***Autarchies: The Invention of Selfishness*. David Ashford. London: Bloomsbury, 2017. Pp. 208 (cloth).**

Reviewed by Henry Mead (Tallinn University)

Autarchies traces the influence of Max Stirner's egoist philosophy on modernisms including Parisian Dada, Ezra Pound's Imagism, and Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism. Modernist interactions with anarchist journals and networks have been traced notably by Michael Levenson, David Kadlec, Bruce Clarke, and Allan Antliff. These studies have established Stirner among the canon of modernist forebears, yet his legacy remains somewhat spectral, owing perhaps to the recalcitrance of his thought and the uncompromising minds he tended to inspire.

David Ashford's study sheds new light on modernism's "selfish streak," an egoism at odds with its reactionary reputation; indeed, the early-twentieth-century avant-garde anticipated post-modernist anti-foundationalism by many years. Ashford adds a new note in proposing that modernist studies can, by tracing this elusive seam, reveal a "fountainhead" for post-war libertarianism. The intermediary linking pre-war modernism to contemporary neo-liberalism is Ayn Rand. Her under-explored debt to Stirner, traced here to her formative studies in Russia, is seen as a dialectical key to her later egoism. Her novels, expanding on this idea, were taken up enthusiastically by readers of Friedman and Hayek, fuelling the free market evangelism of Reagan, Thatcher and ultimately Donald Trump.

This twist to earlier genealogies may provoke those who find modernism's redeeming feature in its early "verse revolutionaries." Imagism's war on abstraction, pursued in anti-statist radical journals, sought expressive integrity through newly coined metaphor: a consoling obverse to the fascist Pound. And yet the latter was in time another product of this milieu. Ideas can be put to many uses; one can readily affirm that Rand's objectivism is one such response to modernity, but other ideologies grew from the same intellectual stem. Early modernism's stress on psychological authenticity is surely also echoed in the recent post-liberal

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disaffection with free market globalisation and new emphases on localised cultures.

In Michael Levenson's influential account, modernism was individualist before it was authoritarian, anarchist before it was conservative. Imagist poetry stands out as a prime example of the first phase. Ashford resolves this seeming polar shift into a process of dialectic. He distinguishes modernist egoism firmly from the "transcendental egoism" of Coleridge or Whitman, for example; this was no romantic relapse, but a "phenomenological or existential concept of self," a "perpetual self-analysis," of the type which Stirner's *The Ego and His Own* (1844) took to extremes.

To begin with, Ashford usefully recounts Stirner's Young Hegelian roots, his career, his belated influence, and his relationship to the Marxist tradition. Stirner's reception makes an intriguing history in its own right, including a high point of Parisian anarchism in the Bonnot terror gang's "illegalism," and Ashford's opening study of Stirner's influence via New York Dada on Duchamp's intriguing *Three Standard Stoppages* is vivid and persuasive. This leads into a consideration of art economics in the age of Saatchi and Hirst, hinting at the later Trumpian diminuendo.

The book's second chapter turns to London, tracing Pound's interactions with Dora Marsden, editor of the *Egoist*. The conceptual links between Pound's and Marsden's individualism are compelling: as Clarke was first to show, Marsden's interrogation of Pound's politics prompted his influential 1913 "Serious Artist" essay. As Ashford stresses, the re-naming of Marsden's *New Freewoman* as the *Egoist* in 1914 was a product of her philosophic development, not a concession to Imagist interlopers, as some have argued. We are shown in detail how, "far from being peripheral," Marsden's articles participated in a "a discourse […] vital in Modernist pre-war thought." That said, her tendency to withdraw, Stirner-like, from London networks sometimes confounds the trail—a 1913 letter to her co-editor admits a three-month delay in reading Pound's contributions: "Speak it not. He is a nice old thing"—and Marsden's later work, written in growing isolation, falls into the trap of systematising which she had earlier denounced. Yet Imagism and Egoism remain intellectual cousins, and Ashford adds much to our sense of this zeitgeisty intimacy.

The third chapter, on Wyndham Lewis, focuses initially on his play *The Enemy of the Stars*, first published in *BLAST* (1914), in which the protagonist memorably throws Stirner's book out of a window only for it to be returned by a passer-by, seemingly its author. The cameo is exemplary for Ashford of Stirner's position as a "revenant," haunting even those modernists who disavowed his influence. A close study of Lewis's resistant text—an "extraordinarily difficult piece of writing," as Ashford puts it—identifies his figure of the "shamanic" primitive as representative of the "Mongolian" phase in Stirner's history of psychological growth, a stage in which mental "spooks" are gradually exorcised. Building on Paul Edwards's reading, Ashford traces how Lewis plays Schopenhauer's will off Stirner's egoism, whereby a trace of transcendence confronts a harder nihilism. These ideas are then traced through Lewis's interwar prose leading to a consideration of Joyce's egoism that expands on work by Jean-Michel Rabaté.

The major aim of connecting pre-war avant-gardism to current libertarianism is resumed confidently in the last chapter, which excavates Rand's unexpected Hegelian debt. As Ashford shows, novels like *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) exemplify an egoist spurning of the categorical imperative, and it makes sense, though troublingly, to trace this Stirnerian message through to Reagonomics, Thatcher's denial of society, and the discouraging image of Trump. Indeed, Stirner's "war of all against all," mitigated only by his mysterious "union of egoists," is a bleak terminus offering little in the way of social reconstruction. Yet enthusiasm for Stirner in the early twentieth century occurred at a junction point for ideas leading to various destinations. The American anarchist Benjamin Tucker, at first intrigued by Stirner's re-issued treatise, later attacked Dora Marsden's *Egoist* for its resistance to societal re-organisation, as Ashford recounts. For Marsden's contemporaries, the extremes Stirner had identified as an endpoint made sense as a stage on a *via negativa*, a purgation of oppressive liberal abstractions in a process of renewed social evolution. In 1914, the *New Age* editor A. R. Orage, like Tucker, challenged Marsden's "misuse of egoism," which he described as an immature phase on a "curve" of social evolution. Such language owed much to the socialist Edward Carpenter, to whom Bruce Clarke gives much space in his seminal account of the *Egoist*'s anarchist networks. In Orage's view, the ego, once freed of conceptual encumbrances, could grow towards an authentic social re-unification that recalled Plotinus as much as Hegel. Echoes of such ideas had various results. In 1942, for example, Pound wrote in *A Visiting Card* of how "a

thousand candles together blaze with intense brightness. No one candle's light damages another's. So is the liberty of the individual in the fascist state." For its part, the *New Age*, whose networks overlapped with the *Egoist*'s, contributed to a different history of guild socialism.

For modernist scholars, this study will be of great use in unpicking an old problem: how do we reconcile modernism's early anarchist dimensions with the authoritarian reputation the movement later acquired? As Ashford notes, this ideological identity is a "back-projection" of post-modernist critiques of totalising "grand narratives," which overlook the anarchist roots of the earlier movement. But modernists also declared their conservative identity, most prominently in Eliot's calls for artistic impersonality and a sense of tradition. Somewhere in between lies an integrity of self and society conceived in terms of aesthetic equilibrium. As Michael North has observed, quoting Terry Eagleton, modernist politics seem to converge in a "dream of reconciliation," of "individuals woven into intimate unity with no detriment to their specificity, of an abstract totality suffused with all the flesh-and-blood reality of the individual being." Just as Marsden's egoism, though fitting the pattern of early modernism, was seen by contemporaries as perversely resistant to intellectual growth, so perhaps Rand's objectivism can be seen as a powerful but partial response, among many, to an alienating modernity. Ashford's study of egoism identifies a key but perhaps transitional stage of modernist ideology, among whose progeny may be some contemporary monsters. This is a challenging and stimulating work, adding much detail to a shadowy genealogy that invites still closer investigation.