



ROBERT PRING-MILL

Robert Duguid Forrest Pring-Mill

1924–2005

ROBERT PRING-MILL WAS ONE of a generation of young men whose education was interrupted by the Second World War and who went to university as mature students after demobilisation. In Hispanic Studies, as in other subject areas, it was academics of that generation who laid the foundations of the modern discipline and Pring-Mill, an all-rounder who firmly believed that his various research activities were mutually enriching, had the distinction of making a significant contribution to several of its branches.

The First World War likewise played its part in shaping the course his life was to take. The only child of Scottish parents, he spent his early childhood in the Essex village of Stapleford Tawney where he was born on 11 September 1924. However, his father, a professional soldier who had been gassed in the trenches during the war, was advised by his doctors to seek the beneficial effects of a warmer climate and the family moved to the Continent, first to France and then Majorca, where they settled in 1931. Apart from a short period in Italy, where they were evacuated in the early months of the Spanish Civil War, they were to remain there until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. In Majorca the young Pring-Mill learned Catalan and developed a love of Catalonia and its culture that was to stay with him all his life. He also received a Catholic education at the Jesuits' Montesión college in Palma, a training that was to leave its mark on his thinking and his academic writing.

Still a teenager when the family returned to Britain, he somehow contrived to enlist in the army in 1941, keeping alive his Scottish heritage by joining the Black Watch. He served with the 25th Indian Division in Burma before ending up in Malaya, where he celebrated his twenty-first

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birthday shortly after the Japanese surrender. During his service he rose to the rank of captain, became an intelligence officer and was mentioned in dispatches. In Malaya in 1946 he produced his first publication in the form of a thirty-page cyclostyled pamphlet on Chinese Triad societies. Though he claimed to have written it mainly to alleviate tedium, its interest in ideology and metaphysics points forward to the preoccupations that underpin his later work.

In October 1947 he entered New College, Oxford, where he took the shortened ex-servicemen's honours course in Modern Languages. He read Spanish and French, and under a new dispensation he was also able to take Medieval Catalan as an optional subject, thereby becoming the first student to study it at Oxford. At university he demonstrated his talent by winning two undergraduate prizes—a Heath Harrison Travelling Scholarship in Spanish (1948), which he used to finance a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, and the Arteaga Essay Prize (1949)—and confirmed it by obtaining a First in his Finals in December 1949. That success led to a scholarship at Magdalen College and in 1952 he was appointed to a university lectureship in Spanish. He held that post until his retirement in 1988, together with a tutorial fellowship at St Catherine's College (1965–88) and college lectureships at New College (1956–88) and Exeter College (1963–81).

During his time as an undergraduate Pring-Mill got to know fellow student Brigitte Heinsheimer and they married in 1950. The marriage, which produced a son and a daughter, Francis and Monica, was stable and lasting, largely because the couple had personalities which complemented each other and shared strongly held Catholic beliefs. Pring-Mill was a quiet and private man whose life was centred on home and family, but at the same time he and his wife were known as generous and affable hosts, frequently entertaining Oxford colleagues and visiting scholars and writers at their cottage in the Buckinghamshire village of Brill. Among those who enjoyed their hospitality was the celebrated Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. Some time later, he commemorated the occasion by concocting in their honour a cocktail which he named Brill's Smile: 1 soup-spoon raspberry juice; juice of 6 sweet oranges; 1 soup-spoon Cointreau; 2 soup-spoons cognac; ½ litre white wine; 1 bottle *brut* champagne.

One of Pring-Mill's earliest publications, a co-authored book of Spanish translation passages intended for use in the classroom, was a standard textbook in its day and ran into several editions.¹ As that book

¹ Cyril A. Jones and RPM, *Advanced Spanish Unseens* (London, 1958).

indicates, he took teaching as seriously as research. Not only did he enjoy interaction with students but he regarded it as a means of developing new angles of approach and of honing his ideas. His lectures were always rigorously prepared and invariably stimulating and informative, but at the same time he sought to draw undergraduates into a shared exploration of the issues concerned and in his tutorials he encouraged them to express their ideas and to learn through dialogue. As one obituarist aptly put it, 'He had the old-fashioned virtues of an Oxford academic: not only did he appear to have time for everyone, but he always sought to bring out the best in them rather than display his own vast knowledge.'² He was also a kind and conscientious man who went to great pains to care for his students' welfare.

Notoriously Pring-Mill drove himself hard. He started the day early and was wont to reach college when most of his colleagues were still abed, joking that for him breakfast was his mid-morning break. He had, too, a remarkable capacity for long hours of sustained labour which enabled him to produce a substantial corpus of books and articles. Nor did he limit his endeavours to teaching and research, but engaged in a range of activities designed to promote his subject and take it to a wider public. He delivered countless public talks to bodies prestigious and humble. He made hundreds of radio broadcasts, including over a hundred on the BBC's Spanish and Latin American services. He contributed fifteen review articles to the *Times Literary Supplement* on assorted Spanish and Spanish American writers and movements. He also made numerous contributions to reference works such as *The Caxton World of Knowledge* and *The Fontana Biographical Companion to Modern Thought*, the first of which contains no less than thirty entries on Hispanic literary topics and the latter seventeen.³

Pring-Mill's enthusiasm for things Catalan led to an acquaintance with the Catalan publisher and bookseller Joan Gili, who had settled in England in the early 1930s and acquired British citizenship and who was to publish some of his early writings. In 1953 Gili, who was keen to promote Catalan culture in the United Kingdom, recruited him to translate literary critic Joan Triadó's introduction to an anthology of Catalan poetry and, in addition, he contributed a 'Biographical and

² Nick Caistor, in *The Guardian*, 17 Oct. 2005, p. 33.

³ See *The Caxton World of Knowledge*, vol. II (London, 1960); *The Fontana Biographical Companion to Modern Thought* (London, 1983).

Bibliographical Index'.⁴ With Gili and the likes of Frank Pierce, Geoffrey Ribbons and Arthur Terry, he was a founding member of the Anglo-Catalan Society—an organisation set up in 1954 to promote the study and understanding of Catalan culture in the United Kingdom and which during the Franco era was a symbol of solidarity with a region whose language and culture were denied public expression by the dictatorship—and he served as its President between 1973 and 1978. Given his childhood experience, it is hardly surprising that Majorca should have occupied a special place in his affections and one of his early publications was effectively a piece of PR intended to confer on it something of the romanticism associated with the liaison between Chopin and George Sand, being a translation of a Catalan account of the couple's sojourn on the island.⁵ Likewise the first writer to be the focus of his research was a Majorcan, the medieval poet, mystic, philosopher and theologian Ramon Llull, sometimes Anglicised as Raymond Lully. Llull is famed as the originator of a complex 'art of finding truth', which he developed in successive revised versions known collectively as the *Ars Magna* (The Great Art). The primary aim of his Art was to assist in the conversion of non-Christians to the Christian faith, but it was also designed to bring about the integration of all branches of knowledge into a single theocentric system. In the course of his career, but primarily in the early stages, Pring-Mill produced a body of studies which earned him recognition as one of the world's foremost authorities on Llull's work.

The majority of these were subsequently collected and published in Barcelona as a 336-page book, which won the 1992 Serra d'Or prize for research on a Catalan topic.⁶ The first part of the volume is devoted to 'El microcosmos lul·lià', a long essay that was originally published as an opuscle in 1961. Its overview of Llull's vision of the world is generally held to be the clearest exposition of the writer's thinking and has been

⁴ Joan Gili (ed.), selected by Joan Triadú, *Anthology of Catalan Lyric Poetry* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 371–86.

⁵ Bartomeu Ferrà, *Chopin and George Sand in Majorca* (Palma de Mallorca, 1961).

⁶ Lola Badia and Albert Soler (eds.), *Estudis sobre Ramon Llull (1956–1978)* (Barcelona, 1991). See also 'Grundzüge von Lulls *Ars inveniendi veritatem*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 43 (1961), 239–66; 'Ramon Llull's Four *Libri Principiorum*: An Introductory Note', in Raymundus Lullus, *Quattuor Libri Principiorum (Liber Principiorum Theologiae, Liber Principiorum Philosophiae, Liber Principiorum Juris, et Liber Principiorum Medicinae)* (Wakefield/Paris-The Hague, 1969), pp. vi–xxvi; 'The Lullian *Art of Finding Truth*: A Medieval System of Enquiry', *Catalan Review: International Journal of Catalan Culture*, 4 (1990), 55–74; 'The Role of Numbers in the Structure of the *Arbor scientiae*', in Fernando Domínguez Reboiras et al. (eds.), *Arbor scientiae, Der Baum des Wissens von Ramon Llull* (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 35–63.

extremely influential both in making Lull accessible to non-specialist readers and in shaping approaches to his work. It situates Lull's writings within the context of the ideas of his time, showing that he was operating within the parameters of a broadly Neoplatonic exemplarist world-picture accepted by Christians, Jews and Muslims alike. It also explains at some length the main features of medieval thinking: the common belief in a hierarchy or ladder of being, the theories of the four elements and of the heavenly spheres, the organisation of reality by numerical-geometrical symbolism, the idea of man as a microcosm. The basis of Lull's thought is shown to be the doctrines of the Dignities, God's divine attributes, and of the Correlatives, their manifestation in the created universe, all things being connected to them by sets of 'principles of relation' whose combinations constitute the sum of all possible relationships. Pring-Mill defines his Art as a system of enquiry and verification which makes use of logical methods to refer all truth back to the Godhead, adopting the combinatory methods employed by the science of the day to argue analogically about God and every aspect of the universe. As well as elucidating the Art, he skilfully deciphers the combinatory diagrams and symbolic notations which accompany the written text, though he is at pains to point out that these are ancillary to the system rather than intrinsic to it, being mere devices for speeding up its operations.

The essays in the second and third parts of the book respectively explore more fully key aspects of Lull's thought and offer readings of different literary texts. Two focus on the symbolism of numbers, addressing the question of why in early versions of the Art the Dignities are sixteen in number but are reduced to nine in later versions. Another discusses the analogical structure of the Art, arguing that the four elements of medieval science furnished Lull with the model which he used to structure his analysis of higher things. Yet despite the outstanding scholarship and perceptiveness that Pring-Mill brings to the exegesis of Lull's philosophy, he thought of himself primarily as a literary critic and as such he was concerned not just with the meaning of the work but with the interaction between it and the complex of signifiers that communicate it to the reader. A major element in his contribution to our appreciation of Lull was precisely the attention he gave to the literary aspects of his writing. Thus, for example, his magnificent analysis of the *Llibre d'amic e Amat* (The Book of the Lover and the Beloved), a series of reflections on the path to mystic union with God, convincingly demonstrates that beneath its apparent formlessness the book has an underlying structural unity in that all

of the various motifs and literary resources of its 365 versicles are geared towards the same conceptual end.

Some of the features which characterise Pring-Mill's work on Lull—most notably an interest in how the writers of a particular historical period viewed the world and in the literary conventions they used to communicate their vision of reality—were carried over into his second area of research activity, Spanish literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the so-called Golden Age.⁷ Among his publications in that field are two essays on the theatre of Lope de Vega, one a general introduction, the other an examination of the role of maxims in *Fuente Ovejuna*, in which he argues that they are a key to explain the relationship between the general and the particular, between an abstract universal principle and the specific concrete situations faced by the characters. Another two focus on the way prose writers of the period depict reality and, in particular, on their preoccupation with the conflict between earthly appearances and eternal truth. Others explore how mystical experience is conveyed in literature and analyse the ramifications of a conceit recurrent in writing of the period.

However, his most substantial and most important work in the area of Golden Age literature was his writings on Spain's greatest dramatist, Pedro Calderón de la Barca. In the 1960s and 1970s he was one of a group of British Hispanists who shared a common enthusiasm for the theatre of Calderón and who, in a spirit of post-war conciliation, collaborated with German colleagues specialising in the same field and he played an active part in the organisation of a series of Anglo-German symposia which served as forum and focus for that collaboration, the first of them held in Exeter in 1969. His studies of Calderón, written over a period of thirty years, were collected in a 223-page volume published in 2001.⁸ In the book's opening essay, a survey of the Anglo-Saxon contribution to Calderón studies, he acknowledges himself to be the heir of

⁷ See 'Two Spanish Mystics and their Methods of Describing Mystical Experience', *The Aryan Path*, 26 (1955), 489–92, 536–40; 'Spanish Golden-Age Prose and the Depiction of Reality', *Anglo-Spanish Society Quarterly Review*, 32/33 (1959), 20–31; 'Introduction', in Lope de Vega: *Five Plays*, trans. Jill Booty (New York, 1961), pp. vii–xli; 'Sententiousness in *Fuente Ovejuna*', *Tulane Drama Review*, 7 (1962), 5–37; 'Escaligero y Herrera: citas y plagios de los *Poeticos Libri Septem* en las *Anotaciones*', in Jaime Sánchez Romeralo and Norbert Poulussen (eds.), *Actas del Segundo Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas* (Nijmegen, 1967), pp. 489–98; 'Some Techniques of Representation in the *Sueños* and the *Criticón*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 45 (1968), 270–84; "'Porque yo cerca muriese": An Occasional Meditation on a *Conceptista* Theme', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 61 (1984), 369–78.

⁸ Nigel Griffin (ed.), *Calderón: estructura y ejemplaridad* (London, 2001).

such eminent scholars as W. J. Entwistle, E. M. Wilson and A. A. Parker and of an academic tradition whose approach to Calderón he labels 'análisis temático-estructural', a term he coined to distinguish it from French structuralism.⁹ Put simply, that approach is the study of the way in which the action of a play is structured to convey a theme, a universal human truth expressed metaphorically by the stage fiction.

Much of the book is taken up with arguments of a theoretical nature, which are repeated, developed and refined from one article to another. The starting premise is that the ideological framework of Calderón's plays—and indeed of all Golden Age theatre—is an inherited theocentric world-view in which the monarch was perceived as God's earthly representative and a hierarchical society reflected the structure of the cosmos, where each element occupied a rung in a ladder of being. It is argued that Calderón makes use of the theologians' schematic abstractions as keys for the understanding of the everyday experience of human beings, presenting a system of universal principles whose operation is studied in particular situations which are conceived as exemplary illustrations of those principles. That being the case, the effectiveness of a play derives not from the verisimilitude of its action as measured against everyday life but from its validity as a concrete example of a general truth and can be judged only by examining the extent to which it has been constructed to satisfy the conceptual demands of the theme in a logically convincing manner. That is precisely what Pring-Mill does in the various essays, whether by analysing the structure of a specific play or the exemplary significance of a key episode in a play, or by comparing and contrasting the functioning of the different theatrical genres cultivated by Calderón or by examining the dramatist's use of the techniques of rhetoric and casuistry. In the way of things, Hispanic Studies have evolved and new approaches have emerged with regard both to seventeenth-century thought and the theatre of the Golden Age. Even so, Pring-Mill's essays remain a major contribution to Calderón studies, not just as an outstanding example of a particular school of criticism, but because they continue to offer important insights into the plays.

A key experience in Pring-Mill's academic development was two months spent in South America in 1949 as one of a small group of budding Hispanists sponsored by the British diplomat and Hispanophile Sir

⁹ In a footnote he warns of the inappropriateness of a literal translation of the term into English ('thematic-structural analysis') and suggests that it is best rendered as 'the thematic approach to structural analysis'.

Eugen Millington Drake, who sought to foster Anglo-Argentine and Anglo-Uruguayan relations by financing such group-visits in both directions. The party visited Buenos Aires, Montevideo and other cities in the River Plate, taking turns to address local literary or cultural societies, but Pring-Mill and John Street, the future historian of Latin America, managed to fit in a week in Chile. There he was introduced to the poetry of Pablo Neruda and to the ugly face of Spanish American political life. The young Englishman, who had never heard of Neruda until then, was informed that not only was he the continent's foremost poet but he was a prominent political figure, a communist who had been elected to the Senate in 1947 but at that time was on the run, fleeing from a government crack-down on its leftist opponents. He was also presented with copies of a couple of Neruda's books, including part of the *Canto general* (General Song), a monumental poetic exploration of Latin America's history and destiny which he had completed while in hiding and which circulated in clandestine editions. That gift marked the beginning of a lifelong love affair with Neruda's poetry and, more generally, sparked off an interest in the phenomenon of socially committed poetry.

Pring-Mill never regarded himself as being primarily a Latin Americanist and Latin American subjects never took up more than half of his student contact hours. Nonetheless, he ranks alongside Jean Franco and Donald Shaw as one of the pioneers of the study of Latin American literature in the United Kingdom. Initially the Spanish American authors included in the Oxford programme were figures from the past, in keeping with the then widely held view that historical perspective was necessary before a writer could be deemed worthy of study, but in 1960 he succeeded in overcoming the resistance of the traditionalists to have Neruda introduced as the first living author on the Modern Languages syllabus. Five years later he was instrumental in having Neruda invited to Oxford to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. This was the first time the two men had met but they quickly hit it off and during the last eight years of the poet's life they met on a number of occasions as well as exchanging correspondence. Later, in the difficult times that followed Neruda's death in 1973, a few days after the military coup that brought Pinochet to power, Pring-Mill maintained contact with his widow, visiting her in Paris when she went into exile, and he was entrusted with the responsibility of travelling to Chile to archive the poet's estate. For Pring-Mill the honorary doctorate awarded to Neruda meant public recognition in Britain of a poet whom he regarded as one of the half-dozen greatest poets in the Spanish language. At the

same time, the honouring of the distinguished Chilean writer helped to raise the profile of Latin American literature and was symptomatic of the trend that brought about the growth of Latin American Studies in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰ Though he found the ceremony rather quaint and was greatly amused that it was conducted in Latin, Neruda later acknowledged on several occasions that the honour conferred on him by Oxford initiated the process that brought him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971, for it was the first time his standing had been officially recognised in a country outside the Spanish-speaking world and the communist bloc. Indeed, so grateful was he to Pring-Mill that he invited him to Stockholm to attend the prize-giving ceremony. It is an indication of the latter's sense of priorities that he declined because the event took place in the middle of term and he did not feel that he could take time off from his teaching.

In 1967–8 Pring-Mill managed to fund a sabbatical year in Latin America. Obtaining various minor grants by way of pump-priming, he equipped a short-wheelbase Land Rover in 1967, shipped it over to Montreal and spent six weeks lecturing his way through the United States to raise more money before spending almost a whole academic year travelling from Mexico to Chile and back again. Between November 1967 and September 1968 he covered 25,000 miles and visited fifteen Spanish-speaking countries. Travelling overland was time-consuming and out of the 309 days he spent in Spanish America 105 were spent mainly driving. For large parts of the journey there were no road maps available and thirty-two frontier-crossings tested his patience, for many crossings involved passing through the hands of six sets of officials and he sometimes spent four hours getting his Land Rover from one country into the next. However, for a considerable part of the journey he was not alone, for during the school holidays he was joined by his wife and two children. Not only did their presence turn the expedition into a family adventure but, since his wife had served as an aircraft mechanic during the war, he was freed from worries about the vehicle breaking down.

Two main purposes lay behind this journey. The first was to pursue his research on Neruda, particularly on the *Canto general*. In Mexico, for example, his priority was to study the muralist art of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros and to assess how it had influenced the semi-epic historical vision of the *Canto general*. Likewise,

¹⁰ In the same year the Parry Report made a series of recommendations to promote the development of Latin American Studies in the United Kingdom. See *Report of the Committee on Latin American Studies* (London, 1965).

out of the four months he was in Chile, he spent a total of five weeks at Neruda's home in Isla Negra, where he interviewed the poet on his work and examined the original manuscripts of his poems. Above all, however, Pring-Mill had come to realise that he would never be competent to speak or write about the *Canto general* until he was familiar with the social, cultural, political and geographical setting that was its referent. The trip gave him first-hand experience of the awesome immensity of the Latin American landscape and of the continent's diversity and by making the journey in both directions he was able to see the same places at different seasons of the year. He also had his eyes opened to the chronic underdevelopment in which most of the region languished and to the spectacle of widespread social and economic inequality. He came into contact, too, with a cross-section of the Latin American population, ranging from politicians, academics and writers to miners, fishermen and peasants. Pring-Mill always claimed that what he saw and heard on his travels supplied him with deeper insights into the nature of Latin America than he could ever have acquired by sitting reading in a library. Like Neruda, he found himself identifying with the continent's downtrodden and came to understand why socialist and communist ideas found such ready acceptance in Latin America. Indeed, one of his idiosyncrasies was that while he was essentially conservative in his beliefs and attitudes, he held strong views with regard to the need for social change in Latin America and was a fervent supporter of the Allende government in Chile and of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Yet he was far from sharing Neruda's political ideas—and always refrained from discussing politics with him—and his belief in social justice was rather that of a Catholic in tune with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

Pring-Mill's exploration of the changes that had taken place in Neruda's poetry as a consequence of his politicisation in the 1930s led him to interest himself in socially committed poetry as a genre and the second main purpose of his travels around Spanish America was to examine the nature, origins and current state of that genre. That project involved meeting poets and critics and collecting texts. Letters of introduction from Neruda and the Guatemalan novelist Miguel Ángel Asturias opened many doors and as a means of establishing contacts he gave forty-three lectures arranged for him by the British Council and British embassies.¹¹ Over the year he acquired 1,332 books, booklets,

¹¹ An old friend of Neruda's, Asturias was at that time Guatemalan ambassador in Paris. He was awarded the Nobel prize that same year.

periodicals, leaflets and unpublished texts, including some 500 volumes containing committed poetry, material which he further supplemented on later journeys to Mexico and Central America. He also extended his interest to embrace popular music and protest song and he amassed a collection of LPs as well as making his own taped recordings. This was to be an abiding interest and he built up his collection over several years. He later donated his committed poetry collection to Oxford's Taylorian Library, together with his collections of material on Pablo Neruda and Ernesto Cardenal. His collection of recordings of and publications about Spanish American committed song was donated to the University of Liverpool's Institute of Popular Music.

No one did more than Pring-Mill to make Neruda's work known in the English-speaking world. His introduction to the translation of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* remains a superb guide to the text.¹² Concise but highly informative, learned but clearly expressed, it sets the poem in the context of Neruda's life and career and elucidates its themes and imagery for the reader, arguing that the journey to the ancient Inca citadel that was the inspiration for the work becomes a metaphor for the exploration of the poet's personal world and of the past of Latin American man. He also published an anthology of Neruda's verse that was intended both for the general reader and for use as a university textbook.¹³ The selection spans the whole corpus of Neruda's work, from his earliest books to those written in the last years of his life and published posthumously. It is also a representative sample, in the sense that it presents a spectrum of the major tendencies in the poet's work at different periods, each represented in sufficient depth for individual poems to be appreciated in their context. The sixty-four-page introduction is conceived, not as an independent critical study, but as a tool to be used in conjunction with the body of poetry which makes up the anthology. It provides essential biographical information, traces the different stages in the development of the poet's work and describes the themes and style of each phase, thereby furnishing a context in which individual poems can be read. The first two volumes of *Residencia en la tierra* (Residence on Earth), published respectively in 1933 and 1935, are shown to mirror the collapse of the inherited world-picture in a studied disintegration of poetic form. The pages on the *Canto general* examine the thematic and stylistic features

¹² 'Preface', in Pablo Neruda, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, trans. Nathaniel Tarn (London, 1966), pp. 7–13.

¹³ *Pablo Neruda: A Basic Anthology*, ed. RPM (Oxford, 1975).

that characterise Neruda's socially committed poetry, while those on the *Odas elementales* (Elemental Odes) of 1954 demonstrate that Neruda went on to develop a different kind of social poetry which celebrates the experiencing of the simple things of life, whose intrinsic beauty is enhanced through their relationship with others in a social context. Above all, the introduction reveals Pring-Mill's knack for explaining complex ideas in clear and simple language.

Though he never produced the major book that one might have expected of him, his essays put him in the front rank of Neruda scholarship.¹⁴ These include one which explores at length and in depth the poetics of the *Odas elementales*, but the area where he most distinguished himself was the analysis of the originals. By virtue of his friendship with Neruda and his wife he had privileged access to draft versions of many of the poet's works. By relating these to the finished products, he throws fresh light on the latter by exploring the evolution that took place in the course of the creative process. This applies not just to individual poems but also to books, for by examining how the ordering of the poems in a collection changed he is able to highlight the set of intertextual relations that came to prevail.

Meanwhile, Pring-Mill had developed an interest in the leading Spanish American committed poet of the generation that came after Neruda, the Nicaraguan priest and champion of liberation theology, Ernesto Cardenal, whose work had first come to his attention during his 1967 trip. In 1972 he spent a month with Cardenal in the commune which the latter had established on the island of Solentiname in Lake Nicaragua and was able to discuss his work and thought with him. He also worked on translations of Cardenal's verse and three years later he introduced the Nicaraguan to the British reading public with an anthology in English presenting representative poems from different phases of his writing.¹⁵ Following a pattern similar to that of the Neruda anthology, the introduction situates the poetry in the context of Cardenal's life and thinking

¹⁴ See 'La elaboración de la cebolla', in Ángel Flores (ed.), *Aproximaciones a Pablo Neruda* (Barcelona, 1974), pp. 227–41; 'El Neruda de las *Odas elementales*', in Alain Sicard (ed.), *Coloquio Internacional sobre Pablo Neruda* (Poitiers, 1979), pp. 261–300; 'Neruda y los originales de *Los libertadores*', in *Actas del Sexto Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 587–9; 'La composición de *Los versos del capitán*: el testimonio de los borradores', in Hernán Loyola (ed.), *Neruda en la Sassari* (Sassari, 1987), pp. 173–204; 'La evolución de *Los versos del capitán*: su composición y su reorganización', *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv*, 13 (1987), 175–89; 'The Building of Neruda's "Oda al edificio"', in Gisela Beutler (ed.), '*Sieh den Fluss der Sterne strömen*': *Hispanoamerikanische Lyrik der Gegenwart* (Darmstadt, 1990), pp. 198–222.

¹⁵ Ernesto Cardenal, *Marilyn Monroe and Other Poems* (London, 1975).

and shows how he evolved a poetic style which eschews subjective elements and conveys its message through understatement, whether through the poetic reworking of documentary material, the cultivation of epigrams modelled on and referring back to those of the great Latin poets, or 'up-dated' versions of the Psalms. Pring-Mill also coedited an American anthology of Cardenal's verse in translation, writing the introduction and reproducing sixteen of his own translations from the earlier book.¹⁶ In addition, he published four articles on diverse aspects of Cardenal's work, of which one examines his use of documentary material such as chronicles, anthropological reports and newspaper articles, two analyse poetic techniques as illustrated by specific texts, and the fourth discusses his treatment of America's Indian cultures as a means of making an implicit critique of the values of modern capitalist society.¹⁷ He also veered into cultural history by producing another two articles on the popular writing workshops which Cardenal set up to promote literary activity when he became Minister of Culture in the Sandinista government.¹⁸

Pring-Mill also authored a number of general articles on the subject of Spanish American committed poetry, as well as introducing a university course on that phenomenon.¹⁹ Regrettably, this is the area of his

¹⁶ Ernesto Cardenal, *Apocalypse and Other Poems*, ed. Robert Pring-Mill and Donald D. Walsh, trans. Thomas Merton, Kenneth Rexroth, Mireya Jaimes Freyre and the editors (New York, 1977).

¹⁷ 'The Redemption of Reality through Documentary Poetry', in Ernesto Cardenal, *Zero Hour and Other Documentary Poems*, ed. Donald D. Walsh (New York, 1980), pp. ix–xxi; 'Comunicación explícita e implícita en dos poemas de Ernesto Cardenal ("Las ciudades perdidas" y "Katún 11 Ahau")', in Giuseppe Bellini (ed.), *Actas del Séptimo Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas* (Rome, 1982), pp. 825–35; 'Acciones paralelas y montaje acelerado en el segundo episodio de *Hora 0*', *Revista Iberoamericana*, 118–19 (1982), 217–40; 'Cardenal's Treatment of Amerindian Cultures in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*', *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, 35 (1992), 52–74.

¹⁸ 'Ernesto Cardenal and the *talleres de poesía*', in Rob Rix (ed.), *Nicaragua: Pueblo y cultura* (Leeds, 1985), pp. 18–39; 'Mayra Jiménez and the Rise of Nicaraguan *poesía de taller*', in Lloyd King (ed.), *La mujer en la literatura caribeña: Sexta Conferencia de Hispanistas, 1983* (St Augustine, Trinidad, 1987), pp. 1–39.

¹⁹ 'Both in Sorrow and in Anger: Spanish American Protest Poetry', *Cambridge Review*, 91 (1970), 112–17; 'The Poetry of Protest', *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 3882, 6 Aug. 1976, 994–5; 'The Scope of Spanish-American Committed Poetry', in Sabine Horl *et al.* (eds.), *Homenaje a Rodolfo Grossman* (Frankfurt, Berne and Las Vegas, 1977), pp. 259–333, reissued as a pamphlet (Oxford: St Catherine's College, 1978); 'The Nature and Functions of Spanish-American *Poesía de compromiso*', *Bulletin of the Society for Latin-American Studies*, 31 (1979), 4–21; 'Spanish America: The Social Role of the Committed Poet', in Ann Thompson and Antony Beck (eds.), *Social Roles for the Artist* (Liverpool, 1979), pp. 81–8; 'La toma de

academic output that has least stood the test of time, for the essays project a somewhat one-dimensional image of Spanish American literature that reflects the simplistic assumptions and limited knowledge of the period when Latin American studies were still in their infancy. Nonetheless, they advance an argument that it was important to make in the early days of the discipline, namely, that since most modern Latin American literature displays some kind of social concern, it is necessary to eschew traditional European concepts of what constitutes literary studies and to consider that literature at least partially in terms of the socio-political context from which it has emerged. They also identify a particular type of literature which flourished in Latin America for the greater part of the twentieth century, explain it as a response to prevailing social, political and economic conditions and as inspired by a desire to promote social change, and analyse its characteristic features. Moreover, Pring-Mill is able to draw on his work in other fields to bring important insights to the study of committed poetry. Thus he establishes a parallel between the medieval world-picture and the various forms of Marxist ideology that inform much committed poetry in that both provide a coherent frame of reference to which everything can be related. Likewise, he demonstrates that, just as Calderón used the techniques of rhetoric and casuistry to convey a theocentric world-view, so too the committed poets were operating within a literary-cum-rhetorical tradition and followed the conventions of what he calls 'a familiar grammar of dissent'.

Furthermore, one of his most significant contributions to Latin American Studies grew out of his research in this area. Deciding that the study of committed poetry should embrace the oral as well as the written, he set about investigating the field of popular song and thereby foreshadowed the later emergence of cultural studies.²⁰ While stressing that the origins of Spanish American popular song go back to colonial times, Pring-Mill focuses on its modern manifestation, identifying two stages in its evolution as a vehicle for voicing social grievances and promoting class solidarity. The first began with the collection of existing folksongs by poet-singers like the Chilean Violeta Parra, the Argentinian Atahualpa Yupanqui and the Afro-Peruvian Nicomedes Santa Cruz, who then went

conciencia en la poesía de compromiso hispanoamericana', in Antonio Vilanova (ed.), *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas* (Barcelona, 1992), pp. 33–53.

²⁰ See 'Cantas—Canto—Cantemos: las canciones de lucha y esperanza como signos de reunión e identidad', *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, 34 (1983), 318–54, reissued as a pamphlet (Oxford, 1983); 'Gracias a la vida': *The Power of Poetry and Song* (London, 1990); *The Uses of Spanish-American So-Called Protest Song*, IPM Occasional Paper 4 (Liverpool, 1993).

on to write original songs in traditional forms. The second, that of the so-called 'new song', shows the influence of foreign protest song, with singers such as the Chileans Víctor Jara and Patricio Manns and the Uruguayan Daniel Viglietti seeking to emulate in the Latin American context figures such as Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger. The articles on the subject explore how song involves the audience and how its music impacts on the listener, as well as examining recurrent themes and artistic conventions. The artists studied in greatest depth are Violeta Parra and Víctor Jara.

The most striking thing about Pring-Mill's scholarship is its range, since it not only covers three areas—Catalonia, Spain and Latin America—but spans three historical periods—the Middle Ages, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the twentieth century. What is also striking is that he was not a scholar who produced 'big books', for the books that he published are either anthologies or collections of essays brought out after his retirement and he himself modestly described his longest study—*El microcosmos lul·lià* (1961)—as an opuscle rather than a book. Yet the impact made by his research output confirms the old saying that size does not matter. His preferred medium, in fact, was the essay, in the form of articles, conference papers and opuscles where he reworked and refined his ideas on the work of his favourite authors and it is a sign of the esteem in which his scholarship was held that others were willing to assume the role of editor to make his essays on Lull and Calderón available in book form. At the same time a substantial part of his publications played a significant role in the dissemination of the work of major Hispanic authors, whether in the form of anthologies or of introductions to selections of their writings edited by himself or by others or, in the case of his elucidation of Lull's world-picture, by making difficult texts accessible to non-specialists.

Many honours were bestowed on him in recognition of his scholarship. His contribution to Catalan studies led to his election as Corresponding Member of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (1966) and of the Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres (2002) and in 1990 the Generalitat de Catalunya awarded him the Cross of St George. In that same year the Spanish government acknowledged his work in the field of its country's literature by naming him Commander of the Order of Isabel la Católica. Chile honoured him by making him an Officer of the Order of Bernardo O'Higgins in 1992 and in 2004, Neruda's centenary year, awarded him the Presidential Medal of Honour. At home he was given a Doctorate of Letters by Oxford in 1986 and was elected a Fellow of the British

Academy in 1988. He was also the recipient of two festschrifts. To mark his seventieth birthday colleagues compiled a collection of essays covering the three areas of Hispanic literature which he had graced over the years.²¹ For its part the University of Liverpool's Institute of Popular Music paid tribute to his pioneering endeavours in that area by organising a symposium whose proceedings were subsequently published as a book.²²

Pring-Mill remained active for a decade and more after his retirement. He was regularly invited back to the university to give talks. He continued to research, write and deliver papers and, in particular, completed the first draft of a book on the songs of the Nicaraguan revolution which, unfortunately, never progressed beyond that stage. He also continued to travel and made return trips to Malaysia and Chile, where he had the satisfaction of being present when Salvador Allende was finally rehabilitated with the erection of a statue to him outside the presidential palace. However, his latter years were plagued by ill health, first in the shape of a heart condition and then of cancer of the oesophagus, which eventually killed him. He died on 6 October 2005. To the end, though, he bore his sufferings with the same serenity with which he had lived his life and which so impressed all those who had the privilege of knowing him.

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²¹ Nigel Griffin *et al.* (eds.), *The Discerning Eye: Studies presented to Robert Pring-Mill on his Seventieth Birthday* (Llangrannog, 1994).

²² Jan Fairley and David Horn (eds.), *'I Sing the Difference': Identity and Commitment in Latin American Song (A Symposium in Honour of Robert Pring-Mill)* (Liverpool, 2002).