

**Gendering the revolutionary subject**  
**the role of Marxist thought in Christina Stead's authorial production**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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March 1997

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1.</b>	<b>To perform, or to be performed: the subject in the social web</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 2.</b>	<b>Loving the revolutionary: the thirties</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Chapter 3.</b>	<b>Revolutionaries at the threshold in <i>House of All Nations</i></b>	<b>88</b>
	Preamble - Documenting the Bank -	
	Strange Bedfellows - The Gorgon	
<b>Chapter 4.</b>	<b>She casts herself as revolutionary: <i>The Man Who Loved Children</i></b>	<b>144</b>
	Preamble - Performance and performativity: figuring	
	revolutionary praxis - The Spectacle of Pollitry	
	- Shame and performance: Louie as revolutionary	
	figure - Closure and escape: elusive or illusory	
	freedom of the subject?	

<b>Chapter 5.</b>	<b>Females who can wreck the revolution: the American years and the postwar era</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>Chapter 6.</b>	<b>'Closeting' revolution in <i>Cotters' England</i></b>	<b>230</b>
	Preamble - Strange familiars, or the familiar estranged - True lies, secret circles: the power of (un)knowing	
<b>Chapter 7.</b>	<b>Crossing the Rubicon: abjection and revolution in <i>I'm Dying Laughing</i></b>	<b>283</b>
	Preamble - On the side of the angels - The scalpel within - Fissures in the Marxist project	
<b>Conclusion</b>		<b>334</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	1. Works by Christina Stead	<b>344</b>
	2. Secondary Reading on Christina Stead	<b>347</b>
	3. General and Critical Reading	<b>372</b>

## Abstract

### **Gendering the revolutionary subject: the role of Marxist thought in Christina Stead's authorial production**

The influence of Marxism on the authorial production of Christina Stead (1902-1983) has often been acknowledged but has been insufficiently explored, particularly in view of biographical narratives which have jeopardised the authenticity and sincerity of Stead's political views. My study, drawing on a range of Stead's fictional and non-fictional works, as well as on relevant historical sources, examines the development of Stead's authorial production over three decades, in the context of Marxist debate about the role of the revolutionary subject. My study proposes that Christina Stead's 'Marxism' is caught up within, and co-ordinated by, a wider set of social and cultural positionings. Her fictional and non-fictional texts are culturally situated or determined performances, but also dynamic and hybrid. Examination of these narratives, as well as of biographical and historical sources, shows that a Marxist system of belief and value constructs the terms of Stead's representation of subjects in ideology. Marxism, therefore, both enables and contains Stead's representation of revolution and revolutionaries.

In chapter one, I establish a theoretical and methodological frame which is both sympathetic to, and enables criticism of, Stead's political and aesthetic views, and which situates Stead's understanding of subjectivity in the context of currents of debate within Western Marxism and other contemporary discourses. From a feminist perspective, and informed by the cultural materialism of the Bakhtin school, of Raymond Williams, and of Pierre Bourdieu, I critically assess Stead's own cultural performance, the production of her

authorial persona, and her gendered representations of subjects in the social web. Illustrations are drawn from a number of Stead's texts.

In chapters two to four, I examine the formation and development of Stead's Marxist understandings of the revolutionary subject in her fiction of the 1930s. Chapter two provides an historical context, as well as a discussion of the implications of Stead's relationship with Marxist men. Chapters three and four provide in-depth studies of two novels of the late 1930s, *House of All Nations* and *The Man Who Loved Children*, developing the theme of 'loving the revolutionary' in the argument that masculine models of revolution are celebrated, appropriated and performed in these texts.

Chapter five briefly surveys the overall development of Stead's political and aesthetic views, in the context of her authorial production of the 1940s and during her stay in the United States, before examining the increasing problematic of gender in Stead's postwar fiction. Issues in the production of Stead's authorial persona in this period are also analysed in the context of Bourdieu's theory of the literary field. The theme of chapter five, 'females who can wreck the revolution' - elaborated in chapters six and seven, in the context of two postwar novels, *Cotters' England* and *I'm Dying Laughing* - develops the idea that the troubled female protagonists of the postwar fiction are the site of Stead's antithetical exploration of the proper 'revolutionary subject'.

## Acknowledgements

I thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Virginia Blain, for her perceptive advice and for her guidance throughout the process of researching and writing the thesis. I owe thanks, also, to Associate Professor Tom Burvill, who acted in a supervisory capacity for six months, and who provided me with significant critical challenges.

I am grateful to the members of the staff and postgraduate community of the School of English who read and commented on my work-in-progress, especially Dr Marea Mitchell, Dr Nick Mansfield, Dr Ali Lavau and Yvonne Edgren. I thank the staff of Macquarie University Library and, in particular, the Inter-Library Loans staff, who provided prompt and fruitful responses to my requests and who made the research task much less onerous. I am also grateful for the help of the staff of the National Library of Australia's Manuscript Room, who assisted me in gaining access to Christina Stead's unpublished papers.

I thank my parents, my extended family and my friends, who were always encouraging, and especially my sister, Monique, for her friendship, help and advice.

I thank, most of all, John, Robin and Jeremy Lloyd, for their generous love, support and loyalty, and I dedicate my thesis to them.