Randolph Hughes and Alan Chisholm: Romanticism, classicism and fascism

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Abstract
During the 1930s Alan Chisholm and Randolph Hughes were located at the antipodes from each other, even as they shared many of the same aesthetic and political preoccupations. Hughes was an academic at King's College, London until he resigned his post and sought a living from his writings; Chisholm taught French at the University of Melbourne, rising eventually to the rank of professor. Separated by thousands of miles, they corresponded regularly, exchanging letters covering aesthetic, literary and political topics, as they bemoaned the state of the world around them. Outlooks were shared at a variety of levels. Both were dissatisfied: Chisholm wanted nothing more than to escape what he saw as the provincial world of Australia, and to obtain a scholarly position in England; Hughes meanwhile viewed the AngloSaxon academy of which he was a part with a jaundiced eye. Both also felt deeply alienated from the world around them, but were sustained by mythologies nourished by their experience of their respective situations, particularly by myths of the Antipodes, and myths of Europe. Both men detested Australia.

Keywords
alan, hughes, fascism, classicism, chisholm, randolph, romanticism

Disciplines
Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details
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Hughes savaged the ‘integral’ nationalism expressed in Percy Stephensen’s Foundations of Culture in Australia and elsewhere, and regarded Australia as an intellectual desert. Where nationalists such as Stephensen and Brian Penton could be critical of the reality of Australian life even as they sang the praises of the Australian ideal, Hughes and Chisholm were unequivocal in their critique. They rejected both the reality and the ideal of Australia, particularly where that ‘ideal’ found expression in democracy. Instead, they looked to Europe for inspiration, and sang the praises of, amongst others, Charles Maurras, leader of the Action Française, and theoretician of ‘integral’ French nationalism. Their readings of Maurras were however clearly
selective: strictly speaking, they shunned narrow nationalist positions, and were, more accurately, supporters of a particular pan-national ideal of Europe, which they strove to uphold in the face of what they perceived to be a hostile and philistine world, a determination peculiarly reinforced by their formative experiences of the Australian context. The origin of their idealising vision of Europe was therefore distinctively Antipodean, and grounded not in the presence of Europe, rather, but in a sense of its absence.

**Australia and Europe**

The peculiar character of Hughes and Chisholm's preoccupations owe much to their origins within an emergent Australian academia. During the late nineteenth century, a vision of the university as a place where 'aristocrats of the spirit' struggled to preserve the light of culture in a wasteland where philistines thrived and prospered, had gained a particular currency in Australia. In the small, struggling University of Sydney, for example, this idealisation of the spiritual life, of culture, came to be symbolised by a string of heroic figures who fought on its behalf: firstly John Woolley, then Charles Badham, and in the early twentieth century, the poet and scholar Christopher Brennan. Although this vision of the university possessed a democratic side (it was the task of its graduates to spread the light of culture out into the world) it was also inspired by a recognition that true spiritual insight and culture was properly the preserve of a particular culture élite.²

This élitism made its devotees at best lukewarm, and at worst hostile, to the egalitarian myths of Australia which gained currency in the decades immediately before and after Federation in 1901. Myths of labour and of the ordinary man, but also myths of the virtue of philistinism, and the superiority of the practical and the material over the spiritual and the intellectual, sat uneasily with an emphasis on 'aristocracy of spirit'. For Chisholm and Hughes, such emphases only confirmed Australian remoteness from European achievement, and underlined a need for local cultural stewardship by a more internationally-minded élite. Chisholm and Hughes were thus symptomatic of their historical moment and their class fraction, and through them one can see clearly how central the ideal of Europe was for that generation of Australian intellectuals educated to view the 'universal' as the goal towards which they, and their society, should strive. One finds such sentiments, for example, in the work of V. G. Childe, whose intellectual enterprise centered around the problem of explaining how Europe was different from those ancient middle-eastern societies where civilisation had begun, fascinations which perhaps suggest why Europe has remained a central reference point for Australian cultural life up to the present day.³ The battle-lines drawn up by Hughes and Stephensen in 1936 have remained fundamental, with a struggle between the nationalist myth of Australia and the universalist myth of Europe continuing to structure debate at a variety of conspicuous levels.

As inheritors of the traditions of the spiritual 'aristocracy' and self-proclaimed keepers of the Brennan flame, Hughes and Chisholm appropriated a particular version of the European myth. Following Brennan, they engaged Europe through the study of Romanticism and French Symbolism, and developed a particular fascination with nineteenth-century French poetry, as it culminated in the work of Mallarmé. Hughes viewed Brennan as the chief theorist of Symbolism in the English-speaking world, as well as recognising in him a great Symbolist poet in his own right. The celebration of Brennan also however signalled potential divergences between Hughes and Chisholm, particularly over Brennan's construction of the European. Like his followers, Brennan had also been a classical scholar, whose image of Europe was as much Graeco-Roman as modern; and it was around the question of the relationship of this Graeco-Roman heritage to both Christianity, and to modern Europe, that Hughes and Chisholm would develop their most fundamental disagreements. Ultimate differences thus shared common points of origin, with a shared love of the classical world and an appreciation of the classical heritage nurtured by those around them (another key influence came from the Professor of Greek at Sydney during those years, W. J. Woodhouse) gradually giving way to contention.

Such a preoccupation with the classical was generalised amongst the peers of Hughes and Chisholm. In the articles and poems of the University of Sydney magazine _Hermes_, in the years leading up to the First World War, one can discern a generation saturated in Romantic ideals that were both pagan and Christian in origin. Hughes and Chisholm were part of this milieu, as disciples of the Brennan encountered as poet and conversationalist holding forth at the Casuals Club.⁴ With Brennan acting as something of a catalyst, they were inducted into a spiritual and intellectual élite that spurned the bourgeois materialist world of a society devoted to the accumulation of money, and pursued the life of the mind. As Hughes was later to insist, it was a group inspired largely by a pagan ideal of the spiritual life, describing
Brennan at the Casuals Club as a presiding spirit ‘looking like a pontiff of what Novalis called The Invisible Church’.5

War destroyed this idyll, and tested the ‘aristocracy of spirit’ to breaking point. Both Hughes and Chisholm served in the army during World War One; Chisholm as an interpreter on the western front, Hughes in the light horse in the Middle East. Hughes never returned to Australia; he entered Oxford to study French, and then moved on to a number of teaching posts in France, including the Ecole Normale Supérieure, before returning to London to take up a post at King’s College, an institution from which he eventually resigned in the mid-1930s, amid accusations that he had been ‘done in’ by a Jewish colleague.6 Chisholm returned to Australia to work at the University of Melbourne. Both continued their work on French poetry, with Hughes completing a doctorate on Baudelaire, and Chisholm writing his first book on Rimbaud.

Hughes and Chisholm shared certain political instincts, and in the world of the 1930s both were tempted by the Right. It was not the Australian Right, nor even the British Right, that attracted them (there is no evidence that Hughes had any connections with British fascism), but a version of the European Right which appealed, in particular that espoused by the Action Française, although Hughes was also drawn to Nazism. The attraction of the Action Française lay in the fact that it was primarily a movement of intellectuals, and that its leader, Charles Maurras, was, as Hughes put it, a fine literary stylist.7 It is perhaps difficult to construe such fascination as affiliation, in the first instance. As more than one commentator has remarked, to be considered a fascist one has to be a nationalist, for that is part of the ‘fascist minimum’.8 On such a ground, both Chisholm and Hughes fail the test, since for them the basic intellectual reference point was not that of the nation, but the civilisation, of Europe. Yet the myth of Europe certainly did drive both to support an authoritarian politics, to admire Hitler in the case of Hughes, and to wish for a Caesar in that of Chisholm.9 Certainly in the case of the latter, it was also anti-Communism that led initially to welcome for the rise of Hitler, but such preferences, in the present context are more suggestive of the extent to which Europe in their eyes stood at the antipodes of democratic Australia, as a symbol of high culture and spirituality, opposed to the low culture and materialism that Australia embodied.

Despite his personal respect for Maurras and his friendship with Jacques Delebecque, Hughes, however, was never really at ease with the doctrines of Maurras as leader of the Action Française. Universalism sat uneasily with nationalism. Never able to accept the idea that France was the exclusive protector of classical European civilisation, Hughes proposed, in a letter to Maurras, that the French, like the English, were essentially Germanic heirs of a common Latin inheritance.10 That the letter remained unanswered is perhaps suggestive. Other evidences of Hughes’s scepticism remain. There is in Hughes’s correspondence, for example, an account of a visit he made to Maurras at his home in Provence, where the two of them passed the afternoon visiting some local classical ruins.11 Hughes could clearly admire the Maurras who extolled the virtues of classical Greece and its pagan virtues. Paganism also attracted Hughes, who believed that the Nazis were to be admired because they wished to wipe out Christianity and replace it with a new paganism. Unlike Maurras however, he saw no value in Catholicism, regarding it as a form of Christianity that had been subjected to classical values and Europeanised. For Hughes, it remained an exotic oriental import. Ironically, Hughes remained something of a Romantic, dreaming of a pagan Europe, dominated by England, France and Germany, that would throw off Christianity and adopt a true pagan spirituality.

Chisholm, on the other hand, was far more attracted to Maurras’ Classicism, and could accept the significance of Catholicism for the development of a classical European civilisation, even if he was not prepared to believe in its doctrines. Unlike Hughes, Chisholm was never particularly attracted to Nazism, save as a bulwark to Bolshevism, and ultimately condemned National Socialism. His admiration for, and desire to preserve, the values of Classicism and classical civilisation remained paramount. Both Hughes and Chisholm were thus admirers of the Graeco-Roman heritage, disliked the bourgeoisie, sought to pursue beauty, were attracted to authoritarian politics, and believed in the supreme spiritual value of European-universalist traditions. Yet they also stood apart in their respective visions of Europe to some extent; for Hughes, Europe connoted paganism, romanticism and Nazism, for Chisholm the reference was equally classical, but also Catholic and Christian.

Taking its title from one of Mallarmé’s poems, Chisholm’s book *Towards Hérodiade* (1934), describes its object as being to:

show how, as a result of various influences, partly Germanic and Hindoo, partly French, the most representative French poets from Leconte de Lisle to Mallarmé attempted to break down the plastic structure of the universe and found behind phenomena, first, an immense and incessant flux, and then a sheer void.12
The aim of the exercise, in other words, was to mount a classical critique of Romanticism in order to demonstrate that its ultimate destination was, nothing less than nihilism; at the same time, Chisholm wanted to show that this doctrine of the void, and hence Romanticism itself, was not European in origin but oriental. Identifying his ‘European and classical prejudices’ and expressing the hope that there would be ‘a restoration of plastic values and a rehabilitation of phenomena’ in the not too distant future, Chisholm insisted that the French poets had been led towards a ‘Dionysian nihilism’ by a version of Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the Will, understood as endlessly recreating the phantom forms by which it sees itself. From this perspective, Will became for the French poets the true reality of the universe.13

For Chisholm, Dionysus was a ‘convenient symbol for expressing a fairly common human desire to burst the bounds of individuation by identifying the self with the world-all’. He associated this desire for anti-individuation, the urge to become part of the greater unity, with a range of visions, including Rousseau’s myth of the golden age, with Christian desire for redemption, and even with Communism. The Dionysian impulse led to an absorbing of the individual into some form of greater world spirit, understood as a vast cosmic will that is constantly ‘becoming’, and whose ultimate destination is a spiritual nihilism that exalts the cult of nothing. This cult of the void, claimed Chisholm, robs Europe of its moral basis ‘by stripping it of its spiritual sanctions’. In more directly political terms, it is an exotic import whose popularity provides a sign of the decadence of Europe.14

True European civilisation, according to Chisholm, ‘has evolved on a Christian basis’, and ‘is rooted in the idea of being and stability, not in the idea of an eternal becoming or an eternal void’. It has always respected the value of the individual. The contrast between Europe and non-Europe could hardly be starker; on the one side stands Christianity, being and the individual, on the other, stands becoming, the void, and nihilism. The important question for the European mind as far as Chisholm was concerned therefore, was how to relate this respect for the particularity of existence with the unformed cosmic will. Chisholm believed that the ‘typical western mind’ has always been able to control and use that will:

‘it has put shape into it (through the intellect), logical control (through morality), beauty (through art), and has even made death not an escape from it but a discipline within it. Thus has it put Will at the service of the individual and the race’.

The classical approach is to recognise that those in the finite world can only come into contact with the perfect and the infinite occasionally. Individuals must be satisfied with these occasional moments of perfection and be content to view the world sub specie aeternitatis.15

The problem with the nineteenth-century European mind for Chisholm was that it had lost this classical vision of the cosmos as something to be grasped and analysed by the individual intellect. Instead it had sought to lose itself in the eternal cosmic flux and to identify with that flux. The ‘new aesthetic ... [sought] the identification of the self with this flux’ and this meant ‘a tragic renunciation of the classical ideal’. This immersion in ‘the cosmic whirlpool’, claimed Chisholm, meant a loss of ‘real intellectual control; we are no longer masters of our own destiny, this mastery shifting from the stable human intellect into the whirling cosmos’. In particular, it meant the triumph of sentiment and feeling over intellect. In this, claimed Chisholm, lay the origin of both nineteenth century pessimism and twentieth century materialism.16

Romanticism, Politics and The Void

The central battle for both Chisholm and Hughes was that between the nihilism of the void, to which Romanticism inexorably led, and the ‘classical and ‘Latin’ element in the ‘French genius’. Hence for Chisholm, ‘oriental’ nihilism can ultimately be identified with German and Nazi ideals, and the policies of Maurras and the Action Française are justified because they embody not just Classicism, but also the ideal of the individual and a decentralised polity that recognises both the centrality of the individual and the necessarily limited and finite nature of human existence. At the same time, Chisholm can claim that French poetry was saved from complete nihilism by ‘this classical atavism, this faith in the ultimate necessity of words to express ideas’. In these poets, he recognises a constant struggle between the void and the flux of becoming, and the need to impose form and order on that flux. In that battle, the victory of form and order over flux and the void represented more than the victory of Classicism over Romanticism; it also signified the victory of Europe over oriental principles. Discussing Leconte de Lisle, Chisholm claimed that he was ‘too European to yearn instinctively for Nirvāṇa, he believes too heartily in the restless, onward striving of the Western races, predestined to inherit the world’s hegemony’, and that Lisle was being ‘European in putting ‘Will’ at the
service of morality or doctrine. Baudelaire’s doctrine of ‘correspondences’ was another way in which the cosmic unity and the plastic realities of this world were brought together. There was a thirst for the absolute but also a recognition that the absolute is inaccessible.17

Finally Chisholm discerned in the poetry of Mallarmé a ‘pseudo-classicism, a classicism of decadence’, in which Mallarmé applied a classic method to romantic data. In Héroïade, Mallarmé proclaimed the eternal void, ‘escape from which is not a real escape, but a tragic dénouement’. For Chisholm, this embracing of the void, of the nothingness that lies at the heart of the Absolute was not just a crisis for French poetry; it was an indication that the ‘European intellect faces suicide’. He believed that only two routes of escape lay open; a return to medieval Christianity or a partial acceptance of the Schopenhauerian thesis. Despite his dislike of Australia and the new world, his book’s final sentence is interesting since it seems to imply that only ‘in a new beginning’ could ‘some younger race’ find ‘in life itself and in its splendid energies’ an escape from this European nihilism and decadence, echoing the view that Stephensen was to embrace in his celebration of Australian nationalism.18

In a later piece entitled ‘The Aftermath of European Romanticism’, Chisholm developed this picture of the flaws and faults of Romanticism. Again he invoked Maurras, but now stated that it was not the politics of Maurras, but his achievement in purging criticism of its sentimentality, and replacing it with a sound intellectual foundation that attracted him. The problem with the romantics, as he saw it, was that they established the cult of the infinite and sought to create the divine by moving beyond the finite and the real. In seeking to move outside the finite, he claimed, ‘we run the risk of getting beyond the realm of art altogether, for art is essentially a selection with a view to achieving something perfect, that is, finished’. This led to the romantic adoration of words, and the romantic penchant for talking as opposed to thinking.19 What Chisholm was expressing here was a preference for logic and dialectic, as opposed to the gnostic incantation that he associated with Romanticism. In this regard, it is worth noting that Brennan had explicitly rejected Platonism for gnosticism in his exposition of Symbolism, and that in his rejection of the incantatory power of words as the route to the infinite, Chisholm was also casting-off a central element of Brennan’s teaching.20 Chisholm could not accept Brennan’s gnosticism because it lacked the capacity to engage in rational criticism and analysis; ultimately he saw it as leading away from the individual and the rational to the void and ‘utter annihilation’.21

For Chisholm, Romanticism led to Maurice Barrès’ Culte du Moi, the belief that the objective world is an illusion, and to attempts to withdraw from the world into a realm of subjectivity. This attempt to withdraw from the world, he argued, had already had political consequences, including the institution of a ‘tariff-guarded, hermetic nationalism’ and the creation of an ‘isolationist’ nationalism in Australia. Similarly, he condemned Gobineau’s theory of race because he saw it as yet another manifestation of the romantic cult of words, it was built up from a small number of examples, and then allowed to develop beyond the finite into the void.22 Given that the fascist regimes in both Italy and Germany developed doctrines of autarchy and race, such an affirmation of free trade and condemnation of racism is hardly the stuff of fascism.23 Perhaps the fact that Chisholm revised Maurras so that Classicism was identified not exclusively with France, but also with Europe, meant that he was released from the excesses of nationalist chauvinism. In any case, what mattered for him about Classicism was its defence of the critical sense and of reason and logical criticism. This affirmation of internationalist values can also be seen as an indication that Chisholm continued to be influenced by those universalist liberal values that were so significant for many of his contemporaries at the University of Sydney, in particular those influenced by Francis Anderson.

Randolph Hughes, however, was an entirely different case. In his extended review of Towards Héroïade, entitled A Further Decline of the West (1934), Hughes recognised that Chisholm was engaged in more than just an account of the development of French poetry, and saw him as seeking to expose the ‘maladies of the modern spirit’. Hughes, however, sided with Brennan against Chisholm, contending, in a letter to Chisholm, that Brennan had argued that Maurras’s Absolute was not a void but a Totality. The ‘Absolute, far from being a void’, claimed Hughes, ‘was a thing of super-realities’. Symbolism thus remained a sound doctrine; it did not lead to nihilism but to some of the very best poetry ever written.24

Equally Hughes defended ‘becoming’ as the basis of real spirituality, invoking in its defence T. H. Green, Ernest Renan and Samuel Alexander. According to all of these writers, the movement of humanity involved an ‘eternal tendency or drive of the universe towards ever higher forms; of the world infinitely progressing towards infinite Deity’. Becoming plus gnosticism equalled a spiritual vision of history for Hughes, a vision in which Humanity is driven towards the infinite and the Absolute as it moves to become God. Hughes defended such religious visions on ethical grounds; ‘they make an urgent call to
the energies of the individual, making him partly responsible for the evolution of Godhead'.

The cult of nihilism, claimed Hughes, may be a product of oriental knowledge, but then so too is Christianity, which is seen as an oriental alien imported into European civilisation. For Hughes, the 'true foundation of the [European] civilisation is Graeco-Roman culture'. Here then are the continuing themes of Hughes's writings: the Absolute is not a void but a plenitude, becoming is a religious process that leads to God, and the true European tradition within which this universal process of becoming occurs is defined by Graeco-Roman paganism and its modern descendants. Hughes's vision of Europe, despite its emphasis on the classical world was therefore not particularly classical, and was quite different to that of Chisholm. Whereas Chisholm emphasised Europe in terms of stability, order and being, for Hughes Europe meant becoming and a constant movement towards the Divine, albeit a Divine conceived as a European pagan divinity, rather than a Christian, oriental or Jewish one.

When Hughes wrote on Symbolism, Brennan and Mallarmé, he emphasised not only the fact that the key to Mallarmé's aesthetic lay in absence and silence, but also that Symbolist poetry went beyond rational language, thereby leading to both a 'stirring of transcendental presences' and an act of genuine creation. The aesthetic of Symbolism leads the individual into a new country that he can 'recognise as his true home'. As such it:

is nothing less than a religion; as spiritual and mystical as any other, and yet making no hard and impossible demands upon the reason ... it is nobler than any other, for it makes no appeal to the lesser, basely selfish side of man's nature, which is desperately concerned to prolong its individuality, however little worth preservation it may be; its sole appeal is to the highest part of man, the part that seeks towards what else is highest in this world, and thence to what is highest in the transcendental world. And it reinstates man in his Eden ... It offers him sure salvation, and salvation of the only acceptable sort. 

There is little in this account that is not to be found in Brennan's theory of Symbolism, and in this sense Hughes was a true disciple of his master. Hughes also saw Brennan as a poet of absence but, he contended, absence does not imply a void but a memorial presence beyond the absent. As he explained, 'it is precisely the idea, the divine archetypical idea, that is absent from any particular rose'. This is a form of negative theology; it is the very finitude of the human mind that renders it incapable of knowing the divine as infinite and absolute. Human beings can only know the divine as an absence, but it is that very absence that implies that there is a divine.

Hughes continued also to pursue the theme that man moves towards God through history. He found this idea in his studies on Swinburne, and argued that Swinburne was an adherent to the doctrine of theantropy.

Writing to Jack Lindsay, Hughes affirmed his belief that 'the deity is not complete, but that it is on the way to becoming such'. It is through human striving and participation in the divine, through, in particular, creative endeavours, that God evolves and develops towards perfection. Becoming is a divine process claimed Hughes, and he could identify this as the doctrine of the European pagan elite, an elite that stretched from Eschylus to Lucretius to Giordano Bruno to Shelley, Mallarmé and Nietzsche.

Chisholm, by and large, rejected Hughes's position, although at a later stage he admitted that he had been excessively harsh on Romanticism. Nevertheless, he continued to claim that Mallarmé was driving towards the void, and argued that Hughes's attacks on Christianity were misguided because the value of Christianity lay not in the fact that it was Christian, but in its European-ness. At the same time, the political orientations of the two men diverged. Chisholm condemned Nazism because he believed that it was rooted in sentiment and Rousseauism; it was 'wild and fantastic', and lacking an intellectual foundation. Chisholm's increasing hostility to Nazism was framed within a context of defending Classical values, and was often accompanied by a defence of Maurras. In an article entitled 'Pantheism, Poetry and Politics', Chisholm identified three forms of pantheism. The first was materialism. The second was what he termed 'Pattern-Pantheism', a formulation owing much to Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West (1922). In this form of pantheism patterns move out from a centre of radiation, at which the source of all being is located. For Chisholm, this pattern-pantheism was connected with Romanticism and its desire to merge the individual with 'the eternal life-force, so that the differences between the individual and the totality disappear'. By moving back to the centre of this 'spiritual radiation', the individual could become one with the spiritual source. Chisholm claimed that it was this desire to go...
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Maurras. Again Chisholm reveals his debt to the idealist liberalism that was taught at the University of Sydney when he was an undergraduate.

On this basis, Chisholm could contrast the true universality of classical Latin Europe and the narrow, particularism of Nazi race theory. The Nazis, according to Chisholm, were creating a pseudo-collective consciousness by trying to impose one particular consciousness on all others. They were seeking to absorb all other forms of individuality through regimentation. In this way, they were denying the true universal spirit of European civilisation as it had developed over the millennia. European civilisation had attained this universality by absorbing the universal elements of other civilisations. Classicism and individualism were the true foundations of modern European civilisation and the principles of universality that it embodied. The classical, Latin civilisations of Britain and France were the fulfilment of that universality and individualism, standing for disinterestedness and for the undogmatic liberal view of the world that derived from that universality.

Last Bastions

The fall of France in 1940 stimulated Chisholm to develop his defence of this Latin, classical civilisation. In this 'tragic moment', he claimed, 'Britain alone represents that great Graeco-Roman civilization which can never be destroyed'. As the true heirs of Latin civilisation, Britain and France alone retained the particular qualities that had enabled the seeds of Roman civilisation to take root and bear fruit in modern Europe. For this reason Britain, according to Chisholm, was 'more Latin' than the Italy of Mussolini. From this perspective, the barbarians, in the shape of the romantic Nazi Germans, were once again attacking the Roman empire, but despite the defeat of France, one vibrant and uncorrupted part of the Latin bloc remained to defy these new savages.

As the last bastion of classical civilisation, Britain was stronger than Germany because she possessed the qualities of that inheritance. Chisholm contrasted the 'immense spiritual strength' of British values, derived from the classical-Latin tradition, with the lack of spiritual coherence of a Germany that had deliberately broken with its past. At the same time he claimed that while Britain had achieved 'a real and spontaneous unity ... by the scrapping of the party idea', Germany had merely attained a 'kind of specious unity' that relied on the party imposing its will on the nation. Britain had now taken on the task of

Chisholm contrasted this version of pantheism which led from Romanticism to the rule of the dictator with the classical version of pantheism in which, as Chisholm always loved to explain, we see things sub specie aeternitatis. He continued to emphasise that the eternal must have a concrete and particular form, for only 'through the magnification of the particular' was 'the attainment of the universal' possible. Chisholm did not therefore associate Classicism with the cause of democracy so much as with the doctrines of Charles Maurras. Maurras, he claimed, defended the idea of the individual and the particular, as for example in his defence of regionalism. Maurras, claimed Chisholm, was the defender of an ideal of attaining perfection not through agitation, but through 'the calm of the spirit'. As a result, Chisholm increasingly came to see Europe as a battlefield crossed by forces derived from the Graeco-Roman world, best exemplified by the Latin societies of France and Britain, and the Romantic destructiveness of Germany. 35

Chisholm was also led increasingly to defend the significance of the individual. In a piece entitled ‘God, Man and Reich’, written in 1939, he sought to establish the relationship between the development of the individual consciousness and that of the group consciousness. He argued that the long experience of humanity had established two principles. The first was that human beings live fuller and richer lives when they live in society, because it was only through contact with other people that they could enlarge their personalities. The second was that the wider the scope of the society, the more universal was the order it created. Great civilisations, such as Rome, Greece and ancient Judea, were great because they had contributed to an increasingly universal and civilised humanity. The group consciousness that emerged as a consequence of the development of these societies and civilisations did not submerge and abolish the individual; rather it found its fulfilment in the individual. Abolish and limit the individual, contended Chisholm, and the consequence is that the group is also prevented from developing. 37 This argument, however, owes little to Classicism and

back to the source that lay at the core of the new authoritarian political systems of his day. Each strove to move in one great rhythm, radiating from a centre: the Dictator. Each had its musical incantation, its Dionysian hymn as it were, its pattern-gesture or salute. Each also had its sacred fund of remembrances: for Germany it was the golden age of the Altgermanen, reaching back to the still holier period of the Aryans; for Italy it was the classical age of Rome, reaching backward towards the She-Wolf. 35

Chisholm was also led increasingly to defend the significance of the individual. In a piece entitled ‘God, Man and Reich’, written in 1939, he sought to establish the relationship between the development of the individual consciousness and that of the group consciousness. He argued that the long experience of humanity had established two principles. The first was that human beings live fuller and richer lives when they live in society, because it was only through contact with other people that they could enlarge their personalities. The second was that the wider the scope of the society, the more universal was the order it created. Great civilisations, such as Rome, Greece and ancient Judea, were great because they had contributed to an increasingly universal and civilised humanity. The group consciousness that emerged as a consequence of the development of these societies and civilisations did not submerge and abolish the individual; rather it found its fulfilment in the individual. Abolish and limit the individual, contended Chisholm, and the consequence is that the group is also prevented from developing. 37 This argument, however, owes little to Classicism and
defending the very principle of civilisation, rooted in Graeco-Roman culture, without which there could be no progress and no universality. Such an identification of Britain with classical civilisation is similar to one made by the Australian-born Gilbert Murray, in his 1941 essay on Greece and England, where he identified Britain as the heir of Greek civilisation. Murray, however, was a liberal, which Chisholm certainly was not. In this regard it is worth recalling that Chisholm identified the ‘spontaneous’ unity of Britain with the suppression of the party system in favour of a wartime coalition. Indeed he spent much of this essay defending and justifying Maurras, a man he still looked on with genuine intellectual affection. Maurras, meanwhile, had condemned capitalism and the modern mechanistic spirit, and Chisholm viewed him as an undogmatic French socialist, not without some justification. Above all, for Chisholm, his importance lay in the fact that he had ‘recognised that the basis of Western civilisation was the Graeco-Roman culture handed onto France by the Romans’. The true Europe for Chisholm, was classical, Latin and respectful of the individual, it most certainly was not liberal, democratic and capitalist. Germany was the enemy because she was romantic and barbaric, not because she had overthrown democracy.

Hughes followed a different path from Chisholm because he had a different idea of Europe, and of the values Europe was meant to embody. He was attracted to Nazism, in part, because he believed that the Nazis would overthrow those religions that he detested: Christianity and Judaism, and was a true believer in a pagan ideal of the sort in which vitalists such the Lindsays had engaged in Australia. It was certainly no accident that Hughes corresponded on a friendly basis with Lionel Lindsay, and that they had a genuine intellectual compatibility. Hughes believed that the Nazis were genuine idealists and could write of the ‘spirit of disinterested service in Nazism ... moral discipline ... a vast amount of idealism’. Even at the end of the war he could still mourn their passing, and claim that ‘there is something tragic in the fact that all this idealism and its good practical human results have been shattered out of existence’. For Hughes, the values of the pagan Graeco-Roman world were the source of all creativity and spirituality in European civilisation. Ranged against this vital and creative force were the forces of Democracy, Jewry, Christianity and America. Opposing Christianity meant opposing democracy because ‘democracy is indeed the Christian polity par excellence’. This helps to explain how Hughes had been initially attracted to Maurras, because he approved of Maurras’ anti-Semitism and his distinction between Europe and the oriental forces of Judaism. Jews could not be assimilated by European civilisation because they were oriental. The same was true of Christianity. Both had to be eliminated from Europe.

As Hughes opposed both Christianity and democracy, his vision of European civilisation was quite distinct from more routine invocations of ‘Western Civilisation’. His ideal of Europe was of a continent purged of Jews and Christians, in which an alliance of Germany, France and Britain was dominant. As mentioned earlier, he could not accept the Maurras view that France was the particular heir of classical civilisation. His vision of ancient Greek civilisation was correspondingly authoritarian rather than democratic, and Hughes believed that the Nazi regime had much in common with the ancient Greeks. Writing to Edwyn Bevan he claimed that ‘Aristotle’s view of the individual to the state was singularly like that which has been enforced in Germany’, and suggested that ‘Plato took in a large degree the Greek counterpart of Nazi Germany as the model for his ideal Republic’. Regimentation and order were certainly not alien to the Greeks, and Hughes argued that the Melian oration was Hitlerism raised to the ninth power. From this perspective, the Nazis were the modern heirs of the Greek heritage, even down to the cruelty and harshness of the Nazi regime. There was much, contended Hughes, that was dark and troubled in the Greek temper.

Conclusions

Hughes’s idealisation of the Nazis as the heirs of a European civilisation based on pagan ideals owed a considerable amount to his romantic view of the world and his belief that the development of humanity represents movement towards the divine and the infinite. It also echoed his elitist view that the true European pagan-spiritual tradition had been preserved by a small group of illuminati, of which Hughes believed himself to be an heir. Opposed to democracy and Christianity, Hughes saw Hitler and the Nazis as creating a regime in which these aristocrats of the spirit would flourish and their true worth be appreciated. Most certainly, at a personal level, Hughes was seduced by the pageantry and ritual of Nuremburg, as is clear from his descriptions of the rally that he attended. It would also be true to say that Chisholm was saved from the excesses of Nazism by his adherence to classical ideals. Like Hughes, he was an elitist, despising of the mediocrity of the modern world and its inability to recognise the place of the true aristocrats of the spirit, a view focused by a particular encounter with Australian contexts early in the century. Hence he was
attracted to the authoritarian ideas of Charles Maurras, which nonetheless recognised the limitations that are placed on human beings. From Maurras, Hughes learned that one must remain satisfied with the imperfections of the world rather than going off in search of the infinite. At the same time, it would be true to say that both Hughes and Chisholm could never really escape the vision of an evolving spiritual cosmos that they absorbed as students. Chisholm combined a liberal version of this doctrine of 'becoming' with Classicism, and this acted as a restraint on his extremism. Hughes, however, interpreted this ideal of 'becoming' in a way that allowed him to fuse the vision of an aestheticised, spiritual universe moving on the road to perfection with an extreme form of authoritarian politics. Hughes was undoubtedly a fascist; Chisholm never quite made the grade.

Despite their common heritage in the shape of Christopher Brennan, Hughes and Chisholm were at the antipodes in terms of their views of Europe and the true nature of the European cultural tradition. Neither Hughes nor Chisholm were defending the West, or western civilisation, insofar as these categories are understood as a coalition of democracy and liberal values. Both were authoritarian. One was defending the ideal of a classical Europe in which Christianity played a central role, a Europe founded on Being and order and stability in which there was a place for the ideal of the individual. The other was defending a radical pagan view of Europe based on principles of Becoming and the quest for the Absolute, a view that was based on Romantic principles. The oddity, of course, is that these two products of an Australia often understood as the 'social laboratory' of the world, of a radically democratic society, should have been pursuing such dreams at all. Imagining themselves as aristocrats of the spirit suffering in a society openly embracing egalitarianism and opportunism, Hughes and Chisholm construed Europe as escape from democracy. Europe was the antipodes of democracy, a place from which they could draw sustenance as they sought to defend what they saw as the true principles of culture and the spiritual life.

NOTES

3. Ibid., pp. 126-36.
Almost forty years ago, George Rudé published an article on the ‘Swing protesters’ transported to New South Wales. Most of the detail subsequently appeared in the monograph, Captain Swing, which he co-wrote with Eric Hobsbawm, and which documented the background to the sentencing of those involved. Altogether, 138 agricultural labourers and artisans from the Wessex counties of Wiltshire, Berkshire, Hampshire and Dorset, were tried and convicted for their involvement in a series of protests for a living wage, and eventually arrived in the colony. The majority of these travelled aboard the Eleanor, which reached New South Wales in June, 1831. Rudé did little more than describe basic aspects of their servitude, listing some of their masters (those whose rank and status enabled them to be readily identifiable), and the convicts’ designated places of assignment. Writing in 1965, he concluded:

So much for the machine-breakers’ story during the time of their confinement. What happened to them once it was over? We have no certain means of finding out.

The proposition here, is simply that it is now possible perhaps to complete Rudé’s ‘story’, and to show from the record how a significant number of ‘Swing men’ fared, as they reconstructed their lives in the colony, both during their servitude, and when eventually free.

Even when allowance is made for the difficulties Rudé faced with his understandably limited knowledge of local geography and history, his article, a pioneering piece, was rather circumscribed. Convicts sent to Australia were among the best-documented citizens of the nineteenth-century British Empire. Apart from records of shipboard

Published by the BRITISH AUSTRALIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION (BASA)