

# Mabel Holland Thomas Grave, the Anarchist Pastoral

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## Introduction

Mabel Holland Thomas (1861-1929), later Grave, is a quintessential example of an anarchist woman with an eclectic body of work, whose manifold contribution has been largely overlooked or considered through the prism of her romantic association with a leading figure of the French and international anarchist movement, Jean Grave (1857-1939). This article offers an analytical biographical account emphasizing her privileged and artistic family background and Welshness, exploring how they connected with her later embrace of anarchism

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through the themes of nature and the landscape, social justice, education, and feminism. It seeks to restore her agency by considering her engagement with and contribution to anarchism on her own terms, and to tease out some key themes and characteristics of her political activism, which was primarily expressed in print through translation, illustration, and writing. Anarchist culture features in this analysis in a twofold way. First, it undertakes the first biographical study of an important but unheeded anarchist artist, and one of the very few anarchist women to be so prominently associated with the arts in the pre-1914 period. Second, the article probes the role of culture in the making of anarchism in the broader senses of national/local belonging, education, and the arts.

### **‘Mabel, daughter of the staunch Tory family’<sup>1</sup>**

How did a woman born into an affluent conservative Welsh family end up living and dying in France, and, more surprisingly, contributing for years to one of the most important anarchist periodicals of the pre-First World War period, as well as marrying its notoriously surly editor, Jean Grave? Her extended family, while noting the apparent incongruity of Mabel Holland’s marriage, did not dwell on it, and simply observed that “Mabel...surprisingly married Monsieur Jean Grave, a famous anarchist of the eighties and nineties in France, editor of the ‘Temps Nouveaux.’ But the marriage was happy.”<sup>2</sup> The terse statement echoes the indifference of other contemporary observers, suggesting at the very least that such transnational entanglements were commonplace in the anarchist movement at the time, including in the romantic and conjugal sphere. The class difference between the spouses did, however, draw more comments, as examined below. We suggest here that Mabel Holland Thomas’s path to anarchism is inscribed in her Welsh origins and upbringing, and that the seeming paradox of her political trajectory can be disentangled through three key themes: her family’s benevolent paternalism combined with a feminist streak, education and the arts, and Welsh patriotism.

Her father, Lewis Holland Thomas, anchored her family in genteel paternalism. On 4 September 1855, he married Elizabeth Roberts in the neo-classical St. Bride’s Anglican Church, Liverpool. Born in

1828, Elizabeth was fourteen years younger than her husband and had known him from childhood through his business partnership with her father. In marrying him she committed to moving from a major maritime and trading city—a port of global importance with a thriving social and cultural life—to Caerffynnon Estate and its associated small village of Talsarnau, home to some 550 people. Over the next eighteen years, the couple had eight children—6 girls and 2 boys—four of whom predeceased her. Mabel Mary was born in 1861.

Mabel Mary's father was born in Llanrwst, Wales, in 1812. Family debt and his own father's premature death meant that he and his four siblings were destitute and forced into the Poor Law Workhouse. Driven by the ambition to reclaim his father's lost property in Talsarnau, at the age of twelve, Lewis decided to follow in his grandfather's footsteps, leaving the farm and joining a ship at Barmouth as an apprentice mariner. English replaced Welsh as his language and in 1835, aged twenty-three, he was the master of the ship "Enfield." For over three years, he traded with countries and ports along the west coast of America and made several voyages to the Pacific Ocean. In 1842, he married his cousin Winifred Williams, who passed away in 1846. That same year, he once again sailed for Valparaiso, Chile, on the west coast of South America and traded in Hong Kong, the Philippines, Hawai'i, Tahiti, and San Francisco. While in San Francisco at the time of the California Goldrush, he invested in property and land. As well as being a sea captain and successful businessman, he was also a Protestant lay preacher during his time in San Francisco. While in the United States, he travelled to the American South and even befriended and corresponded with future Confederate General Robert E. Lee. In 1848 he returned to Wales as a wealthy widower and purchased the Caerffynnon Estate, Talsarnau, in 1851, which included Draenogan farm together with other smaller farms. He appointed a Liverpool architect to design and oversee the construction of Caerffynnon Hall and remodel the farms and estate. The building and associated works were completed in 1856. For Lewis Holland Thomas, Caerffynnon Hall was a conspicuous statement, symbolising his achievement in restoring his family's name and status, and of his hard-won wealth gained through his seafaring and trading exploits over many years. This was no doubt an imposing property, complete with heraldic

shields, noble materials, commanding views, and spacious rooms, as a family biographer describes:

A drive led up from the village of Talsarnau, opening out to a site that offered panoramic views of Bae Ceredigion and the Snowden range.... It was built of Weish stone, faced with sandstone, with a slate roof. A gabled porch led into a hall with mosaic tiles on the floor. On the right was a large drawing-room with a carved marble fireplace, and decorative plasterwork made by craftsmen especially brought from Spain. Here, he displayed souvenirs of his travels. Tall bay windows looked out on the mountains, the Dwyrdd estuary and the sea beyond.<sup>3</sup>

Lewis accumulated outward signs of gentility. Despite being a member of the Anglican Church, he became a sponsor of the local elementary school as its founder and chairman of the governors, even though it was an independent school, and his own children did not attend it. Despite a changing political climate in Wales, he remained a staunch follower of the Conservative Party, member of the Anglican Church and patriotic Welshman. He described himself as a “gentleman” and saw himself as a member of the landed gentry - the local benevolent squire of Talsarnau. His children were brought up to adhere to these political beliefs and way of life. According to the elementary school’s logbook, Mrs. Holland Thomas and her daughters took a prominent part in the running of the school, helping with sewing classes and arranging an annual Christmas party for the children. Mabel’s sister Ethel wrote a book in the form of a diary in 1881, when she was thirteen years old, entitled *My Welsh Heart – Diary of Ethel Holland Thomas of Caerffynnon Talsarnau* (published by her daughters Heulwen and Hedydd in 1969). This illustrated story gives a snapshot of life in Caerffynnon over a six-month period in 1881, telling the story of the family, the staff who worked there, the daily lessons, going to church, together with many social events, and the visitors who came there during their childhood. It is infused with humour, warmth, and creativity, suggesting comparisons with the broadly contemporaneous fictional sisters of Louisa May Alcott’s

*Little Women*. In addition to this upper-class setting and lifestyle, it is pervaded with deeply conservative insights, for instance when Ethel casually declares, “What awful people those Irish are!” following a brief encounter with “five Irish tramps.”<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, the young Mabel also embraced her family’s conservative views; she later decried radicals and radical thinking in a letter from her boarding school: “All the girls are Radicals! How glad I shall be to come home and be among good Conservatives again.”<sup>5</sup>

Elizabeth was similarly inscribed in traditions of paternalism. She had read many medical books and was always ready to help the village people. She travelled around the village before Christmas to see who was in greater need and donated a hundredweight of coal or two wool petticoats to the poor. Many of the villagers worked at Caerffynnon, as maids were required to run the house and look after the children, and the men worked in the gardens and on the farms.

While it would probably be an exaggeration to claim that Mabel’s upbringing was feminist—especially at a time when the term had not yet gained currency—her mother’s outlook was nonetheless clearly not as patriarchal as her husband’s. In her book *Some Welsh Children*, first published in 1920, Mabel reflected on the importance her father placed on a male heir: “Mabel and her sisters remembered how she and her sisters were brought up to believe that ‘little Lewis [her younger brother, born in 1863, who died before his second birthday]...was a being of superior essence to ourselves of whom the world is not worthy.’ When his second son, Dickie, also died at only nine years old, their suffering was a grievance from which he never fully recovered.” But Elizabeth (“a firm believer in education for girls”) planned, encouraged, and managed her daughters’ education and development—from governesses to boarding and finishing schools—and their literary, artistic, musical, and language talents.<sup>6</sup> As children, Mabel and her siblings were taught by their governesses in a “school-room” at Caerffynnon Hall. The three oldest girls went to boarding school in Liverpool, followed by finishing school in Switzerland and Paris. It was said that their father “did not entirely approve when they returned with elaborate dresses and coiffure.”<sup>7</sup> Of the sisters, Fanny trained to be a singer, Mabel and Winnie studied art in Paris, which

Mabel furthered in Berlin. Elizabeth travelled extensively on the Continent, particularly following the death of her husband in 1888. She overwintered in Italy, a practice she continued until her death in Cannes in 1904 and which would no doubt have contributed to her daughters' cosmopolitan outlook.

While such education, emphasis on artistic accomplishments, and international travels were both made possible by and characteristic of class privilege, it may be argued that they also fed into Mabel's later engagements with anarchism. The artistic upbringing factored into how drawing and literature played into Mabel's activism. It also found expression through the general creativity and playfulness of her tone and approach. Education is another red thread connecting her with Jean Grave's own brand of anarchism, which materialised in numerous practical initiatives, as examined below. Might this upbringing also relate to the feminist streak which appears in her writing in the anarchist press? The contrast between being brought up amidst strong women, with ambitious creative and intellectual prospects of her own, and the reality of their father's traditional outlook must have been grating.

### **From Conservatism to Anarchism via Welsh Patriotism and “Fraternity”**

We do not know when Mabel's political shift to the left occurred, but it was at the very least in progress in the late 1880s, by which point she was in her mid-twenties. The contribution of a “Miss Mabel Holland” was recorded at a meeting of pro-women's suffrage activists in 1888, noting that she had “presided over stalls” during fundraising events, although the possibility that it might have been a namesake cannot be fully ruled out.<sup>8</sup> Her 1888 utopian novel *Fraternity* (attributed to her only later, thanks to a copy bearing her name donated to the British Library in 1919) is indicative of her brand of socialism at the time and its interweaving with Welshness.

The book attracted some very favourable reviews, including from *The Scotsman*, which praised “its liberality of thought, the nobility of its aspirations” and even compared it to the earliest productions

of George Elliot.<sup>9</sup> Through a plot situated in the North Wales slate quarries, *Fraternity* elaborates on the theme of class conflict and reconciliation. Literary scholar Jane Aaron describes it as “an ambitious text which calls upon ‘young Wales’ (directly invoked as such in the novel) to accept the principle of fraternity, or ‘fraternal Socialism’ as its guiding light.”<sup>10</sup> The main character is Edmund Haig, who was brought up as an orphan and discovers his Welsh parentage. He returns to Wales, learns the language, and seeks to educate the masses, persuading the slate quarry workers to turn from trade unionism to fraternity, which is based on the less radical aspects of the French Revolution. He also links to the Fraternity of the bardic Gorsedd of the Welsh Nation Eisteddfod, thus tying Welsh nationalism with social and political emancipation. The Gorsedd is defined as a “‘great body’ of bonded brothers and sisters who will work to overthrow the English class-system: ‘At the Gorsedd, . . . all men and women are equal, princes and quarry men meet at the same level.’”<sup>11</sup> As noted by Aaron, the novel does not really push forward the concept of the “combative socialist Gorsedd,” moving instead towards a romance plot: Haig eventually marries Blodwen Trevor, a deeply patriotic member of the old Welsh aristocracy. Egalitarianism and Fraternity nonetheless remain key themes, as Blodwen still follows the manner of the old Welsh Squirearchy, which includes dining with family servants, and she also espouses Haig’s “fraternal Socialism.” Welsh nationalism, or at least liberation from the Anglican Church, is another running theme.

The novel’s emphasis on “fraternal socialism” thus appears somewhat skewed by a far more ambiguous narrative of class reconciliation still verging on paternalism, in the enduringly cosy setting of an affluent and ancient Welsh family, as pinpointed by a critical contemporary review by *The Nation*: “The doctrine of Fraternal Socialism will seem more pointedly put when some other shall be consistent enough not to make all his [sic] high souled paupers turn out to be the eldest sons of old families, and his renunciatory young ladies of rank unconsciously marry money.”<sup>12</sup> The author and literary scholar Diana Devlin, who was related through marriage to the Thomas family, has argued that the novel illustrates that “Mabel’s vision of how society worked best was based on the group dynamics she knew best, that of

the family. Here too, her view was idealistic, taking no account of the tensions and rivalries of real life.” And she quotes:

For the perfect type of society is the family—and even in an ideal family there is not absolute equality—one child is strong another weak, one talented, another beautiful, but inequality hurts not where Fraternity exists. In a family, the beauty of one is the pleasure of all, the strength of one supplies the weakness of another. All of us cannot live in large and beautiful houses. Shall we destroy them, therefore, and prevent our brother’s enjoyment, because we cannot share it? Is it so in an ideal family? Is not the success of one the success of all?<sup>13</sup>

Despite these contradictions, the novel expresses a striving towards absolute forms of solidarity. Even though a degree of social prejudice remains, the novel retains its universalist core and radical impulse.

One might speculate on the timing of her decision to publish *Fraternity* when her father’s health was declining both physically and mentally, since he died in the September following publication. Was her decision to publish anonymously prompted by a fear of her novel’s contents offending both him and her other close relatives? Or had her political persuasions changed to the degree that she felt she had to express them? One might also wonder whether the focus on a “socialist” Gorsedd was influenced by her sister Ethel being a Bard and member of the Gorsedd. In any case, a repertoire of progressive social and political themes had entered her consciousness, underpinned by a collective and utopian streak which one might connect with the anarchist ideals which she became closely associated with in the following decade.

Historians of anarchism will also note the rejection of trade unionism and organised labour activism in the novel. The novel was penned in the late 1880s, at the very time when anarchists became increasingly interested in trade unionism as a possible vehicle for revolutionary action, in a context of widespread labour militancy in Britain. Of



course, it is not surprising that she would have been unfamiliar with these incipient strategic discussions, but worth noting to contextualise her own political thinking at the time, especially since her later anarchism does not evidence any close engagement with industrial militancy either. In terms of the historical context, it is also important to consider how the Industrial Revolution impacted the Holland Thomas family and the sisters. For instance, how the rise of railways made travel so much easier (see their Continental journeys), the improvements to the postal services enabled better communication and sharing of ideas, information, etc., and the rise of the publishing and newspaper industries.

Welsh patriotism is another important strand in her literary output. Although brought up with English as their primary language, the Holland Thomas girls learned Welsh through their interactions with family servants, children at the local school, and estate farm labourers. They expressed an intense patriotism and love of Wales in their writings and diaries—in English. Their romantic patriotism was fueled by stories told by their father which linked their history back to Llywelyn the Great, King of Gwyned (North Wales) in the thirteenth century, and Owain Glyndwr, Prince of Wales, who in the fourteenth century led a revolt against English rule in Wales. In his book *Re-birth of a Nation: Wales 1880 - 1980*, the Welsh historian Kenneth O. Morgan writes of “(a)n immemorial attachment to locality, family and race” and it could be said that it was this which drove Lewis Holland Thomas to make his fortune and restore his family’s status in the place of his childhood. How much was Mabel’s thinking shaped by the rise of Welsh nationalism, and how well informed was she about them?

Jane Aaron situates Mabel’s books in a late-nineteenth-century current of literature foregrounding Welsh identity, while Devlin notes that the sisters all “developed a passionate and romantic strain of Welsh patriotism.”<sup>14</sup> Mabel refers to her lifelong and comprehensive sense of belonging in Welsh identity in her book *Some Welsh Children*. Could this Welshness have fostered, if not an anticolonial mindset or a subaltern consciousness, perhaps an openness to an alternative political vision or at least a sense of unjust hierarchies,

articulated around the sense of Wales as “a conquered nation”?<sup>15</sup> She phrased her love for the land and the country in unambiguously nationalistic terms such as when she writes, “How can I choose but love my country?—my little mother whose life pulses in my veins—she who has made and fashioned me body and soul.”<sup>16</sup> Not only is her use of feminisation interesting but so too is her attachment to nature, which in turn can be connected with a pastoral vision that infuses her art. She later recalled that her childhood patriotism “stopped little short of mania,” matched in its intensity by her hatred of the “English tormentor.”<sup>17</sup> Her deep love for Wales and its landscapes allowed her to move towards articulating an antiauthoritarian ideal of seeing them free from violence, bloodshed, and cruelty, “whether authorized by law, sanctioned by custom, or accepted by public opinion.”<sup>18</sup>

Following *Fraternity*, her personal and political trajectory clearly moved toward anarchism. By the late 1890s, she was in London and had met Peter Kropotkin, who was living there in exile and suggested that she meet his friend and collaborator Jean Grave during a trip to Paris. Grave’s brief evocation of how this happened is enlightening: “She and her sisters had first met Kropotkin at the Stepniaks’ house. He had read her first book [most likely *Fraternity*] which she had just published. He had been very interested upon reading it, and found in the book a strong leaning towards our ideas.”<sup>19</sup> This quote has a dual merit. First, it confirms the continuity between Mabel Holland’s writings and ideological background with anarchism. It also suggests that upper-class progressivism and Russophilia may have been drivers for her political radicalization—a not uncommon route for middle-class anarchists at the time, albeit not necessarily one that led to anarchism.

In this respect, parallels may be drawn with the London-based young Rossetti siblings, who shared Mabel’s well-off and artistic upbringing, and went on to found the anarchist periodical *The Torch* (1891-1896). In their case too, even though their anarchist militancy was shorter-lived, contact with London’s Russian circles had been a key factor.<sup>20</sup> Devlin outlines a different ideological route for the sisters, surmising that there may have been a transition out of their father’s Toryism through Ruskinism, connecting art and socialism.<sup>21</sup> “Ruski-

nism” – named after the influential art critic and writer John Ruskin (1819-1900) – combined art and radical politics through its critique of the ugliness and social devastation of the industrial age; it was a key strand of the Socialist Revival of the late 1870s-early 1890s. The parallel with the young Rossettis who set up *The Torch* is equally enlightening in a line of interpretation foregrounding Ruskinism, since as the children and nephew and nieces respectively of Michael William and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, two founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, they belonged to a prominent artistic dynasty heavily influenced by Ruskin’s conceptions and its synthesis of art and political radicalism.

French historian Jean Maitron, whose pioneering works are based on extensive first-hand testimonies from historic militants from Grave and Holland’s generation, gives a fascinating account of their blossoming romance that materialised into a long marriage and comfortable lifestyle, requiring both to make some ideological adjustments:

During one of his trips to England, Jean Grave met a very bourgeois family. It was his friend Kropotkin, the Russian prince, who introduced him into this aristocratic circle. A young girl, Miss Mabel Holland Thomas, fell in love with this young man; she was won over by this self-made worker with a powerful will. A love story began. However, Jean Grave had misgivings, and hesitated for a long time. “What am I getting myself into?” he would repeat at the time to Alexandrine, his favourite [niece]. They grew closer. From time-to-time Grave allowed himself a few days of holiday. In the winter, he went to see his beloved in St-Raphael, and in the summer, it was in Wales that the lovers would sometimes meet up. Gossips spread nasty rumours about the anarchist’s “double life.” However, the years went by. Miss Thomas was 48 and it was time to “bring things to a close.” In June 1909, Grave decided to marry her in a civil ceremony, in Folkestone. “The Englishwoman,” as she became known, started socialising within the anarchist milieu, with an ease and

simplicity which everyone who knew her saluted, with just as much ease as when she attended the London gentry's evening receptions.<sup>22</sup>

### Mabel, Mab, M.H.T. the Anarchist. Art, education, translation.

It was in France that she remained for most of her adult life, between the pretty suburb of Robinson where she and Grave eventually settled around 1910, the south of France where they often retreated, and an extended stay in Britain during the First World War. Existing sources indicate that her contribution to anarchism was affected chiefly through her work for *Les Temps Nouveaux*. This includes both the paper launched by Jean Grave in 1895, which appeared until 1914, and its associated publishing house, the Editions des Temps Nouveaux, which issued dozens of illustrated pamphlets and books over the years. This was a manifold contribution. Its best-known aspect is Mabel's illustrations for the paper and some of the pamphlets and books published by the Editions des Temps Nouveaux, in which she signed as either Mabel (see Fig. 1 for of Grave's *La Panacée Révolution* in 1898), Mab, or MHT (as in *Le Coin des Enfants*, 1905). She had emerged from an early age as a talented visual artist, "a Car Re-



Figure 1 Jean Grave. *La Panacée Révolution*, 1898

gio,” in the words and aspirations of her sisters. She was said to have exhibited her work at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris “with considerable success,” but no trace of this has been found.<sup>23</sup> The stylistic versatility of her illustrations is especially striking; they veer from the Gothic-leaning pointiness and witch motif of *La Panacée Révolution* (1898) to the classical, almost naïve illustrations of *Le Coin des Enfants*, dominated by mythological, pastoral and upper-class scenes, featuring both nature depictions and individuals.<sup>24</sup> Her illustrations for Grave’s book *Terre Libre* (1908) show an even wider range in her representations of nature. Art historian Tania Woloshyn has noted how Mabel Holland Thomas’s rich and detailed rendering of the lush vegetation of the south of France gave substance to Grave’s evocation of the Maures region of the Côte d’Azur as a “free land,” “an ideal space of anarcho-communist liberty.”<sup>25</sup> In doing so, she partook in the construction of a key visual trope in anarcho-communism: the depiction of the Maures region and the South of France as an idealised anarchist-communist space, alongside celebrated artists associated with anarchism at the time, such as Henri-Edmond Cross, Paul Signac and Theo van Rysselberghe—yet without achieving a fraction of their critical recognition, even though the cover of *Terre Libre* will be familiar to many.

Her illustrations were also pivotal for the educational work spearheaded by Grave through *Les Temps Nouveaux*. Indeed, from the mid-1890s onwards, following the rejection of the theory of propaganda by the deed which advocated headline-grabbing acts of political violence as a way of igniting the revolution, education became a key strategic direction for a segment of the anarchist movement, particularly the anarcho-communists among whom Grave was so influential. *Les Temps Nouveaux* printed stories for children week after week, including in the Literary Supplement published alongside the paper, which featured a “Coin des Enfants” (Children’s Corner) section. These texts were often translated and, one might assume, selected from English-language sources by “M.H.T.” Amidst numerous examples spanning a wide range of genres and authors with various degrees of fame, one might cite translations of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Wonder Book*, H. Fielding’s “The Soul of a People” about the Burmese, Winwood Reade’s *The Martyrdom of Man*, Beata Francis’s *Good*

*Works for the Young*, T.L. Peacock's *Headlong Hall*, and more. Some of these were subsequently assembled into beautifully illustrated story-books entitled *Le Coin des Enfants*, which brought together thirteen stories. Grave explained his educational philosophy in the volume's preface, arguing that, among other merits, the tales collected in the volume "will teach [children] to make out the lies which official morality teaches them at school" and sharpen their critical skills.<sup>26</sup> The apex of the genre of anarchist children's literature was Mabel's illustrations for Grave's instant classic *Les Aventures de Nono*, to which other artists contributed. Some of her creations remain difficult to trace, such as the brochure "La leçon des parents" (Parents' Lesson), written by Grave and illustrated by "Mabel" (cover and text) which is mentioned in *Les Temps Nouveaux* in July 1914.

Besides these acts of revolutionary anarchist publishing, Mabel also wrote, and here we better see hints of her own political views. On 4 September 1897, she published a lead article on the execution of anarchist "propagandist by the deed" Michelangelo Angiolillo and his message. Like some of her other contributions, the role of women in driving change is highlighted: "It may be the case that women will be able to move the work forward. It is the mother, the sister, the partner who can turn their sons, their brothers, their partners the heroes and martyrs that we need"—a contentious and rather late endorsement of political violence and martyrdom, which is very distinctive in emphasising how women's domestic and educational work can lead indirectly to revolutionary change. On 20 November 1897, *Les Temps Nouveaux* published a front-page article called "L'Excentrique" (The Eccentric) and signed "MMHT," about the British woman Miss Woodward, who refused to pay her taxes while the British government bombarded Crete. The piece was based on an article from the *Daily Chronicle* and prompted a broader reflection on eccentricity and the power of the individual, as well as on civil disobedience as a political tool.

Lastly, her financial support for both Grave and the paper was likely crucial but cannot be documented in any detail. Like many aspects of the publication's material history, it remains a blind spot in our knowledge, even though Grave was usually very forthcoming when

it came to the paper's finances. Lewis Holland Thomas died in 1888, and the lack of a male heir to inherit left his wife Elizabeth with the responsibility of managing the Caerffynnon Estate. The will further stated that upon Elizabeth's death it should pass to Mabel as the eldest single daughter. But, as Devlin notes, because Mabel was not legally married (she was living with Grave), "her sisters felt that her sole ownership of it was not what their father had intended. They had to persuade Jean Grave to betray his principles.... Four years later, the couple went through a civil marriage ceremony. The four sisters then inherited their Welsh home in equal shares."<sup>27</sup> At a later date, Mabel, Ethel, and Winnie agreed to sell their shares to their sister Fanny and she and her husband Claude Leigh Richmond Haigh made Caerffynnon Hall their family home. It remained within the family until sold by Fanny's daughter Elfrede in 1951, one hundred years after Lewis Holland purchased it.

Grave suffered criticism levelled at him for the *embourgeoisement* connected with this marriage. In 1930 (a year after Mabel died, after long periods of ill-health), the reception to Grave's memoir in anarchist circles was glacial. The prominent individualist publication *L'En dehors* noted that his marriage—which others considered laughable for an anarchist—had been financially beneficial, so that Grave "would spend his last days in a villa, in the southern suburb of Paris." Thus, to the editors, Grave was no different from "the most vulgar of these individualists whom he is persecuting so hypocritically." The review then described "Madame Grave" as "a person who belonged to the bourgeoisie, distinguished, an artist."<sup>28</sup> This surprisingly tactful mention may have been a mark of respect for a woman who had just passed away, or perhaps a hint of how well-liked she was, as suggested by Maitron.

### **Concluding Remarks: Reversing the Male Gaze**

Mabel's sister Ethel married Sir Herbert Isambard Owen, a prominent defender of the Welsh language, medic, educator, and very much an establishment figure. He graduated from the University of Cambridge in 1872, qualified as a doctor and became Dean of St. George's Hospital London, a prominent member of the British Med-

ical Association and a key figure in the founding of Cardiff School of Medicine. He was knighted in 1902. Quite fascinatingly from an anarchist perspective, he was also the physician and friend of Prince Louis-Lucien Bonaparte, the nephew of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, who spent decades in exile in Britain; both men shared an interest in Celtic culture and the Welsh language. Owen played a leading role in ensuring that the Welsh language was included in the new elementary school curriculum at a time when the British Government was intent on excluding it. He also actively promoted the admission of girls into intermediate and higher education and the teaching of Welsh history. Grave, who appears to have spent a great deal of time with him during the First World War and not baulked at his link with France's imperial dynasty reviled by fellow anarchists, described him as "a charming man, with liberal views."<sup>29</sup> Ethel and Isambard Owen kept in touch with the Graves through their visits to France and last visited them in late 1926 before Isambard's death in Paris in 1927. Ethel returned to Paris in 1929 to nurse her sister through her last illness, she herself dying there months later. Their daughters visited Jean Grave in late 1939, and he died later that year.<sup>30</sup>

A piece like this on Mabel Holland Thomas-Grave is not the place to revisit Jean Grave's complex political trajectory during and beyond the war. However, from anti-Irish prejudice to the seemingly unself-conscious embrace of his wife's upper-class connections, it is clear that this marriage ushered him into a new milieu and shaped his own outlook. This is far from anecdotal given his central role in the history of pre-1918 French and international anarchism, as well as his notorious contribution to the infamous "Manifesto of the Sixteen" (1916) that articulated a pro-war, "defencist" position.<sup>31</sup>

This line of exploration provides a useful corrective to the obvious reading of Mabel Holland Thomas Grave's life which abides by the stereotypical representation of women activists as the faithful partners and supporters of a "great man." Grave himself clumsily leaned into this interpretation when pointing to his wife's input in some of his own work: "My wife reminds me again how [Kropotkin] loved to distract himself by discussing music."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, we see this when Grave praised her moderating influence over the rather rancorous



score-settling into which he had indulged when writing his autobiography.<sup>33</sup> In other instances, however, there was a clearer acknowledgement of a long-term political and creative partnership. We see this in the dedication of his 1930 memoir to “the woman who often inspired me and was always my companion and my comfort.”<sup>34</sup> Or again in *Terre Libre*: “To my friend M.H.T., This book which we both conceived, through our conversations.”<sup>35</sup> These were a fitting homage to an artist, writer, translator, and collaborator who gave so much to the cause, yet did so discreetly.

## Notes

- 1 *My Welsh Heart. Diary of Ethel Holland-Thomas*, eds. Heulwen and Hedydd Isambard Owen (Caernavon: Gwenlyn Evans Ltd., 1969), “Foreword.”
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Diana Devlin, *The Casson Family in North Wales: A Story of Slate and More* (Llanrwst, Wales: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2019), 225-6.
- 4 *My Welsh Heart*, 31.
- 5 Quoted in Devlin, *The Casson Family in North Wales*, 277.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 251.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 251.
- 8 Annual Report of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women’s Suffrage (London: John Bale & Sons, 1888), 10.
- 9 Cited in Jane Aaron, *Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales*, 167-170.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 168.
- 11 Cited in *Ibid.*, 169.
- 12 Quoted in Devlin, *The Casson Family in North Wales*, 280-83.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Devlin, *The Casson Family in North Wales*, 278; Aaron, *Nineteenth-Century*, 3.
- 15 *My Welsh Heart. Diary of Ethel Holland-Thomas*, 35.
- 16 Anon. [Mabel Holland Thomas], *Some Welsh Children. By the Author of Fraternity* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1920/1898?), 32.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 19 Jean Grave, “Kropotkine” (Robinson, Publications du “Groupe de Propagande par l’Écrit,” 1921), 15. Sergey Stepniak was a Russian revolutionary who in 1878 assassinated the head of Russia’s secret police, fled Russia, and lived in exile in London.
- 20 *Tea and Anarchy!: The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett 1890-1893*, ed. Barry C. Johnson (London: Bartletts Press, 1989).
- 21 Devlin, *The Casson Family in North Wales*, 282-3.
- 22 Jean Maitron, “Jean Grave, 1854 – 1939,” *Revue d’Histoire Économique et Sociale*, 28.1(1950), 105–117 available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24068959>, last accessed 10 November 2023.
- 23 Anon [Mabel Holland Thomas], *My Welsh Heart*, “Foreword.”
- 24 Another legacy of her childhood: “As for witches, or wise-women, they were personally known to us, for in our very village lived an aged crone.” Anon. [Mabel Holland Thomas], *Some Welsh Children*, 125.
- 25 Tanya Wolshyn, “Colonizing the Côte d’Azur: Neo-Impressionism,

Anarcho-Communism and the Tropical Terre Libre of the Maures, c.1892-1908,” *RIHA Journal* 45 (July 2012) available at <https://journals.ub.uni-heidberg.de/index.php/rihajournal/article/view/69912/65821>, last accessed 10 November 2023. This free access article contains several reproductions from the book.

26 *Le Coin des enfants. Recueil de contes* (Paris: Librairie des Temps Nouveaux, 1905), 9.

27 Devlin, *The Casson Family in North Wales*, 319.

28 *L'En dehors*, Supplement, March 1930.

29 Jean Grave, *Mémoires d'un anarchiste* (Paris, Editions du Sextant, 2009), 545.

30 Mike Jones, *Echoes of the Past. The Misses Isambard Owen*, Private collection, 59.

31 Constance Bantman, *Jean Grave and the Networks of French Anarchism* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2021), 171-76.

32 Grave, “Kropotkine,” 16.

33 Grave, *Mémoires d'un anarchiste*, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

34 Jean Grave, *Le Mouvement libertaire sous la IIIe République*, Paris, Les Œuvres Représentatives, 1930, p. VII.

35 Jean Grave, *Terre Libre (Les Pionniers)*, Paris, Librairie des Temps Nouveaux, 1908, p. 1.