

Stuart Hood,  
Twentieth-Century  
Partisan



# Stuart Hood, Twentieth-Century Partisan

Edited by

David Hutchison and David Johnson

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*David Hutchison and David Johnson*

## INTRODUCTION

### DAVID JOHNSON AND DAVID HUTCHISON

When he was 27 years old, Stuart Hood was released from an Italian prisoner of war camp, and from December 1943 to July 1944 he fought with partisan bands under the *nom de guerre* of Carlino. After the war, Hood returned in his writings to his experiences with the Italian Resistance, most vividly in his memoir published under the alternating titles *Pebbles from my Skull* (1963, 1973 and 2013) and *Carlino* (1985). The Italian Resistance, Hood believed, was one of those rare moments in twentieth-century history when “members of a society, of a class, undergo a transformation that endows them with courage and virtue beyond all expectation.”<sup>1</sup> Hood identified closely with the spirit of that moment, sharing the partisans’ dream of a better future, the dream of “a good utopia” expressed in the lines of “La Bandiera Rossa.”<sup>2</sup>

This collection reads Stuart Hood’s life and work through the prism of his experiences as a partisan, beginning with reflections on how his early life in the north-east of Scotland and in 1930s Edinburgh predisposed him to fighting with the Italian Resistance. After paying detailed attention to Hood’s wartime experiences, the balance of the collection investigates the many ways in which Hood attempted to live out or give expression to the socialist-internationalist values of the partisan moment in the second half of the twentieth century: as the translator of over forty European texts (thirty from Italian, seven from German, five from French, and one from Russian); as the most influential Marxist working in senior management at the BBC until his resignation in 1964; as a major theorist of television and founding figure in the discipline of Media Studies; as an inspirational lecturer at British universities from the 1970s to 1990s; as a public intellectual writing over 200 feature articles, reviews and columns for *The Listener*, *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, *The New Statesman* and *The Observer*; as a member of the Workers Revolutionary Party in the 1970s; as the populariser of radical ideas through the co-authoring of several books in the *Beginners* series; and as the author of a remarkable memoir and eight well-received novels.

Hood's death in 2011 was followed by lengthy obituaries in *The Guardian* and *The Times*, as well as a substantial entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*,<sup>3</sup> but this collection is the first scholarly attempt to assess his career. Hood was a man of letters, as is evident from the long list of his publications, but he was also a man of action, and the twelve chapters therefore combine the biographical and the analytical, attempting to give due attention both to what he did and to what he wrote. Given the wide range of his interests and achievements, it is appropriate that this assessment comes in the form of a collection by contributors with different areas of expertise—social history, media studies, literary criticism, translation, political studies—with each contribution focused on different aspects of Hood's life and work. Several of the contributors knew Hood as a friend, colleague, comrade, and their contributions accordingly combine scholarly discussion with personal memories.

The collection follows loosely the chronology of Hood's life. Part One, "Behind Enemy Lines," focuses on the period up to the end of the Second World War. In the first chapter, "'In the Shadow of Fascism and War': A Village Dominic's son and his Place in Twentieth-century Historical Memory," Terry Brotherstone reconstructs Hood's formative years, from his boyhood in the north-east Scotland village of Edzell and adolescence in the seaside town of Montrose, to his student years in 1930s Edinburgh and his decision to volunteer for the army in 1940. Drawing on his own conversations with Hood, Brotherstone emphasises the defining influence of Hood's early life on his career, noting, for example, Hood's comment that "[T]hroughout my life, wherever I happened to be—in the Libyan desert for instance—trying to work out north, south, east and west, I always did it in relation to the High Street in Edzell because it points due north. I seemed to use it like a compass with which to orient myself."<sup>4</sup> The chapter demonstrates *inter alia* how Hood's proximity to the rural poor of Edzell enabled him to empathise with the Italian peasants who protected him in 1943–4; and how, in the 1930s, his involvement in the debates of other young Scottish intellectuals like Sorley MacLean, and the relationships with workers he formed in the Communist Party, left an enduring mark on his literary-political trajectory. Brotherstone concludes that Hood's early years inculcated a resilient commitment to socialism premised on working-class solidarity, a rejection of Stalinism, and a sympathetic—if complicated—articulation of Scottishness.

The balance of the chapters in Part One focus in greater detail on Hood's experiences with the partisans during the Second World War. Hilary Horrocks' chapter, "In Search of Carlino. Stuart Hood in the Italian Resistance, 1943–4," meticulously contextualises Hood's memoir *Pebbles*

*from my Skull* by examining Hood's many other writings on his war experiences, the broader history of the partisans, and post-war debates over the meaning of the Italian Resistance. Focusing in particular on Hood's role in the mythologised battle of Valibona on 3 January, 1944, Horrocks discusses Hood's acute grasp of the uncertain territory between his anguished personal memories, which characterise much of his fiction, and public acts of heroic memorialisation. She also underlines the importance of Hood's early analysis, drawn from his experience, of the political use of Resistance memory in post-war Italy.

The third chapter, Nick Havely's "'My School Dante': Stuart Hood's *Inferno*," complements Horrocks' discussion of *Carlino* by reflecting upon how Hood's rereading of Dante's *Inferno* while he was living with the Tuscan peasants in 1943–4 illuminated and informed his encounter with Italy in the grip of war. Noting that the *Inferno* gave Hood the titles and epigraphs for the two main parts of his memoir—"The Savage Wood" and "The Sweet Season"—Havely demonstrates how Hood read Tuscany's war-torn landscape in terms of Dante's poem. Havely also registers Dante's enduring influence upon Hood, observing that his post-war fiction, notably his novellas *The Circle of the Minotaur* and *The Fisherman's Daughter* (published together in 1950) and his 1955 novel *Since the Fall*, continued to be haunted by the ghosts of Dante's Ghibelline heretic and of Tuscan factionalism.

The final chapter of Part One by Philip Cooke locates Hood's war memoir in the context of the historiography of the Italian Resistance. Categorising Hood's *Carlino* as "fictive autobiography," a work of the same genre as Eric Newby's *Love and War in the Apennines* (1971), Cooke explains that the many memoirs in Italian and (less frequently) in English have been grouped together by historians under the Italian collective noun *memorialistica*. Notwithstanding the fact that they were not based on archival sources, but rather on the unreliable tool of memory, the *memorialistica* have provided historians with unique insights into understanding individual rather than collective experiences of the war. They represent a form of micro-history, which allows their readers to understand how a specific set of historical circumstances conditioned the life, hopes, fears and ideologies of individual subjectivities. Seventy-five years later, Cooke concludes, fictive autobiographies—pre-eminently Hood's *Carlino*—still convey personal experiences of the Resistance with an unrivalled immediacy.

Part Two focuses on Hood's career in the media, with reminiscences of his time at the BBC and at the Royal College of Art, as well as an assessment of his contribution to media studies and particularly

the academic analysis of television. In Chapter 5, “A Revolutionary at the BBC: Stuart Hood as I Knew Him,” Tony Garnett remembers the time he spent with Hood in the 1960s, emphasising Hood’s pivotal role in opening a space for left-wing initiatives to flourish at the BBC. Haim Bresheeth met Hood about a decade after Garnett, and in Chapter 6, “Stuart Hood: Memoir of a Friendship,” he illuminates Hood’s gifts as a teacher, as well as his principled and sustained critique of Zionism. Like Garnett, Bresheeth was struck by the complexity of Hood’s character, observing that “he was really a cluster of identities in one, a most complex, multifarious personality—with *personae*, sensitivities and aptitudes, seldom to be found in a single person.”<sup>5</sup> But (also like Garnett) Bresheeth insists that Hood’s complexity never diluted his radical sensibility, his readiness to criticise new forms of domination, pre-eminently the state of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians. To illustrate, Bresheeth quotes from *The Holocaust for Beginners* (1994, co-authored with Hood), which concludes, “Israel has adopted the role of ‘Speaker for the Jewish Dead’ and custodian of the Holocaust as a perfect ideological justification for its less-than-benign policies and actions in the Middle East.”<sup>6</sup>

In the final chapter on Hood and the media, David Hutchison provides an analysis of the influential books on television that Hood wrote, co-authored or edited after he had stopped working for the BBC and Rediffusion—*A Survey of Television* (1967), *The Mass Media* (1972), *Radio and Television* (1975), *On Television* (four editions between 1980 and 1997), *Questions of Broadcasting* (1990, co-authored with Garret O’Leary) and the edited collection, *Behind the Screens* (1994). Hutchison argues that Hood’s unique position as a radical “insider” at the BBC enabled him to develop a powerful critique of television and the mass media in Britain that is still pertinent today. Referring in particular to the fourth edition of *On Television* (co-authored with Thalia Tabary-Peterssen), Hutchison concludes that Hood’s criticisms are more urgent now than ever: the threat posed by the market to public service broadcasting continues to grow; the Executive Board of the BBC (a replacement of the Board of Governors and the BBC Trust) is increasingly supine and timorous; the bureaucratisation of all the large television organisations inhibits creativity and risk-taking; a two-tier system determined by the viewers’ ability to pay for access to programmes has become entrenched; ownership of television companies by US multinationals is on the rise; and the BBC’s failure to address properly allegations of bias during the recent referenda on Scottish independence and Brexit attests to a malfunctioning public sphere.

Part Three comprises two chapters: Chapter 8 is a re-edited version of a long interview Robert Lumley conducted with Hood in the 1980s, and Chapter 9, “A Dreamer in Broad Daylight: Stuart Hood,” is Lumley’s reflections on the interview three decades later. Lumley recorded eleven hours of interview with Hood in four sessions over eighteen months—on 19 October 1984, 29 October 1985, 26 November 1985, and 21 April 1986—and they were then edited and published in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1988. Responding to Lumley’s questions, Hood reflects self-critically on his life and career in chronologically sequenced sections—“A Scottish Childhood,” “University and the Communist Party,” “War and the Army,” “A Partisan in Italy,” “Berlin Encounter with the Russians,” “Working at the BBC,” “Writing and Translating,” “Before and After ’68,” and “Remembering Scotland.” In Chapter 9, Lumley identifies certain themes in Hood’s life that stand out even more clearly in retrospect: that “he seemed to grow more radical, rather than more conservative, as he aged”; that his relationships with institutions, from the Army to the BBC to the Royal College of Art to the Workers Revolutionary Party, were always uneasy, as “[a]t various times the tension between the public performance and the inner person became unsustainable”; and that “Hood seems to have been pulled between a desire to belong and the search for autonomy and freedom.”<sup>7</sup>

Part Four concludes the collection, focusing on Hood as translator and novelist, and comprises three chapters, the first by Stephen Watts and David Johnson on Hood’s many translations of European texts, and the final two on Hood’s novels—Alan Riach’s “Stuart Hood: Literature, Media and Politics in Modern Scotland,” and David Johnson’s “Stuart Hood’s Search for Community: Novels beyond the Nation.” Watts and Johnson emphasise how central translation was to Hood, starting out with what he described as his “bilingual” childhood in the north-east of Scotland; continuing as a major preoccupation in his friendships with Sorley MacLean and Hugh MacDiarmid in Edinburgh in the 1930s; intensifying in Italy during the Resistance when his mastery of Italian was key to his survival; and consolidated after the war when between 1947 and 1995 he translated about forty major texts from Italian, German, French and Russian. The chapter dwells in greater detail on his translations of Ernst Jünger, Erich Fried, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Dario Fo.

Riach emphasises the polymathic dimension of Hood’s abilities, arguing that more than any other intellectual of his time, Hood understood the relationship between the claims of literature and the arts, on the one hand, and the mass media, on the other. Analysing Hood’s novels *A Storm from Paradise* and *The Brutal Heart* in relation to the work of several of

his contemporaries—Brecht, MacDiarmid, Orwell and Fried—as well as to his successors like James Robertson, Ali Smith and Jackie Kay, Riach demonstrates Hood’s continuing relevance and his prescience. Continuing with a sympathetic discussion of recent figures who have reiterated Hood’s arguments for the radical reform of the Scottish media, Riach concludes, “We could do a lot worse than go back to Stuart Hood. Or rather, better, we could make certain that we have Stuart Hood with us, as we go forward.”<sup>8</sup>

In the final chapter, David Johnson discusses the five novels Hood wrote in his seventies (between 1985 and 1995), arguing that they speak eloquently for a generation of radical European intellectuals who came to political consciousness in the 1930s, and who tried to live out their formative commitments in the much-changed world of post-war Europe. Johnson’s point of departure is Hood’s acknowledgement in *Carlino* “there was nothing I wished more than to be drawn into a fuller community,”<sup>9</sup> and he argues that the protagonists in Hood’s novels—versions of himself—grapple with how the radical individual might (or might not) “be drawn into” proximate communities. The chapter concludes that notwithstanding the terrible political reverses of the post-war decades, Hood never abandoned the lessons of solidarity and struggle he learned during his time in the Italian Resistance, and that even in these final novels he continued to identify with new forms of resistance and sought connections with emergent if imperfect forms of radical community.

At the conferences held in 2015 to commemorate the centenary of Hood’s birth, Tony Garnett delivered a keynote address, concluding with a tribute to Hood that this collection seeks to elaborate:

[M]aybe he was just a bright, perceptive actor, bounced around by events, trying to make sense of that terrible twentieth century. ... His life encompassed most of that century. Two terrible wars devastating Europe, a Bolshevik revolution in Russia, its corruption into Stalinism, a devastating world slump, the rise of the Nazis and unimaginable acts of atrocity, a post-war attempt to rethink socialist possibilities. A man whose socialist principles were inevitably fixed in the 30s slump, trying to make his way through the minefield of choices and the bitter disappointments familiar to everyone on the left. But if he was just a man of his time ... what a time! And what a man!<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

1. Stuart Hood, *Carlino* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985), 144.
2. Marc Karlin, James Leahy and Julian Petley, "Outside the Wire: Interview with Stuart Hood," *Vertigo* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993).
3. Brian Winston, "Stuart Hood. Maverick BBC TV Executive who Escaped into Academia," *Guardian*, December 22, 2011; "Stuart Hood," *Times*, January 20, 2012; Vincent Porter, "Hood, Stuart Clink (1915–2011)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/104581>.
4. Stuart Hood, "The Landscape in the Mind," in *Roots in a Northern Landscape. Celebrations of a Childhood in the North East of Scotland*, ed. W. Gordon Lawrence (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996), 63.
5. Haim Bresheeth, see Chapter 6.
6. Haim Bresheeth, Stuart Hood and Litza Jansz, *Holocaust for Beginners* (London: Icon Books, 1994), 171.
7. Robert Lumley, see Chapter 9.
8. Alan Riach, see Chapter 11.
9. Hood, *Carlino*, 132.
10. Tony Garnett, see Chapter 5.



**PART ONE:**  
**BEHIND ENEMY LINES**

## CHAPTER ONE

# “IN THE SHADOW OF FASCISM AND WAR.” A VILLAGE DOMINIE’S SON AND HIS PLACE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY HISTORICAL MEMORY<sup>1</sup>

TERRY BROTHERSTONE

Sebastian Faulks’ novel *Paris Echo* features an American academic researching the experience of women in France during the wartime Vichy years. Locating an archive of testimonies—recorded memories—she looks for a still-living subject whose life, whose recollections of what happened to her and what she thought about it, seem to have more than particular significance. She wants to find a witness “whose experiences might illuminate the whole period,” whom she can meet and re-interview, and “make discoveries” of her own—leading her more profoundly to empathise with, and understand, “the whole period.”<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hood’s, I believe, was such a life; and in his case “the whole period” embraces an entire historical age. His story, I want to suggest, can be an inspiration to think anew about how that age should most meaningfully be remembered.

Hood’s life was touched by—and touched—many of the great matters of the twentieth century, including two world wars; the outcome of the Russian Revolution; the rise of fascism and the struggle against it; the impact of mass communications; and the politics of the post-imperial United Kingdom as the social-democratic “Welfare State” decades morphed into the era of Thatcherite and post-Thatcher “neoliberalism.” He is no longer a living witness who can be re-interviewed, but those of us who met him when he was can use our own powers of recall, recapturing—to use his own metaphor—some of “the pebbles in our skulls” to put on record as much as possible of what we gleaned from him. And the potential for illumination Hood’s story offers is all the greater because, as many of the essays in this book testify, he led a far from usual life, made experiences that, in their totality at least, were surely unique, and held—and articulated—ideas about the trajectory of his times that were far from

orthodox. Trying better to understand him is not only fascinating in itself. It also challenges us to rethink our ideas about the twentieth century and about its significance for defining and confronting the tasks posed for us—and for a new generation of scholars and political activists—in the twenty-first.

### *Il partigiano scozzese:* a Scot in contemporary Italian history

The doyen of anglophone historians of contemporary Italy, Paul Ginsborg, begins his classic work on the country since the Second World War very precisely “at midday” on 9 September 1943. It was then, he writes, on “the day after the armistice had been declared between the Italian king ... and the Allies” that “a young Scottish prisoner of war, Stuart Hood”—along with his fellow POWs—was released from a camp for captured officers near Parma.<sup>3</sup> The ensuing story of Hood as a fighter with the Tuscan partisans—in the area he is still memorialised, slightly inaccurately, as “*il capitano inglese*”—is told elsewhere in this book. In itself it establishes his place in the history of the war. But this was not what attracted Ginsborg, whose focus was rather on Hood’s depiction—in his self-reflexive and theoretically sophisticated war memoir, *Pebbles from My Skull* (also republished under the title *Carlino*, his Tuscan *nom de guerre*)—of the society he encountered as, in the autumn of 1943 and into the winter, he headed south over the mountains with a fellow-escapee. Hood’s sensitivity to the lives—and the way of life—of the Italian peasants who made their survival possible makes his account a valuable source for the mid-twentieth-century social history of rural Italy. He could speak their language and even engage with their distinctive dialect. He was able to forge more than superficial and pragmatic relationships.<sup>4</sup> His evocative descriptions reflect a literary talent already noted by intellectual associates in Scotland and later to be demonstrated in his post-war careers as documentarist and novelist. But his profound empathy with an embattled peasant society was born of his origins and upbringing.

Hood’s earliest years were spent in the north-east Scottish village of Edzell, just south of “the Howe of the Mearns,” where, in the early 1930s, James Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassie Gibbon) based *Sunset Song*, the first novel in his much-admired trilogy, *A Scots Quair*.<sup>5</sup> Over the three volumes, Mitchell tells a story that begins in a rural society where pre-modern ways prevailed well into the twentieth century, following his characters through the 1914–18 war, into a small town at the time of the 1926 General Strike and on to an industrial city in the early 1930s. To read

it is to understand better something of the social transition Stuart Hood had lived through before *his* war brought him into contact with the Tuscan peasants; and why he was able to relate to them so well.

In this personal essay—informed by my own memories of discussions with Hood that took place between the latter 1980s and the beginning of the twenty-first century—I want to reflect on his recollections of his two-and-a-half decades in Edzell, Montrose and Edinburgh, before his experiences as an anti-fascist fighter and Italian *partigiano* changed his life.<sup>6</sup> His north-east Scotland origins and the intellectual and political choices he made during his Edinburgh University years were, I believe, to remain fundamental to the sense of identity and purpose that informed the rest of his life. At university—where he studied, he was to recall, “in the shadow of fascism and war”—he developed into a multi-faceted, linguistically-skilled intellectual with wide literary and cultural interests; and joined the Communist Party, identifying particularly with the internationalism of the working-class people he met who willingly contributed much they could ill afford to send aid to the Republican fighters in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>7</sup>

To many who knew him later in life, Stuart Hood remained, as Tony Garnett’s essay engagingly evokes, something of a mystery. A decorated war hero (a designation he would, I think, have vehemently rejected), Hood went on to a distinguished career at the BBC, rising to be Controller of the Television Service during the director-generalship of the moderniser, Hugh Carleton Greene, who admired and promoted him; and overseeing the new programming ethos that paved the way for the inspirational social radicalism, in the latter 1960s and 1970s, of the *Wednesday Play* and *Play for Today* series.<sup>8</sup> After his peremptory resignation from the BBC in May 1964 he had—as the editors’ introduction stresses—a multi-faceted career. His was a life of varied experience and many-sided achievement—lived, if not exactly in the limelight, at least in the public’s peripheral vision. Yet it received relatively little recognition in his lifetime, certainly in his Scottish homeland; and when he died in Brighton early in 2011, aged 95, it was to be many months before the news became public and an obituary appeared in a major newspaper.<sup>9</sup> The delay perhaps placed a final question-mark on an enigmatic life, the significance of which deserves the critical discussion this book encourages.

### **Briefing encounters**

When Hood died, I was one of those who, to my regret, had fallen out of touch with him. I had been able to engage with him, however, at a period

when, in his eighth and ninth decades, he was in reflective mode—about his own roots; about the country to which, after he left for war in February 1940, he never returned to live; and about the century with which his life had been almost coterminous. In June 1988 a reflective, autobiographical television documentary film about his roots—*A View from Caterthun*—was shown on the UK’s Channel 4. At much the same time he had worked with Robert Lumley on a biographical interview, partially republished in Chapter 8 below; and earlier in the decade he had recorded his wartime memories at the Imperial War Museum’s Oral History Department. He had also, by the time I talked to him, begun work on an autobiography he later hoped—he wrote to me in 2000—would appear under the title *The Seeds of Time*, but which fell afoul of the finances of the potential publisher, who later mislaid it; and he had returned to writing fiction, much of it driven by intriguing allusions to episodes in his own life.<sup>10</sup>

Although I first met Hood in the latter 1980s, his work had influenced me much earlier. I had speculated about whether his resignation from the BBC in 1964 was in some way related to his role in promoting refreshingly innovative programmes—revelatory for someone like me, whose adolescence was suffered in the cultural conservatism of 1950s Edinburgh—including *Z Cars* and *That Was The Week That Was*. I had found *Pebbles from My Skull* a challenging but revelatory read, having myself been weaned on more conventional stories by, or about, British war heroes. And when I began to understand that commitment to socialism meant more than voting Labour, Hood’s 1967 BBC documentary *The Trial of Daniel and Sinyavsky*, the Soviet oppositionists, was a factor in persuading me that its achievement would be impossible without a serious left-wing critique of Stalinism.<sup>11</sup> In 1970, Hood’s essay on the dire state of Scottish television in Karl Miller’s *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland* alerted me to the fact that, exiled from the country of his birth though he was, he remained engaged, emotionally as well as intellectually, with its affairs—although in a way that distinguished between a sense of “Scottishness” and nationalism.<sup>12</sup> Then, in 1973, I became aware that, like me, he had joined the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League (SLL). At the time, after a period of relentless activism—I had joined in my mid-twenties—I was contemplating giving up. Learning that Hood had become a member—a mature and hugely experienced man in his late fifties, with whom, as a fellow Scot, I felt a particular sense of intellectual engagement—seemed a compelling reason not to do so.

When Hood joined the SLL during the turbulent death-throes of the 1970–4 government of Edward Heath, it was in the process of “transforming” itself into the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), in

anticipation of an imminent British-based revolution.<sup>13</sup> Whether or not Hood was fully convinced about that, he served on the editorial board of, and contributed articles to, the WRP's theoretical journal *Labour Review* for several years before leaving the organisation. And he took an interest again when the WRP effectively collapsed in 1985, mired in revelations about the sexual corruption of its leader, Gerry Healy, and disoriented when its revolution-in-our-time illusions were shattered by its failure to have any serious influence in the year-long British miners' strike.<sup>14</sup>

My own occasional—but far from casual—discussions with Hood began after my review of his novel, *A Storm from Paradise*, appeared early in 1986 in the weekly *Workers Press*, to which some of those committed to learning the lessons of the WRP experience contributed. He wrote to me, replying to my question about whether I had understood the novel with a friendly affirmative; and we subsequently met several times north and south of the border.<sup>15</sup> In *A View from Caterthun*, Hood summarised his working life since the war. It had involved:

A career in broadcasting, what they nowadays call the communications industry. Rising to a position of power in the BBC. Abdicating from it. Earning my living writing scripts, plays, books, novels, and an autobiography about my months behind the lines with the Italian peasants and partisans. Becoming an academic, teaching the young, learning from them.

For him, I guess, aside from our shared interest in the WRP and in, as he put it in the film, being “Scottish whatever that may mean,” I was one of many acquaintances who afforded him opportunities—through invitations to the University of Aberdeen where I lectured in history—to learn from the young and also to engage in discussions with colleagues about memory, the war, and the media.<sup>16</sup> He came twice to the university, first to address a student social-science class about media theory and practice and to converse at an open seminar on issues raised by other aspects of his life, including Scottish intellectual discourse in the 1930s; and, on the second occasion, to participate in an oral-history conference, where—along with two of the international pioneers of the modern discipline, Paul Thompson and Alessandro Portelli—he was a keynote speaker.<sup>17</sup> Our other meetings, over a decade and a half or so, were informal ones in Edinburgh, London and, on one occasion, at his home in Brighton.

## The High Street in Edzell

In September 1943, Hood had marched out of an Italian POW camp into the mountains of northern Tuscany. Some 45 years later he was again on the march into the countryside, this time on a journey of return to the locations from which, as a young man, he had effected a very different escape—from the constraints of his childhood and adolescent homes. *A View from Caterthun* begins with the striking image of a windswept 72-year-old, still lean and active, striding out purposefully towards a substantial mound in a deserted landscape, climbing it and addressing the camera. He starts philosophically:

Memory is very fallible. When you go further back into childhood ... [it] is extremely selective. Things that surprised or hit one stand out in some way. I think I've got very clear memories of Caterthun—the bridge and the moor. Of course things have changed. But my memory of them, of where to go and so forth, that is quite clearly in place.

As the camera focuses on the top of the mound, Hood locates it with characteristic topographical precision:

Caterthun—an iron-age hill fort in what used to be the county of Angus, in north-east Scotland; map reference, N.O. 548660. Two enormous, eccentric stone circle walls enclose an oval area about 150 metres by 67 metres. The entrance is on the south-east. Maybe the Picts, that mysterious people, lived here 2,000 years ago ...

A cut to a train travelling from London follows and Hood introduces himself, going on to say that the journey north has reminded him of how in his youth he went in the opposite direction—“to excitements, cinemas, theatres and art galleries ... [and] demonstrations in Trafalgar Square in support of the Spanish Republic.” Then, standing in Edinburgh’s Waverley station, he recalls how, in 1940, his journey away from Scotland started there. It was a “place of wartime farewells” in the city where he had been “a student in the thirties ... in the shadow of fascism and war.” But he is returning to Caterthun, he says, because it is his reference-point for memory. He went there often as a youngster, “partly just to career down on my bike, partly for the view.” In a later essay, he writes that the place provided a strategic vantage-point from which to recall his childhood sense of wonder. This was where he would want his ashes scattered. In the film, as the camera sweeps over the surrounding country he defines the world he grew up in and the place of his family in it:

To the north, beyond the hills of Glenesk, Aberdeen—with its fish-laden quays. To the south, Dundee—with its jute mills and slums and wealth. To the east, Montrose—with its tidal basin and beaches and dunes, where I passed my years of adolescence. At my feet, Edzell, which was a village of a couple of thousand souls—with its farms and its village streets and two smithies. Here my father was headmaster in the local school.

A few years later, he was to write, with engaged eloquence, about his awareness of the continuing influence of his early years on a life that had taken a course (or courses), which, in his youth and adolescence, could not have been predicted. Referencing Wordsworth's belief in the ennobling nature of the countryside, he acknowledged his good fortune in having spent his first eleven years "free to play in [Edzell's] surrounding fields and woods" and "by the river that runs past the village."<sup>18</sup> But he was quick to recognise the social contradiction the poet had ignored.

I cannot believe ... that my experience of the countryside bore any relationship to that of the ploughmen's children with whom I went to school. They came from bare cottar houses set usually in bleak gardens where the stalks of sprouts, kale and cabbages were often the only vegetation ... [and] had to walk two, three, even four miles to school where in winter they arrived soaked.<sup>19</sup>

And he recalled how his school-fellows would avoid casual encounters with his father, whose strict classroom discipline they had to endure; how he would see their families move house in carts loaded with their few sticks of furniture; and how, cycling carefree, he would pass the fields in which they were being exploited as cheap labour.

The sense of nature as—for Wordsworth—full of "ready wealth our minds and souls to bless," and for himself a source of discovery and freedom, must, he reflected, have been very different for them.<sup>20</sup> Yet he respected their rural skills, such as "guddling" trout, and their lack of sentimentality as they lived with the realities of rural life, where lambs were "libbed," and a hen would have its neck "thrawn."<sup>21</sup> All this was to have a lasting influence on his linguistic and social awareness.<sup>22</sup> He learned early, through experience, that it is possible to say and understand the same thing in more than one language.<sup>23</sup> And he acquired a natural consciousness of class and its complexities that was reinforced by the annual influx of well-off summer visitors who invaded the locals' favourite spots, earning contempt for having nannies: the young Hood and his friends would take part in riverside sorties, where they would punish the superior holiday-makers "for their otherness" by swinging on the bridge's cables, forcing them to cling fearfully to the sides.<sup>24</sup>

This was the Edzell Hood recalled as he returned to his Caterthun vantage-point for his late-1980s documentary. And he concluded his introduction to the film with “one very curious thing.” It might stand as epigraph for this book. Over an aerial shot of the long, straight road that runs through the village, Hood revealed that:

[T]hroughout my life, wherever I happened to be—in the Libyan desert for instance—trying to work out north, south, east and west, I always did it in relation to the High Street in Edzell because it points due north. I seemed to use it like a compass with which to orient myself.<sup>25</sup>

In Stuart Hood’s life there were, I think, to be many moments when he seemed—sometimes wilfully—to be cast adrift and in need of a new sense of direction. It was perhaps not only in a topographical sense that he found himself relying on reflections about his origins in a Scottish village. He was a man who, having escaped from his background, often found himself thinking about how it had shaped him.

### **Towards the wider world**

In the latter 1920s, when Hood was twelve, his father was appointed to the Academy in the coastal fishing port of Montrose, fifteen miles east of Edzell. The family’s move meant that the teenage Hood had to handle the confusions of adolescence in a new environment. Nearby though the town was, he had only once been taken there before the move; and living in the town was very different from the rural isolation of Edzell. On the line from Aberdeen to Edinburgh and London, Montrose had a busy railway station where fish-boxes awaited loading on to trains already smelling of catches from further north *en route* to metropolitan markets. In the nineteenth century the town had established itself as a reliable base for Liberal politicians and some of its MPs—such as the mid-century radical Joseph Hume, and, from 1896 to 1908, the cabinet minister and biographer of W. E. Gladstone, John Morley—had been distinguished enough to afford the place national recognition. For the adolescent Hood, the “snorting power” of the green-liveried steam-engines of the London and North Eastern Railway were soon to symbolise a new connectedness with the wider world—“they were the machines that would one day take me to Edinburgh, to London, to freedom.”<sup>26</sup> His first visit to London, however, was by sea. Around the time of the move to Montrose, he was taken on a long-promised voyage to Tilbury, fulfilling his father’s desire to visit Dr. Johnson’s London house, and leaving the young Hood with the memory of an “overwhelming sensation ... of excitement.”<sup>27</sup>

That anticipation of the freedom to come, however, was, at the time, small compensation for the freedom he missed—the freedom of the fields. He found consolation in his discovery of the sea. He was to remember new sounds, sights and experiences—the lapping and pounding of the waves, the flights of wild geese and the Montrose fishing-boats on which he would hitch rides. His new social environment brought him into contact with more people than in Edzell, but his sense of aloneness remained: the town's society was not easy for the newcomers, lacking in urban social skills, to penetrate. Although he had greater contact with schoolmates and played golf with them, he did not fit naturally into their established networks and still felt—as he also told Bob Lumley (see Chapter 8)—an outsider.<sup>28</sup>

At Montrose Academy, nevertheless, he excelled. His school record, his former headmaster was to affirm in a reference to the BBC in 1946, was outstanding: he had won awards in Latin, English, French and German.<sup>29</sup> This educational achievement was to take him to Edinburgh University; and it was a school trip that afforded him his first real contact with the world outside north-east Scotland, when, in 1932 he went with a party of fellow-pupils to Germany. It was an experience, he told me, of which he had two abiding memories. The first was of brown-shirted German youths marching enthusiastically and singing vigorously round a campfire, their sense of purpose in sharp contrast with the Scots boys' ragged parade and lack of a choral repertoire beyond half-remembered renderings of *Auld Lang Syne*. The second was of an encounter with a Hamburg docker who kept himself apart from the uniformed teenagers, eyeing them with circumspection. The significance of the worker's aloofness from militaristic display hit home the following year when the Nazis came to power.

If it was his academic qualifications that took Hood away from home—to higher education and new realms of intellectual and cultural discovery—he nonetheless continued to value what he had learnt amongst the village-folk and in the countryside around Edzell and in the seaside environment of Montrose. In these places—especially the first—he had been formed, his intellect had been awakened and his historical imagination had been fired. From his Caterthun vantage-point, he had “imagine[d] Roman galleys sailing up off-shore in support of the legions ... before they marched on to the battle of Mons Graupius ...” And in the surrounding countryside he had also “learned to be observant ... aware of a sudden movement ... that betrayed a bird when it broke from cover; to know that a rabbit or a hare would squat unmoving ... until you almost

trod on it ...”<sup>30</sup> Fighting a guerrilla war behind German lines in northern Italy in 1944, he was to be grateful for such skills.

### Paradise lost

Stuart Hood, wrote George Davie to Christopher Grieve in August 1936, “is having a nasty time this summer.” Having taken a vacation job at a local factory, he was living in the parental home in Montrose, from which “sober chaste & bourgeois ménage,” however, he had come close to being banished by his father—in part, it may be speculated, because, as Davie also reported, he was associating with the local members of the Communist Party, which he had joined in Edinburgh.<sup>31</sup> Davie was to become a distinguished philosopher and controversial historian of nineteenth-century Scottish higher education; Grieve was of course the poet Hugh MacDiarmid—the founding figure in the post-First-World-War “Scottish Renaissance”—whose political allegiances led to his expulsion from the National Party of Scotland, forerunner of today’s Scottish National Party (SNP) as a declared Communist in 1933; to his joining the Communist Party of Great Britain (CP) the next year; and then, in 1938, to his expulsion from the CP on grounds of his Scottish nationalism.<sup>32</sup> In reporting to MacDiarmid about Hood’s domestic problems, Davie’s letter draws attention to three interrelated themes in the story of the dominie’s son between his departure from north-east Scotland for university in the autumn of 1934 and his setting off to war in February 1940.

These were years in which, first, he was growing in cultural and intellectual maturity beyond the influence of his father;<sup>33</sup> in which, second, he had significant involvement with the generation of young Scottish intellectuals for whom MacDiarmid was a key figure and whose work was to play its part in informing a post-imperial identity in Scotland that eschewed ethnicity and atavistic romanticism to help forge a form of civic nationalism fundamental to understanding Scottish politics today; and in which, third, he discovered Marxism and joined the Communist Party. Some of Hood’s more traumatic war memories—discussed in Hilary Horrocks’ essay—were to echo hauntingly in the novels he wrote in the 1950s and in the 1980s and 1990s. But his attempts posthumously to get under his father’s skin and his early involvement with left-wing politics are major informing themes in his fictions too—particularly *A Storm from Paradise*, which centres on an intriguingly fictionalised but clearly recognisable portrait of his father; and *The Upper Hand*, in which he turns himself into an elusive “double” following a path through university and the war constantly alluding to his own experience. And his fascination

with—“whatever [it] may mean”—being Scottish also provides a recurring reference-point. The way in which he saw himself as a Scottish writer was something he discussed illuminatingly in his interview with Lumley.<sup>34</sup>

\* \* \*

When, soon after *A Storm from Paradise* was published, Hood made *A View from Caterthun*, he was filmed in the village classroom over which his real father had ruled—much modified but still recognisable from his days there as a pupil—recollecting, in an imagined Proustian moment, the smell of damp outdoor clothes drying by what had then been an open fire. And he had many other parental memories. His father was a man who seldom openly displayed emotion; but there had been a time when he visited his second son in Edinburgh which ended in shared tears. The father had come to try to understand why—sometime after that difficult summer of 1936—his son had told his parents he planned in future to spend vacations with his girlfriend, Louise, with whom he shared many tastes and intellectual and cultural interests; and that a modest annual allowance would cover his university fees and upkeep, in return for which he would make no further demands on them. The emotional encounter apparently led to no immediate reconciliation. Hood seems to have seen little of his parents for some time thereafter, although, when he and Louise—convinced that Neville Chamberlain’s “peace in our time” speech after the 1938 Munich Agreement prefigured the opposite—decided to marry, they dutifully came to the wedding.<sup>35</sup> But it perhaps foreshadowed a longer-term understanding reflected in the way Hood sympathetically offered his father the possibility of a fictional—and more rewarding—alternative life in the novel.<sup>36</sup>

In his interview with Lumley, Hood recounts how Field Marshal Montgomery’s intelligence chief provided him with a reference for the BBC, in which he described him as “the best type of Scot”: on seeing that, Hood’s first thought, he told me, was of his father—a man who would always pay his bills by return of post. And when, in the 1980s, he was asked to lecture on Lord Reith’s legacy at the BBC, Hood’s point of reference was his own upbringing, comparable, he believed, with the Presbyterian rigour that underpinned Reith’s uncompromising public morality. In his mind, he recalled, was the then-current Oscar-winning film *Chariots of Fire*—the story of the Sabbatarian Scots runner Eric Liddell, who, in 1924, refused the near-certainty of a 100-metres Olympic gold medal because the race was scheduled on a Sunday. Hood thought the film overrated—shown around the time of the 1982 war over *Las Islas Malvinas* (the Falklands), it was like a costume drama with added

jingoism—but it depicted accurately the cultural background he thought he shared with both Liddell and Reith.

There was another side, however, to Hood’s reflections on his father’s legacy. The dominie’s respectable orthodoxy concealed the critical mind of a man who, although his position demanded he be a church elder, was not a believer and who had wide intellectual interests. Outside of the home and the classroom, Hood’s father gave lantern lectures on topics that brought wider global perspectives to the villagers; and his substantial library, with its obviously much-read and well-studied editions of classics in several languages—many containing critical, marginal annotations—were to be a source of fascination for his son. As Hood told Lumley, some volumes were read and re-read to the point of destruction.

### **Intellectual and political choices**

The intellectual and political awakening that lay behind Hood’s break with his parents derived not so much from his experience of the teaching at Edinburgh University as from his dissatisfaction with it. Much of it, he told me, was uninspiring and he had the impression that little had changed since Robert Louis Stevenson’s student years in the 1860s and 1870s. The first-year classes in French and German seem to have contributed little to his already considerable linguistic skills and an antiquarian history curriculum, in which texts like the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle were approached without reference to their social context, bored him. He was attracted instead to “Rhetoric”—English literature—and lectures by the internationally distinguished critic, Herbert Grierson and the Shakespearean scholar, John Dover Wilson.<sup>37</sup> His switch from languages to study for an honours degree in English, moreover, was to have the subsequently significant additional benefit that it led him to attend Italian classes so that he could study Chaucer’s use of Dante and Boccaccio by reference to the original. And, as he moved into his honours years (the third and fourth in a Scottish university), his growing interest in Marxism could discreetly inform his essays, not least because—as he also told Lumley—the university at the time had on its staff a well-known Marxist professor, the distinguished archaeologist Vere Gordon Childe, making it difficult for other lecturers, despite their antipathy, to dismiss anything that smacked of materialism as illegitimate.<sup>38</sup> You could at least, Hood told me, make the case that Milton had to be understood in the context of the English Revolution, and that Romanticism was not something aspiring poets caught like the flu.

But it was in extra-curricular activities that he made his most significant discoveries. The Lumley interviews give a good sense of this. What he told me led me to reflect that bourgeois Edinburgh—where, as Hood remembered it, periodic fits of public philistinism attended events like an exhibition of Paul Klee paintings he had admired—was an excellent environment in which to learn to think independently and critically about what he was seeing, watching and hearing. Art, film and music all contributed to his enlightenment. He read art critics like Roger Fry and the Communist, Christopher Caudwell. He attended the Edinburgh Film Guild, seeing John Grierson's, W. H. Auden-scripted and Benjamin Britten-scored *Night Mail*, and other documentaries like Grierson's *Drifters* and Robert Flaherty's *Men of Aran*. At the time these films seemed like revelatory exemplars of the realistic possibilities of the medium, though Hood was later to reassess them, realising that Grierson's depiction of fisherfolk celebrated "the dignity of labour" but ignored the realities of pay and conditions; while Flaherty's film, in great part, was simply, Hood came to think, a mendacious fiction. Hood's first experiences of the concert hall came when he heard Edinburgh's Reid Orchestra under the internationally known composer and conductor, Donald Tovey. His cultural domain stretched across the central belt of Scotland to Glasgow where he particularly recalled an exhibition of modern French art, and later to London.<sup>39</sup>

Hood's intellectual interests brought him into contact with other aspiring young Scottish *philosophes*, for some of whom MacDiarmid was a key inspiration. Having met Hood, MacDiarmid clearly saw him as a potential disciple and, just before the war, the poet offered to lend the younger man material in his possession on John Maclean. Maclean was the "Red Clydesider," Marxist schoolteacher, who had died prematurely—a martyr, many thought to his role in the class struggle—in 1923. In the 1930s, MacDiarmid was pursuing his "Red Scotland" line and encouraging interest in Maclean, who had been made Soviet consul in Glasgow in 1918 and imprisoned for "seditiously" opposing the 1914–18 war and promoting working-class solidarity with the Bolshevik Revolution, but who had never joined the British CP, believing a Scottish revolution was a more immediate possibility than one dependent on England. On a Cornish holiday in late July 1939, Hood wrote to Grieve, responding to an offer to lend him the material on Maclean: he would be glad to have it when he was back in Edinburgh and wanted to improve his knowledge of Scottish history—"enshrouded in mysteries" though it was, many of the clues to its significance having "been concealed by someone