonian polemic.¹⁰⁰ It is to this meeting that we must look to explain the movement which will lead Hulme to the view of Sorel as a theorist of absolute ethical values. The conversation is recounted by Hulme some months later, in an article in which quotation marks are used to express Lasserre’s positions.¹⁰¹ We see the articulation of a determinist position whose principal strength lies in its political application. The anti-Bergsonian objectivity offered by Lasserre is based on “the existence of laws which express what we know of the necessary and permanent characteristics of any social and political order.”¹⁰² Those who deny that “there are such things as necessary laws governing societies” are the “sincere partisans of the French Revolution,” democrats and progressives.¹⁰³

It is easy to recognize here the categories of “classicism” and “romanticism” which Hulme will deploy in his introduction to the *Reflections*. At this stage of our argument, it is possible to draw the philosophical underpinnings of these political categories more clearly. In other words, beyond its belief in progress and democracy, “romanticism” implied for Hulme a commitment to an open cosmology of the Bergsonian and Jamesian kind. Conversely, beyond its negative anthropology of original sin and its requirement for a politics of order, “classicism” presupposed the possibility of full knowledge of fixed elements. It thus constitutes an important signifier expressing Hulme’s need for ethico-political objectivity. In 1911 Hulme is still undecided on the issue. Clearly impressed by Lasserre’s anti-Bergsonian arguments, he wrote that he was “in agreement with both sides,” something which made him

⁹⁸Hulme, “Bax on Bergson,” 329.

⁹⁹Thomas Ernest Hulme, “Mr. Balfour, Bergson, and Politics,” *New Age* 10/2 (9 Nov. 1911), 38–40, at 39. The democratic reading of Bergson to which Hulme is alluding can be found in Stephen Reynolds, “An Introduction to ‘Seems So,’” *New Age* 9/23 (5 Oct. 1911), 541–43, as pointed out by Karen Csengeri in Hulme, *Collected Writings*, 466.

¹⁰⁰Pierre Lasserre, “La philosophie de M. Bergson,” *Action française*, 9, 16, 23, 30 August 1910.

¹⁰¹Hulme, “Mr. Balfour, Bergson, and Politics,” 39–40. It is highly unlikely that the positions attributed to Lasserre are impeccable accounts of the conversation reconstructed from memory, since the meeting had taken place seven months earlier. It is more plausible to believe that this is a paraphrase through which the character called Pierre Lasserre expresses positions which Hulme is pondering in this period.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

wonder about the existence of “inconsistencies” in his thinking.¹⁰⁴ The solution envisaged at this stage is interesting:

M. Lasserre then endeavoured to prove to me that Bergsonism was nothing but the last disguise of romanticism. If I thought this was true, I should be compelled to change my views considerably. I can find a compromise for myself, however, which I roughly indicate by saying that I think time is real for the individual, but not for the race.¹⁰⁵

What must be underlined here is that, even in this attempt at compromise, Bergsonism and the indeterminateness so central to this philosophical position are indicated as insufficient “for the race,” i.e. for the collective realm of politics. This is of paramount importance, because it shows what Hulme began to see as the fundamental limit of philosophies of openness and relativism: their inability to deal satisfactorily with the collective, ethical and political, aspects of existence. If we examine Hulme’s writings after 1911, we see not only the appearance of more explicitly political texts, but also the increasing centrality of the classical/romantic dichotomy in these works. His most ideologically ambitious work consisted in a series of five articles entitled “A Tory Philosophy,” appearing in April and May 1912 for *The Commentator*, a short-lived conservative publication heavily invested in the fight against the reform of the House of Lords proposed in 1910.¹⁰⁶

At the heart of Hulme’s argument, we find, unsurprisingly, the opposition between classicism and romanticism. Romanticism remains a commitment to cosmological indeterminateness implying openness and the constant possibility of novelty: it is an attitude which “betrays itself in the epithet NEW.”¹⁰⁷ It is impossible not to notice that the terms in which the romantic attitude is here criticized are the same ones through which he had earlier praised the “new philosophy.” Whereas at the time Hulme remarked on the “exhilaration that comes with the sudden change from a cramped and contracted to a free and expanded state” when reading Bergson, now this temperament seeking release from the bonds of structure is relegated to “a certain disordered state of mental health.”¹⁰⁸ Classicism, conversely, stands for the reconquest of some objectivity concerning humanity, for the position that man is “by nature constant.”¹⁰⁹ This constancy is expressed in terms of an eternal imperfection of mankind, the basis on which to construct a politics of order: “the kind of discipline which will get the best out of him ... remains much the same in every generation.”¹¹⁰

It should be clear to the reader that the categories and perspectives employed in these political writings will be the same ones used to make sense of Sorel in 1914.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 39.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁶Christos Hadjiyiannis, *Conservative Modernists: Literature and Tory Politics in Britain, 1900–1920* (Cambridge, 2018), 67.

¹⁰⁷Thomas Ernest Hulme, “A Tory Philosophy (2),” *The Commentator* 4 (10 April 1912), 310.

¹⁰⁸Thomas Ernest Hulme, “Notes on Bergson (1),” *New Age* 9/25 (19 Oct. 1911), 587–8, at 587; and Hulme, “Tory Philosophy (2),” 310.

¹⁰⁹Thomas Ernest Hulme, “A Tory Philosophy (1),” *The Commentator* 4 (3 April 1912), 294–5, at 295.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

There will be slight alterations in the targets of Hulme's scorn, dictated by the onset of the war, as the appearance of the expression "pacifist democracy" signals.¹¹¹ Another alteration consists in the increasing presence of references to Proudhon. The Proudhonian influence on Hulme has been discussed by scholars.¹¹² What can be said here is that this interest in the anarchist thinker postdates Hulme's discovery of Sorel.¹¹³ Moreover, evidence suggests that Hulme's Proudhon is mediated by national syndicalists in France: the Proudhonian citation on war which opens Hulme's preface of the *Reflections on Violence* had appeared in 1912 in an article by Georges Valois in the *Cahiers du Cercle Proudhon*.¹¹⁴ In Proudhon, Hulme celebrates a martial spirit that will feed his elaborations on the desirability of "a different conception of democracy."¹¹⁵ But the deeper dynamic is identical. What Hulme is looking for in Sorel, and to a lesser extent in Proudhon, is the possibility of articulating ethical and political absolutes, an operation which he couldn't perform through Bergson's philosophy of openness. It is important at this point to assess both the shifts in meaning operated by Hulme in presenting Sorel's work to the English public and the intersections between Hulme's and Sorel's perspectives.

On the first issue, it must be underlined that there is no space in Sorel for a metaphysics of ethics and politics such as the one Hulme is looking for. It is true that Sorel insists on pessimism, on an ethics of heroic commitment, and that he ends the *Reflections* by proclaiming that "it is to violence that socialism owes those high ethical ideals by means of which it brings salvation to the modern world."¹¹⁶ Sorel, however, remains a Marxist who rejects historical teleology, and this condemns him to never be able to theorize anything standing above or beyond the historical flux.¹¹⁷ The commitment to socialism is the belief in the historical agency of the proletariat, an agency which does not require, and in fact results from the exclusion of, any theorization of a metaphysical kind, whether essentialist or teleological. It is not coincidental that the Bergsonian language of the *Données* is employed by Sorel whenever discussing the status of myths: these are plunges into the deep self of a historical subject intent on constructing itself, not ways through which we penetrate into an absolute knowledge of fixed things. Myths are "identical to the convictions of a group, being the expression of these convictions in the

¹¹¹Hulme, "Translator's Preface," x.

¹¹²For an extended discussion of Hulme's debts to Proudhon see Andrzej Gasiorek, "Towards a 'Right Theory of Society'," in Andrzej Gasiorek and Edward Comentale, eds., *T. E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism* (Aldershot, 2006), 149–68. See also Mead, *T. E. Hulme and the Ideological Politics*, 212–13; and Hadjiyiannis, *Conservative Modernists*, 138–41.

¹¹³Before October 1915, there is a single reference to Proudhon in Hulme's work. After that date, he is quoted or mentioned eleven more times, mostly between October 1915 and February 1916.

¹¹⁴See Hulme, "Translator's Preface," v; and Georges Valois, "Pourquoi nous rattachons nos travaux à l'esprit prouhdonien," *Cahiers du Cercle Proudhon* 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1912), 34–47, at 45.

¹¹⁵Thomas Ernest Hulme, "War Notes," *New Age* 18/17 (24 Feb. 1916), 389–91, at 91. The years 1915 and 1916 see Hulme moving away from the positions of the Action française, especially on the issue of democracy. With the help of Sorel and Proudhon, Hulme in this period is elaborating a vision of an armed, martial, pluralistic democracy. References to the two French thinkers, thus, are used by him in opposition to the "organic" view of the State," which he sees as present both in French nationalists and in the German tradition. See Thomas Ernest Hulme, "War Notes," *New Age* 18/9 (30 Dec. 1915), 197–9, at 197.

¹¹⁶Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 251.

¹¹⁷Georges Sorel, *Study on Vico*, ed. and trans. Eric Brandom and Tommaso Giordani (Leiden, 2019), 1–48.

language of movement.”¹¹⁸ The voluntarism which characterizes Sorel’s political and epistemological reflection, in simpler words, requires a cosmology of openness and creativity, which in turn prevents him from a substantial theorization of the absolutes that Hulme seeks.

On the second issue, it must be stressed that this theorization of absolutes is also incomplete in Hulme. What we mean to say is that, despite the impression that Lasserre’s arguments made on him, he never developed a conceptual apparatus allowing him to properly theorize absolutes of a moral or political kind. It is true that he does move in this direction. In 1915, he is reading Pascal as a “remedy for unbelief.”¹¹⁹ The commentary he offers on Pascalian techniques of faith are illustrative of the distance traveled from Bergsonian openness to some type of fixed metaphysics:

“There are people who know the way ... follow the way by which they began ... by acting as if they believed ... taking the holy water, having masses said ... this will make you believe and *deaden your acuteness*.” But this is always misrepresented. It is *not pragmatism*, you are not to deaden your *natural acuteness*, but the false and artificial acuteness of an artificial condition.¹²⁰

In 1916, we find him extremely interested in the works of Husserl, Russell, and G. E. Moore. What these thinkers, significantly labeled by Hulme “neo-Realists,” offer him is the possibility of ethical objectivity. What Moore promises, in particular, is that “ethics can be exhibited as an objective science, and is also purified from anthropomorphism.”¹²¹

And yet, despite this, Hulme never made the jump to a theoretically justified metaphysical outlook. What is present in Hulme is the desire for these absolutes, but not the philosophy that would be required for their formulation. At the time of writing the preface to Sorel’s *Reflections*, and for the whole of Hulme’s life, the philosophical resources to construct a metaphysics of absolutes will remain absent. What is there is the desire for it, the need for it, the “craving for belief” of which Eliot had spoken. To be sure, the distance from Sorel, who dedicated his last major work to a philosophical defense of pragmatism, remains large. In this last book, the French thinker affirmed that “the pragmatist remarks that artificial nature is important to our life at least as much as natural nature” and explicitly condemned metaphysical cravings of any kind, wondering “how man can have such senseless ambitions as to believe that artificial nature is not enough to occupy his genius.”¹²² The escape from human subjectivity and the relativism implied in it, in other words, is a burning concern for Hulme, much less so for Sorel. At the same time, this is exactly the reason for Hulme’s fascination with Sorel. To Hulme, the Frenchman appeared as a thinker who offered an ethics of intense commitment in mythical form. To someone engaged in a movement from Bergsonian relativism

¹¹⁸Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 29.

¹¹⁹Thomas Ernest Hulme, “A Notebook (1),” *New Age* 18/5 (2 Dec. 1915), 112–13, at 112.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, original emphasis. As Karen Csengeri has shown the Pascalian reference is to fragment 233 in the Brunschvig edition. See Hulme, *Collected Writings*, 477.

¹²¹Thomas Ernest Hulme, “A Notebook (5),” *New Age* 18/10 (6 Jan. 1916), 234–5, at 235.

¹²²Georges Sorel, *De l'utilité du pragmatisme* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1921), 337, translation ours.

to a philosophy of objectivity and absolutes, this represented a convenient stepping stone.

Conclusion

One of the standard accounts of European intellectual life in the period is that of the “crisis of reason,” an expression used to indicate a movement away from the rationalistic certainties of the nineteenth century and towards a celebration of the open, the indeterminate, the unconscious, and the irrational. John Burrow, in describing modernism, writes of the “revolt ... against the standardization of perception by the fixed concepts imposed by intellect and convention that was to be central to much of the artistic and linguistic experimentation of the next [post-Nietzschean] generation.”¹²³ In a similar vein, Zeev Sternhell, as early as 1972, spoke of the “generation of 1890” and of the “revolt against rationalism which opens the twentieth century.”¹²⁴ This dichotomy between the rationalism of the nineteenth century and the mysticism of the early twentieth, however, only explains a part of the journey which brought Hulme to Sorel.

What Hulme’s reading of Sorel shows is that the picture is best characterized by a more complex movement. It is a movement which does, indeed, start with a rejection of nineteenth-century determinism in favour of philosophies of openness, but which continues through a Pascalian moment of existential decisionism and points towards some still undefined metaphysical absolute. Hulme’s story, we suggest, is far from being unique. Jacques Maritain’s journey from Bergsonism, through the instrumental Catholicism of the Action française, and, after the condemnation of the Maurrassians in late 1926, into Thomist metaphysics exemplifies a similar movement, only brought to completion. Eliot’s shift from a Maurrassian self-fashioning as “an Anglo-Catholic in religion, a classicist in literature and a royalist in politics” to a genuine religious commitment also comes to mind.¹²⁵ The rise of the trope of decisionism in early Weimar Germany, found not only in Carl Schmitt’s work but also in the explosion of translations and discussions of Kierkegaard, can be seen as part of a similar dynamic.¹²⁶

What, in the last instance, must be emphasized is the reason which brought Hulme away from Bergson: the inability of Bergsonian philosophy to come up with a convincing theorization of absolutes to be deployed in the public sphere. “Time is real for the individual, but not for the race.” It is, in other words, politics,

¹²³John Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought 1848–1914* (New Haven, 2000), 238.

¹²⁴Zeev Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français* (1972) (Paris, 2016), 46, 50. When, in the mid-1990s, Sternhell’s narrative of modernity as a struggle between Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment would begin to mature, he started paying attention to the “paradigmatic figure” of Hulme. See Zeev Sternhell, “Modernity and Its Enemies: From the Revolt against the Enlightenment to the Undermining of Democracy,” in Sternhell, ed., *The Intellectual Revolt against Liberal Democracy 1875–1945* (Jerusalem, 1996), 11–29, at 20.

¹²⁵T. S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928), ix.

¹²⁶In 1932, Hannah Arendt wrote that a history of Kierkegaard in Germany would have to focus on “the last fifteen years,” in which “his fame has spread with amazing rapidity.” She added that Kierkegaard “speaks for an entire generation that is not reading him out of historical interest but for intensely personal reasons.” See Hannah Arendt, “Soren Kierkegaard” (1932), in Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York, 1994), 44–9, at 44. For Kierkegaard’s Weimar reception see Charlie Cahill, “Rescuing the Individual: The Kierkegaard Renaissance in Weimar Germany” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2016).

and the need for commitment to some form of public engagement, which triggers the latter and more important part of the movement. As such, Hulme's trajectory is indicative of a wider transformation in European intellectual life from the belle époque towards the interwar period. The joyous openness and relativism of the earlier philosophies of life could not sustain the need for commitment that history demanded from these intellectuals. We will never know in which direction Hulme would have made his "craving for belief" concrete, and the evidence offered by other members of his generation is varied, ranging from fascism to communism, to various types of religious commitment. But in all cases, no trace was left of the lighthearted relativism that preceded the war.

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Appendix: published English-language references to Georges Sorel 1902–1922

Articles are listed in chronological order, books alphabetically. When dates for articles are either not available or without the day (as is the case, for example, in monthly publications), we put the undated items first. No articles were found before 1902. The cutoff point we have chosen is 1922, the year of Sorel's death. This bibliography is incomplete but represents a starting point for future work.

1902

"Recent Publications upon Economics," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* [US] (May 1902), 460–72.

1906

Unsigned, "The Labour Crises in France," *The Speaker: The Liberal Review*, 28 April 1906, 84–5.

1908

"Books Received," *New Age* 3/18 (29 Aug. 1908), 355.

Unsigned, "La décomposition du marxisme," *New Age* 3/24 (10 Oct. 1908), 474.

1909

Books

Werner Sombart, *Socialism and the Social Movement*, trans. Mortimer Epstein (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1909).

Jane Stoddart, *The New Socialism: An Impartial Inquiry* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909).

Articles

"Foreign periodicals," *Catholic World* [US] 88 (March 1909), 841–52.

Ernest Dimmett, "A French Defence of Violence," *Forum* [New York] 42 (Nov. 1909), 413–22.

Ernest Dimmett, "The Evolution of Maurice Barres," *The Living Age* [Boston, MA] 263/3409 (6 Nov. 1909), 344–52.

Unsigned, "The Forum," *The Review of Reviews* 40/240 (Dec. 1909), 576.

William Barry, "Socialism on the March," *The Bookman* 37/219 (Dec. 1909), 146–7.

1910

Books

Yves Guyot, *Socialistic Fallacies* (New York: Macmillan, 1910).

Articles

Ernest Dimmett, "M. Jaurès as Hero," *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 110/2869 (22 Oct. 1910), 511–12.

Unsigned, "Socialistic Fallacies: A French Publicist's Somewhat Scathing Criticism of Past and Present Socialist Doctrines," *New York Times*, 5 Nov. 1910, BR7.

Unsigned, "Review of E. Prince 'Wake Up, England,'" *The Spectator* 105/4299 (19 Nov. 1910), 831–2.

1911

Books

Arthur Clay, *Syndicalism and Labour* (London: John Murray, 1911; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1911).

Articles

Unsigned, "M. Yves Guyot on Socialism and Protection," *The Spectator* 106/4309 (28 Jan. 1911), 120–21.

Unsigned, "Three Books on Socialism," *The Spectator* 106/4322 (29 April 1911), 623–4.

Edwin Slosson, "Twelve Major Prophets of Today – II: Henri Bergson," *Independent* [New York] 70/3262 (8 June 1911), 1246–61.

T. E. Hulme, "Bergsonism in Paris," *New Age* 9/8 (22 June 1911), 189.

Ernest Dimmett, "M. Péguy, the Happy Writer," *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 111/2904 (24 June 1911), 771–2.

Unsigned, "Syndicalism and Labour," *The Spectator* 107/4340 (2 Sept. 1911), 345–6.

Unsigned [A. R. Orage], "Syndicalism and Labour," *New Age* 9/21 (21 Sept. 1911), 496.

Vernon Lee [Violet Paget], "M. Sorel and the Syndicalist Myth," *Fortnightly Review* 90/538 (Oct. 1911), 664–80.

Unsigned, "Syndicalism and Sabotage," *The Economist*, 73/3554 (1911), 722.

Alberta Victoria Montgomery, "M. Sorel and Syndicalism," *New Age* 9/26 (26 Oct. 1911), 619.

T. E. Hulme, "Mr. Balfour, Bergson and Politics," *New Age* 10/2 (9 Nov. 1911), 38–40.

1912

Books

John Hunter Harley, *Syndicalism* (London: T. C. and E. C. Jack, 1912).

Vernon Lee [Violet Paget], *Vital Lies* (London: John Lane, 1912).

Lewis Levine, *The Labor Movement in France: A Study in Revolutionary Syndicalism* (New York: Columbia University Press; London: P. S. King, 1912).

Arthur D. Lewis, *Syndicalism and the General Strike: An Explanation* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912).

Ramsay Macdonald, *Syndicalism: A Critical Examination* (London: Constable, 1912; Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1912).

Philip Snowden, *Socialism and Syndicalism* (London: Collins, 1912).

Fabian Ware, *The Worker and His Country* (London: E. Arnold, 1912).

Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *What Syndicalism Means: An Examination of the Origin and Motives of the Movement with an Analysis of Its Proposals for the Control of Industry* (London: National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution, 1912).

Articles

G., "Strikes," *Fortnightly Review* 91/542 (Feb. 1912), 235–47.

John Hunter Harley, "Syndicalism and the Labour Unrest," *Contemporary Review* 101 (March 1912), 348–57.

Unsigned, "The Contemporary Review," *Review of Reviews* 45/267 (March 1912), 298.

Unsigned, "The Labour Struggle," *The Times*, 1 March 1912, 4.

Unsigned, "The Magazines," *The Spectator* 108/4367 (9 March 1912), 399–402.

Unsigned, "Syndicalism: What It Means," *The Times*, 25 March 1912, 9.

Unsigned, "The Greatest Power in the Land," *Dundee Courier*, 26 March 1912, 4.

"Report of Parliamentary Proceedings (Commons Chamber, Private Business)—debate on Syndicalism," HC Deb, 27 March 1912, vol. 36, col. 536.

- "The Sociological Society: Annual Meeting," *Sociological Review* 5/3 (April 1912), 247–57.
- Unsigned, "A Review of the World," *Current Literature* [New York] 52/4 (April 1912), 367–97.
- T. E. Hulme, "A Tory Philosophy (2)," *The Commentator* 4 (10 April 1912), 310.
- Unsigned, "Syndicalism," *The Independent* [New York] 72 (18 April 1912), 844–5.
- Unsigned, "Revolution or the Unionist Party?," *Fortnightly Review* 91/545 (May 1912), 895–911.
- Unsigned, "Syndicalism: A Working Ethics for Barbarians," *Current Literature* [New York] 50/5 (May 1912), 555–8.
- Huntly Carter, "The 'Blue Bird' and Bergson in Paris," *New Age* 9/2 (11 May 1911), 43–5.
- Unsigned, "How America Views Syndicalism," *Current Literature* [New York] 52/6 (June 1912), 685–6.
- W. J. Ashley, "Review of L. Levine 'The Labor Movement in France,'" *Economic Journal* 22/86 (June 1912), 257–8.
- "A Review of the World," *Current Literature* [New York] 53/1 (July 1912), 1–31.
- Unsigned, "Syndicalism and the General Strike," *Contemporary Review* 102 (1 July 1912), 450–2.
- James Boyle, "Syndicalism: The Latest Manifestation of Labor's Unrest," *Forum* 48 [New York] (Aug. 1912), 223–33.
- "New Books," *The Scotsman*, 5 Aug. 1912, 2.
- "Literary Gossip," *The Athenaeum* 4426 (24 Aug. 1912), 194.
- Unsigned, "Will Syndicalism Supplant Socialism?," *Current Literature* [New York] 53/3 (Sept. 1912), 317–19.
- "Correspondence," *The Freewoman* 2/44 (19 Sept. 1912), 353.
- Hyppolite Havel, "Syndicalism," *Mother Earth* [US] 7/8 (Oct. 1912), 255–7.
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