

recognizable techniques and style and the whole vexed arena of authorship and authorial agency in photography. This issue of authorship is foremost to his consideration of travel photography and the work of Francis Frith, along with the anonymous photographers who helped create the corporate style of his firm's recognizable brand. Questions surrounding photographic authorship are taken up once again in a chapter that looks at some supposed photographic relics from the eighteenth century that were shown to members of the Photographic Society in London in the 1860s. As Bear shows, debates about the authorship of images, and about the origins of photography, were central to establishing the degree of authority that a photograph held, and, indeed, to determining whether that authority ultimately rested with photographer or spectator. Ultimately—and this is something that, in his conclusion, he links with much more recent photographic practices—the more challenging a photograph, the more active and discerning must be the eye that interprets it.

Moreover, not all seeing is done with the unaided eye. In his chapter on telescopic and microscopic photography, Bear considers the consequences of photography and vision becoming untethered. This development seriously challenged earlier models of vision, especially the idea of the democracy of vision—and, indeed, the democracy of the medium of photography—and drew attention to the place of the professional in visual interpretation. He sees the role held by such specialists in reading visual material as having considerable political implications on our ideas about how society is bound together: indeed, by the later nineteenth century, as seen through the lens of the history of photography, scientific, aesthetic, and vernacular audiences may already be seen as fragmenting in particular ways.

Jordan Bear has an impressive ability to make parallels between visual and social phenomena that are not necessarily obvious. Although he does not draw in any significant way upon the theories of John Ruskin, there is at times something quasi-Ruskinian about the cultural leaps and affiliations that he sees. Like Ruskin, too, he relishes in the power, flexibility, and sound of words—on occasion, one just wants him to cut to the chase. But the imaginative connections that he brings to his writing are never at the expense of sound visual history. In this excellent book, photography is never allowed to stand separate and autonomous from the societies that produced, consumed, and discussed it. In turn, photography, and the debates surrounding it, helped shape society's developing ideas about the practice of looking.

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LAURA BEERS. *Red Ellen: The Life of Ellen Wilkinson, Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2016. Pp. 568. \$29.95 (cloth).
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Through astute pen portraits of Wilkinson's mentors, acquaintances, colleagues and opponents, Laura Beers crafts an enjoyable, engaging, well-researched reconstruction of Wilkinson's life. As a fellow biographer of Wilkinson, I feel a certain kinship with Beers, so it is in that spirit that I offer my principal disagreements.

Methodologically, all of Wilkinson's biographers have to compensate for the destruction of her personal papers. Beers uses oral testimony, memoirs, and even obituaries to fill much of the evidentiary void and provide the primary interpretative grounds in *Red Ellen*. Such evidence, in my view, distorts both Wilkinson's politics and personality. Acquainted through intermediaries interviewed in the 1970s, Beers affects an intimacy with "Ellen" and reads off her politics from her personality. Moreover, the appearance of Wilkinson's nicknames in Beers's narrative

epitomizes the reduction of the complex interplay of her private-internal and performed-public selves to the routinely “fiery” heroic “Red Ellen” or “Mighty Atom.”

Representing Wilkinson as a doer, not a talker or theoretician (32, 82), Beers downplays Wilkinson’s political writings. Wilkinson’s journalism in *Labour Leader*, *New Leader*, *Clarion*, *All Power*, and *Workers’ Weekly* is not scrutinized in the same depth as the memoirs of the hostile Wright Robinson or the disparaging J. T. Walton Newbold. This unbalanced approach to sources not only serves Wilkinson’s ideas poorly but also facilitates her continued assimilation into a conventional Labor mold. Like much of the literature on Wilkinson, *Red Ellen* privileges her 1929 novel *Clash* (returned to on eleven occasions) over her political writings in the study of her ideas. This emphasis on fiction strikes me as questionable, even if the novel’s semiautobiographical aspects make it irresistible to the biographer. Meanwhile, Wilkinson’s most famous political text, *The Town That Was Murdered*, receives only a passing sentence. Beers describes *Why Fascism?*, coauthored with Edward Conze, as a “book-length tract” (all 317 pages of it), warranting less than a paragraph; their *Why War?* is entirely overlooked. This is an opportunity missed, since *Why War?* explores the aspect of Wilkinson’s politics that Beers finds most troubling and difficult to interpret: Wilkinson’s “pacifism” and attitude toward (revolutionary) violence. In these and other writings after Hitler’s accession to power until 1939–40, Wilkinson formulated a pretty consistent position. Believing the threat of fascism to be very real, she rejected both reformism and the Comintern’s line in favor of socialism based on workers’ control of production (drawing on her guild socialism) and a “real fight for power” to tackle the state and capitalist ownership of industry.

Only through an inattention to her political writings could Beers say that the Jarrow Crusade (which was not her initiative) and the Hire Purchase Act encapsulated Wilkinson’s orientation on “moderate reforms within the existing capitalist framework” (399) during the 1930s. Beers admonishes “Ellen” during the revolutionary phases of her politics, which are “uncharacteristic” (82), “childish,” “ill-conceived” (69), “naïve” (99), and “callous and irresponsible” (102). On Wilkinson’s “self-professed Marxism” (36), the discussion becomes opaque and jargon-laden (“Marx’s dialectics” [23], “economic superstructure [*sic*, 35],” “imperial-monopolists” [129]). Like Betty Vernon before her (see Vernon’s 1982 Wilkinson biography), Beers dilutes Wilkinson’s Marxism. Apparently, she was a Marxist who rapidly abandoned the defense of violent means and believed that revolution could be achieved only through the ballot box (182). Her Marxism amounted to little more than an emphasis upon economic or material factors, though this conclusion is hard to reconcile with either the description of Wilkinson’s economics as a mix of Hobson and Keynes (399) or the claim that Marxist economics were responsible for her support for selective grammar schools (447). Beers’s disinterest in Wilkinson’s Marxism obscures the distinctions within this intellectual tradition. She argues that Wilkinson supported the “Bolshevik [*sic*] leadership” (146) until the late 1930s, conflating Stalin and his Marxist opponents, among whom (although in semi-concealed form) were Willi Münzenberg and his circle. Wilkinson felt a strong bond to this transnational activist network during the late 1920s and 1930s. It had a fundamental influence upon her political outlook and activism.

Beers tends to reify (at times anachronistic) categories—pacifism, feminism, social justice, reform, “human rights activism.” Thus, both participation in Parliament (notwithstanding Wilkinson’s critique of it) and social movements (the latter repeatedly designated by Beers as movements for “reform”) indicate Wilkinson’s constitutionalism or ideological commitment to reform. Indeed, in Beers’s view, Wilkinson regarded even the Russian Revolution as the “herald of reform” (83). Equally, Beers deduces Wilkinson’s pacifism from her association with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and claims that she was a Wilsonian (no evidence offered). While the league’s consensus combined liberal internationalism, pacifism, and feminism, Wilkinson did not subscribe to this position. Her most intense involvement with this organization was during the Irish War of Independence, when she supported the Republican cause and publicly defended its use of violence to attain just aims. She

understood the league as those suffragists who had rejected the First World War, as she had, and counted on these links in relation to various causes from India to locked-out miners. More generally, she supported anticolonial movements irrespective of their attitude to violence. Indeed, Wilkinson and Conze's *Why War?* criticized the league for the futility of "educating the imperialists." Likewise, Beers's repeated use of "social justice" (a phrase that rings of contemporary nongovernmental organization activism or Rawlsian liberalism) overlooks the significance of the rare occasion that Wilkinson herself used the phrase: in a collection of Fabian essays in 1940, the very moment she assimilated into the Labor leadership and Labor's ideological mainstream.

While this biography's strength is its familiarity with British high politics, it becomes less assured elsewhere. Middlesbrough is neither a "single industry" nor a "city." Jarrow is not a port. The Flint sit-down was at Fisher/GM, not Ford. Sarojini Nehru (not Naidu) led the Women's Indian Association. Overall, then, this is a welcome contribution to the debate on this most intriguing and enigmatic of British politicians, one who continues to fascinate and inspire activists today, but it has substantial limitations. Beers succeeds in reconstructing Wilkinson's international activism, but she misses the opportunity to use the transnational approach to revise our understanding, fundamentally accepting an internationalized version of Vernon's interpretation published twenty-five years ago. That revision would have required treating Wilkinson's Labor colleagues who were casting back to their youthful reminiscences of "Red Ellen" with greater skepticism.

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DUNCAN BELL. *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. Pp. 441. \$39.50 (cloth).
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The relationship between liberalism and empire has been one of the most productive sites of scholarship in the humanities over the last decade. But work in this area is in danger of reductionism in two directions. On one hand, it is too easy to assume that once we expose the complicity of many canonical "liberal" thinkers in the justification and practice of imperialism, liberalism is doomed. Liberalism is then merely another form of imperialism, *simpliciter*. On the other hand, it is too easy to assume that we can inoculate liberal political philosophy—and liberal political practice in our public culture—from this history by acknowledging it and moving on. Reverting to conceptual analysis high above the muddy complexity of the historical grounds of liberalism will not do.

The best scholarship in this field manages to avoid both forms of reductionism and has generated some of the most original work in political theory and the history of ideas in the past decade. This superb collection of essays by Duncan Bell, with its historical breadth and theoretical sophistication, is a wonderful exemplar of such work. Bell dives deep into the historical context surrounding many of the key intellectual figures of the "Anglo-sphere" of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century political thought. In doing so, he provides an indispensable reading of an often neglected, misunderstood and complex tradition. Bell's essays include wide ranging and fascinating discussions of J. S. Mill, J. R. Seeley, T. H. Green, Herbert Spencer, and Henry Sidgwick, among others, read through the distinctive frameworks of an emerging Victorian global racial order and commonwealth settler colonialism. Each essay