DOI: https://doi.org/10.4312/clotho.4.2.155-179

Revolution in Antiquity: The Classicizing Fiction of Naomi Mitchison

Barbara Goff*

INTRODUCTION

One of the intersections between "ancient Greek and Roman culture and world communism from 1917" can be traced in the early works of Naomi Mitchison (1897–1999). She became famous with a series of novels and short stories set in the ancient world, some of which will be the subject of this paper. In particular, the representations of radical political change, of revolution, will be explored in a corpus of selected novels and short stories.

Married to a Labour MP, Mitchison was never a card-carrying Communist, but she espoused a range of left-wing causes, from birth control to Scottish nationalism. Her diverse oeuvre offers a series of variations on the quest for social and sexual justice and freedom, delivered through an ambitious range of genres. Because of this diversity, her work traces many of the preoccupations of the twentieth century, from socialism, feminism, democracy, and colonialism, to technocracy, ecology, migration, and multilingualism. Indeed several such themes can be read in her versions of antiquity, which were produced mainly in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these bear the imprint of the Russian Revolution, as well as of other preoccupations characteristic of the progressive wing of early twentieth-century British culture.[1] At the same time, they suggest new roles for Classics as a dis-

* University of Reading, Department of Classics, Whiteknights, Reading RG6 6EL, b.e.goff@reading.ac.uk.

1 For a general introduction to Mitchison's work, see Joannou, "Naomi Mitchison at One Hundred," 292–304.

cipline. In terms of long-term popular or critical success, they have not all been favored, but they fail in interesting ways. A much later novel will also be discussed, which reworks the earlier texts' preoccupations with greater success.

The discipline of Classics was entering modernity in the 1920s; compulsory Greek was abolished at the universities[2] and the Crewe Report (1921), commissioned by Prime Minister Lloyd George, consequently examined "The position of the Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom." This report sought "the re-adjustment of [the discipline's] claims to modern conditions" and is engaged in developing a sense of the discipline's role in "the life of the nation as a whole."[3] Dethroned from its traditional place as gatekeeper to higher education, the discipline needed to espouse new stories about itself. Mitchison's works of historical fiction approach antiquity from the point of view of subalterns – women, slaves, barbarians – producing new versions even of well-worn narratives. Her role in helping to produce an enlarged role for Classics can be seen in the enthusiastic reviews of her books and recommendations of them for schools.[4]

Although she was born into the Haldane family, which had supplied Britain with political and academic notables for generations, Mitchison was not formed by a traditional classical education. Her family connections meant that she could attend the Dragon School in Oxford, as the single girl among a class of boys, but at the onset of menstruation she was whisked away and delivered to governesses.[5] The tension between being classical and being female is legible throughout her writings, including in the representations of revolution investigated here. Her autobiographies describe various unstructured encounters with antiquity, such as the much-quoted discovery of Plato's Guardians:

> I picked up and began to read *The Republic* and was much taken with the idea of being a Guardian … It is odd that I was not put off by the undoubted fact that all Plato's Guardians were male and that he said many unpleasant things about the inferiority of women.[6]

2 Raphaely, "Nothing but Gibberish and Shibboleths?" 71–94.

3 "The Crewe Report," 3 and 29.

4 See, e.g., Wilson, "Historical Fiction for the High-School Latin Class," 107–115, and Beall, "Historical Fiction on Classical Themes," 8–12.

5 Mitchison, *All Change Here*, 11–13.

6 Ibid., 40. See Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, 1–2 on the necessity for ambitious women of the period to identify at least partly as male. Mitchison some-

The informal encounter does not preclude a critical perspective. In Mitchison's fictional writings on antiquity, the classicists whose guidance she acknowledges include her husband Dick Mitchison (1894–1970) and Theodore Wade-Gery (1888–1972), an established Oxford scholar and her lover.[7] She thus came to antiquity obliquely, and this may be what helped to produce the radical vision that Peter Green celebrates in *The Conquered* (1923), Mitchison's first novel, set among the Gallic victims of Rome:[8]

> This book was not only excellently documented and a fine creative achievement in its own right: it forced readers to perform a radical revaluation of the ethics drummed into them during their schooldays. It came, indeed, like a slap in the face to complacent Caesar-nurtured imperialists by treating the Gallic Wars from the viewpoint of the Gauls.

All her subsequent classicizing works of fiction adopted a similar perspective.

With this thoroughly "democratic turn" to her writing on the ancient world, it may seem strange that Mitchison's writing does not generate more critical interest from present-day classicists.[9] This may be due partly to the range of genres in which she worked: her historical fiction is sometimes overshadowed by her science fiction and Scots novels. But she has been a "neglected" and then a "rediscovered" author ever since 1953, when Henry Treece wrote of *The Conquered* as "my favourite forgotten book."[10] We can also suggest that despite the work's investment in antiquity, Mitchison is not a "classic"; from the perspective of early twenty-first century readers, much of the work has dated, and the style in particular can be gratingly sentimental.[11]

times seems to have characterised herself as a "boy," though not as a man. See, e.g., Calder, *Nine Lives of Naomi Mitchison*, 47.

7 See the dedication to *Black Sparta* and *All Change Here*, 164.

8 Green, "Aspects of the Historical Novel," 53–60.

9 A notable exception is Sheila Murnaghan, "The Memorable Past," 125–139.

10 Calder, *Nine Lives*, 63. On neglect and rediscovery, see most recently the essays collected in the "Naomi Mitchison Special Issue," *The Bottle Imp* 19 (2016).

11 For critiques of her style see, e.g., Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, 178, and Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel*, 114, 136. Q. D. Leavis famously dismissed Mitchison's style as an "average magazine story" with "a nauseating brand of sentimentality" ("Lady Novelists and the Lower Orders," *Scrutiny* [September 1935]: 112–132, 114, 128) and Calder notes the *Cape Times* excoriating the "maddening infantile lisp of a style" (*Nine Lives*, 88).

However, it should be noted that in writing revolutionary versions of antiquity which foregrounded the experiences of those usually silenced in the ancient sources, the texts were undertaking a genuine struggle, which marks them with tensions. Some of the narratives discussed here, especially those collected in *The Delicate Fire* (1933), are messy and unfocused, and the summaries provided do not capture the fairly abrasive reading experience; few modern critics pay any attention to the short story collections. Most of Mitchison's work is out of print, although critics interested in the early twentieth century have started to re-examine the texts.[12]

In the critical terms of the early twentieth century, Mitchison's work was defiantly "middlebrow," i.e., not striving for a role as a classic in "high culture," and currently critics are inclined to site her within the movement to take the characteristics of Modernism and adapt them in order to communicate more effectively with a wider general audience.[13] Mitchison's own writing addresses the question of how to reach different groups; the difficulty as to how to reconcile audiences and ambitions is visible in her diary entry for August 24, 1941:[14]

> I feel I don't care about being in the same tradition as Shakespeare and Beethoven if only I can do something for my own people in Scotland. I would like of course, just for once, to be a best seller [...] But it doesn't matter. I want what Yeats wanted. I want the small group. I want to write history for two or three dozen people who may or mayn't read what I write, for the small, tiny group who said I knew more about Pindar than anyone but Wilamowitz,[15] I want to write like a bit of history in *The Blood of the Martyrs* [1939], which probably nobody has noticed, but it is first class stuff. And then I want to write for people here, for Denny M and Duncan and Angus and Lilla and Jemima and Lachie, for Alec and Anna, for Willie and

12 See, e.g., Purdon, *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time.*

13 See, e.g., Joannou, "Introduction," 1–20, and in the same volume, Bluemel "Exemplary Intermodernists," 40–57, and Humble "Feminine Middlebrow Novel," 97–111.

14 Mitchison, *Among You Taking Notes*, 159.

15 Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff was "possibly the greatest Hellenist of his age" (Magnelli), the author of numerous important books and articles on a range of ancient authors, including canonical scholarly commentaries.

> Johnnie – to make them confident and happy. But I don't want to write for the New Statesman boys, for the international culture of cities […][16]

It is particularly interesting that classical antiquity makes it into this dissection of her literary ambitions, sitting somewhat awkwardly alongside not only her Scottish neighbors but also the left-wing journal *New Statesman*. It should also be noted that this generic and political tension is legible in Mitchison's cultural background; as a scion of the Haldane family, her origin and upbringing are in some contrast with her later progressive allegiances and experimentations. The early classicizing novels and short stories, with the representations of revolution that I discuss, can be read as repeated attempts to square the recalcitrant circle.[17] Mitchison's gender and class identity and the frictions between them meet the progressive forces at work in her historical period and the available versions of classical antiquity to produce a specific oeuvre of historical fiction. The versions of antiquity purveyed in these works of fiction are all "revolutionary" in that they are characterized by transgressive desire, violence of various kinds, and sometimes radical ambivalence, but accounts of actual political change are infrequent and sometimes awkward.

REVOLUTION NARRATIVES OF THE 1920S AND 1930S

The stories collected as *Black Sparta* (1928) include "The Head and the Heart," in which women are caught up in a full-scale revolution. This story, the earliest of the "revolution" narratives, is focalized through the figure of the aging Pindar, who is visited by his Milesian friend Pausilla. Pausilla recounts her history of sexual as well as political dissidence. Unmarried, and a foreigner, she has been living with an aristocratic political leader in the Greek colony of North Africa, Kyrene, and has become involved in the democratic revolution there. She lived with Damophilos outside marriage because she "wanted to be free and not belong to anyone, not even him."[18] Damophilos and his friends were

16 The people named towards the end of this quotation are her neighbours in the Scottish village where she moved in later life.

17 We perhaps do not need to note that the "classical" and the "revolutionary" have not always been easy bedfellows; see on the overall relationship not only the present volume, but also Goff and Simpson, "Introduction" in *Classicising Crisis*, 1–10.

18 Mitchison, *Black Sparta*, 93.

reluctantly drawn into revolutionary activity and ended up helping to lead the movement, but he has been executed by fellow revolutionaries, suggesting the contours of the French as well as the Russian Revolution, as successive cohorts of insurgents turn on one another.

Damophilos features as a character in Pindar's *Pythian* 4, where the poem's speaker entreats the ruler Arcesilaus to allow Damophilos to return from exile to Kyrene. In the story, it appears that this has happened, but to no positive effect, and Pindar laments, "What is the good of all this writing when people die … [Poetry] can't do any of the things I said it could do."[19] The political and poetic failure is accompanied by sexual renunciation and compromise. When Damophilos was in political danger, Pausilla concluded that the gods required from her a supreme sacrifice, and she made a vow of chastity. This, as she points out, meant giving up any future life with her lover, any child, and indeed any sustenance, since she has no way of supporting herself other than by dependence on men.[20] She later loses her faith in the gods and breaks her vow, quite cynically, with the captain of the ship on which she and her sister escape from Kyrene.[21]

Most of her friends, who were also Pindar's friends, have been killed, so her representation of the revolution is ambivalent at best. Much of her narration, which dominates the story, is taken up with loving and sensuous descriptions of aristocratic life at Kyrene before the revolution, and subsequently, she condemns the revolution in strong terms. The demos, referred to as such, are not a very attractive proposition; Pausilla represents them in a patronizing way as "little shopkeepers or businesspeople who'd done badly,"[22] and later she lists "labourers, shop people, sailors, street women."[23] Although she has a sense of their grievances against the king, once they no longer trust the aristocratic leaders, she condemns them:

> I suppose we expected too much of the demos; after they'd seen how easy it was to smash things and how easy it was to kill they wouldn't take orders or advice from anyone … they started killing people, not in hot blood but saying it was justice … And nobody did any work except the women.[24]

19 Mitchison, *Black Sparta*, 117.
20 Ibid., 110.
21 Ibid., 114.
22 Ibid., 97.
23 Ibid., 100.
24 Ibid., 108–109.

Finally, she sums up: "that, you see, was the democracy of Kyrene. I suppose all democracies are the same more or less. I think there must be something inherently cruel and stupid in them, the reduction of everyone in a crowd to the lowest."[25] This recognizable anti-democratic discourse, and the later reference to the "ten days" of revolutionary upheaval,[26] indicate that although the historical Kyrene did depose a king and move to democracy in the fifth century BC, it is the Russian Revolution which provides the foremost template for the imagined events in Kyrene. Mitchison visited the USSR in the 1930s and records an ambivalence about it, which she shared with many other British leftists.[27]

But Pausilla does not have it all her own way, since we are also offered another very different view of the revolution. Her sister, who accompanies her, has a different and more optimistic view, claiming that

> before the end of the ten days, things were much better, they really were! They'd got some sort of order into the State, they'd stopped robbing foreigners and started working again, they were making a constitution! … I'm sure a democracy might be beautiful.[28]

She is determined to get to Athens, where a different democratic revolution is firmly established and where Aeschylus is developing into a poet of Pindar's stature.[29] Like Pausilla, she is determined to live independently, and she is willing to live with an Athenian acquaintance, out of wedlock, in order to establish herself there. She is Aspasia, the future consort of Pericles. So although the story canvasses various forms of failure – political, sexual, and artistic – it also commits to the success of a new kind of poetry, a working democracy, and an independent female who does manage to put her mark on history.

This first "revolution" story involves tropes which will recur. Women's sexuality is closely bound up with liberatory political developments and can cross class boundaries, while masculine politics display the figure of the sacrificial Frazerian king, here the

25 Mitchison, *Black Sparta*, 112.

26 Ibid.

27 Mitchison, *You May Well Ask*, 187–91. See also Stead, "From Argyll with Love." For more detailed accounts of British reaction to the Revolution, see Bullock, *Romancing the Revolution*.

28 Mitchison, *Black Sparta*, 112.

29 Ibid., 115.

aristocratic political leader who suffers undeservedly for others.[30] While the leader whose followers turn on him is recognizable from the history of various revolutions, especially perhaps the French, this figure acquires further resonance from Frazer's study of myths and rituals in which a king dies to preserve his society. A further element of this story which becomes characteristic of later ones is that the representation of revolution is complex enough that judgment must be reserved. Although all the characters here agree that the king of Kyrene was long overdue for his end, the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, with civil war and political repression, had shown that radical political change could immiserate as well as liberate. In subsequent narratives, we read variations on revolutionary female sexuality, the Frazerian figure, and the multiplicity, or indeterminacy, of judgments on revolution.

In later works, women are more integrated into revolutionary activity but often figure in the revolutionary brotherhood, rather than being part of the actual organization of political action.[31] Although we can trace a move across the works to more optimistic representations, there is an undercurrent of failure, regret, and disappointment. In *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* (1931), Mitchison's best-known novel, the central revolution is that of Kleomenes III, the historical late-third-century king of Sparta. He is represented as attempting to restore Sparta's historical supremacy by bringing back Lycurgan institutions of common ownership and commensality, canceling debt, enfranchising helots, and redistributing the land. The revolution is represented not only through Kleomenes and his male supporters but emphatically also through women.[32]

30 On the influence of Scottish folklorist and anthropologist James George Frazer (1854–1941) in Mitchison's work, and that of other women writers of the period, see Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, 17–19, 33–40. Frazer's enormous compilation of myths and rituals from around the world discerned a pattern underlying them of a king who periodically dies and is reborn as a guarantee of harvest and thus of social survival. Frazer's work was highly influential, not least because it brought together study of classical antiquity and what were then perceived as "primitive" cultures.

31 See, e.g., Sponenberg "'The Pendulum is Swinging Backwards,'" especially chapter 4.

32 Mitchison's sources here most likely included Plutarch, *Agis and Cleomenes*; the novel's episodes of the deaths of Kleomenes and of his women family members follow Plutarch's narration closely.

Philylla, the maid of honor of the Queen, is first seen as a young girl practicing archery, determined to grow up into a "real" Spartan, a "soldier" rather than a "girl."[33] We understand that her investment in the revolution is partly because it gives her opportunities beyond the constrictions of the female role, and she pursues this double path of "soldier" and "girl" for the rest of the novel, identifying with the archaic ideal of Sparta which Kleomenes is endeavoring to revive. But she is also represented insistently as female, subject to sexual awakening and sexual threat. When she visits the family of her helot wet nurse on her fourteenth birthday, the nurse recognizes that she is making the transition to womanhood: "Her foster-mother was feeling at her with big wise hands […], touching at all the soft, very sensitive growing points of her body. Waves of feeling poured over her as she waited, shut-eyed, centering, centering […]"[34] Philylla notices that she is taller than some of the helots, and feels that "there was nothing she was afraid of."[35] But the helots refuse to be properly respectful, saying, "There won't be any of that soon! – not when we're all masters, me and him and him."[36] She is shocked, and she senses a threat from the men, whose number she cannot quite see: "dark and laughing, they waited for her."[37] At first, as an elite Spartan, she recalls "all the powers of life and death, of prison and torture and abuse when the abused has to stand silent with his hands folded and neck meek." But as a fellow supporter of the "King's New Times," she also recognizes that with his vigorous words, "the man had brought some sort of community between them."[38] She acknowledges and accepts the community of interest brought about by the imminent revolution, so that the sexual tension, generated by the figure of a young girl facing a group of men, is redirected to enable the crossing of class boundaries.

Kleomenes' royal revolution, like that of Damophilos, is doomed, and he and his supporters flee to Alexandria in Egypt. In Alexandria, they are imprisoned by Ptolemy but plan to break out and try to rouse the Alexandrians with the cry for freedom. On the eve of their fatal attempt, they share a feast, and during this meal, they talk intimately of their love for each other, with Kleomenes and his lover reliving

33 Mitchison, *The Corn King and the Spring Queen*, 126.

34 Ibid., 155.

35 Ibid., 157.

36 Ibid., 157.

37 Ibid., 157.

38 Ibid., 158.

the scene of their first declarations.[39] This feast clearly recalls the Last Supper of Jesus but is also a Mystery as at Eleusis and a version of the rites of Osiris, another dying king, alongside a celebration of homoerotic desire.[40] Kleomenes is positioned as a similar kind of leader, celebrated in rites which ensure that although he dies, he persists, as the figure of the sacrificial king.[41] Despite this figuration, his fall sweeps up all his followers. His male companions are killed in the streets of Alexandria, and the women of his family, his mother and his children, and the families of his followers, who have all been separately imprisoned as hostages, are executed by the Egyptian authorities. Philylla, the wife of his closest friend Panteus, achieves the kind of heroic identity she longs for only via these terrible events; she supports all the other women through the mass executions that follow, lays out the bodies, and finally ensures that her dress falls around her neatly when she is killed.[42]

A second female character is also caught up in Kleomenes' movement and comes out of it more successfully. Erif Der is a Scythian princess and priestess who kills her father during a ritual and leaves Scythia for Greece in search of healing. At first, she uses her fertility magic for Scythians, Spartans and Egyptians alike, but once Kleomenes' revolution is under threat, she deploys greater powers to stunning effect. When Kleomenes is killed in Alexandria, she goes into a trance; her spirit or Egyptian "khu" leaves her physical body and travels to guard the corpse in the form of an enormous snake.[43] Since his corpse is thus preserved, there emerges a cult in his honor, which permits his revolution to enjoy a kind of afterlife. The novel closes with later generations of Scythians and Spartans alike tending his memory.[44]

A very different coordination of female sexuality and revolution unfolds in the collection *The Delicate Fire* (1933), specifically in the five narratives gathered under the title "Lovely Mantinea." These deal with the aftermath of the destruction of Mantinea by the Macedonians under Antigonus in 222 BC.[45] The destruction of Mantinea was itself fallout from Kleomenes' failed revolution, so the Spartan events are

39 Mitchison, *The Corn King and the Spring Queen*, 646–648.

40 Ibid., 641–642. For the feast and the love of Kleomenes and Panteus, see Plutarch, *Agis and Cleomenes*, 37. The ritual overtones of the feast are not found in Plutarch. For the wife of Panteus, see Plutarch, *Agis and Cleomenes*, 38.

41 Mitchison, *The Corn King and the Spring Queen*, 643.

42 Ibid., 672.

43 Ibid., 685–687.

44 Ibid., 713–719.

45 See Polybius 2.56–58.

in the background; Kleomenes' revolution supplies a paradigm to which some characters aspire. Each of the first four stories is focalized through a different character, while the last takes a more distant third-person perspective. Together they imagine how the aftermath of violent upheaval may lead to a utopian community. Over-full of contradictory events and emotions, plot developments that strain credibility, and a frequently ponderous and didactic tone, the stories have not made much of a mark in criticism; the contemporary review in the *Times Literary Supplement* passes no judgment except to say that the characters end up in a "happy communism," which perhaps was condemnation enough.[46] It might be suggested that Mitchison has exhausted the possibilities of the classical world, especially in relation to revolution. Murray's introduction to the 2012 edition of *The Delicate Fire* concludes that the collection

> illustrates a fundamental change in Naomi Mitchison's work. The early stories are set in ancient Greece, like many before them. But here Mitchison effectively says farewell to that setting with accounts of the worlds of Sappho and "Lovely Mantinea." … She turns away from Greece for good. She turns to the present, and will spend the thirties warning against fascism.[47]

It will be suggested here that *The Blood of the Martyrs* (1939) resists the fascism of the 1930s with a different kind of revolution and that *Cleopatra's People* (1972) embeds the earlier tropes in a different culture and in a story even more dominated by women.

The only first-person story in the "Lovely Mantinea" group, "The Wife of Aglaos," is ironically titled; although the narrator Kleta certainly begins the story as the wife of Aglaos, she takes on several other identities before regaining that status. Kleta is enslaved, along with her baby son and everybody else in Mantinea, when the city falls to Antigonus. In her new master's house she tries to make friends with the other slaves, but without success because they are hostile to her former citizen status. She succeeds in forming a friendship only when she gives birth to her new master's son, and is helped by a slave herdsman Damis. Once she recovers from the birth, they determine to run away and she abandons the baby. In hiding, when Damis helps her express her painful breasts, she goes on to feed him, and they subsequently become lovers.

46 Smyth, "The Delicate Fire," 444.

47 Mitchison, *The Delicate Fire*, v.

When the couple meet up with other escaped slaves who have set up a home in the hills, the outlaws assume that Kleta belongs to Damis. Damis quickly rebukes them: "She's not my woman. She isn't anybody's. She is a free woman … She's not a lady. She is a good woman."[48] Liberated from the notion of possession, Kleta sleeps with each of the outlaws in turn, and over the years she has two children whom the outlaws all acknowledge together. Her shared body thus works politically to unite the group: "I became one of them. I got their point of view."[49] Kleta's first-person narrative tries on occasion to reclaim something of a higher status, in that she can teach the outlaws about poetry and philosophy. But she then comes to recognize that Homer and the philosophers do not speak to those who are enslaved or otherwise oppressed; she perceives her culture anew as well as her politics.[50] She reflects on the Spartan revolution under Kleomenes and concludes that it failed because it came from the top down, because Kleomenes "could not get out of the possessors' habit of wanting more power for himself" instead of making "a stable state where there would be no one under and no one over, but all equal."[51] So the physical sharing is furthered by a cultural and political sharing that works both ways. However, the idyll of egalitarian politics and sexual emancipation ends with the arrival of Kleta's husband, himself having escaped from slavery, and her return to a more regular union with him.

Other stories concentrate on male survivors of the sack, Kleta's husband Aglaos and her brother Arkas. The final Mantinea story brings all these people together once more and stages a real revolution, a slave revolt in which Kleta plays a prominent part. Her husband Aglaos has, like her, learned humility and brotherhood through having been a slave, but Arkas has not; although he suffered as a slave, he has clawed back power and has now become a brutal owner himself. Kleta and Aglaos move to Arkas' farm, but are horrified by his cruelty toward his slaves. They befriend the slaves, and when the slaves in the whole neighborhood rise up against the owners, Kleta and Aglaos are spared. Indeed the rebel slaves allow them to help direct the course of the revolt, so that they end by saving the lives of most of the owners. Kleta occupies a prominent role in ensuring that the revolution is largely bloodless. The harmonious conclusion of the revolutionary

48 Mitchison, *The Delicate Fire*, 166.

49 Ibid., 168.

50 Ibid., 170–171.

51 Ibid., 169.

action may invite skeptical scrutiny; for instance, Arkas repents of his misdeeds with unconvincing alacrity, so that the narrative escapes the necessity to have Kleta, Aglaos, or the other ex-slaves kill him.

The perspective of this final and apparently optimistic story differs considerably from Kleta's first-person narrative in her own tale. There, she questions at the outset whether "I can say what happened with any measure of truth,"[52] and she often struggles to find exactly the right words to express her understanding of past events. The impersonal narrative of the final story, despite its multiplicity of exciting incidents, has no such difficulty and keeps all the characters at arm's length. The story ends when the ex-slaves have killed the people they needed to, spared the others, and are planning a new settlement run along egalitarian lines. The upheaval and suffering, sexual and social, are positioned to bear positive fruit in a future characterized by freedom and equality. The ending, however, is not simply triumphant. Aglaos, who had been a philosophy student, reflects:

> The old Stoic equality idea looked like coming real now that it had solid facts to work on! It would be very exciting to see whether it would be possible to run a community without slave-owning at all; it had never been done in the past, but – after all, why not?[53]

There is some irony here in that twentieth-century Western society has, in its own representation, managed without slavery for decades, whereas the notion of equality is still utterly radical. So the community of ex-slaves challenges its 1933 audience to make the kind of imaginative leap into an identification that Kleta had made earlier, and, despite the disillusionment with revolution legible in other parts of Mitchison's work, the absence of slavery in the twentieth century could yield optimism about the possibilities for equality.[54] Yet the final sentences are open to a different, ironic reading. "That winter they would be working together, but there would be no need for words, no need to talk about

52 Mitchison, *The Delicate Fire*, 141.

53 Ibid., 274. "The old Stoic equality idea" is not fleshed out in the story, but Aglaos' idea may relate to the strand of Stoic thought characterised by cosmopolitanism and human community. The lost Republic of Zeno apparently recommended that "we should consider all men to be of one community and one polity, and that we should have a common life and an order common to us all"; Plutarch, *On the Fortune of Alexander*, 329.

54 The absence of legal slavery is meant here, but we are also increasingly forced to be aware of enslaved people all around us. See, e.g., the Anti-Slavery International website's details on modern slavery.

all that, ever any more. No need between equals."[55] On the one hand, this can be read as an idealizing declaration of faith that the past can be managed toward a positive reconciliation among people who were earlier on opposite sides, and it might strike us as valuable, if naive; and it brings its own truth in that it is the final sentence of the story, so there is indeed no more talk. But that very silence may be thought ominous. It potentially closes down debate and leaves a difficult history unspoken. The fact that the characters will never discuss their previous lives again might imply, in quite a sinister fashion, that the life of "equality" is maintained only at a great price.

The Blood of the Martyrs (1939) is set among the early Christians in Rome and examines the difficulties attending the construction of a political movement in the face of persecution. This novel is perhaps more revolutionary even than "Lovely Mantinea" in that the institution it tries to build, the Christian church, does survive and still functions, although few would readily say that we now inhabit "the kingdom" of peace, justice, and freedom which the early Christians work for. The plot convenes a huge cast of characters from different parts of the Roman world who are drawn together by the magnetism of the imperial city as well as by their shared investment in the new religion. The early Christians, of mostly servile status, assume that the rich and the masters will not be part of their revolution,[56] but meanwhile, the aristocrats of Rome are discussing their own brand of political change: how to depose Nero and develop a constitution without emperors but with proper senatorial power for themselves. They conclude that an actual revolution, "with equality and all that," is impossible,[57] but in their very houses, the slaves are working toward that end. The novel invites us to think of early Christianity as a version of socialism, and in the third part, the chapter titles include explicitly political terms such as "Difficulties of a United Front."[58] The identification is sealed by the "Dedication," which thanks as contributors to the book "Austrian socialists in the counterrevolution of 1924, share-croppers in Arkansas in 1935 … and the named and unnamed host of the witnesses against

55 Mitchison, *The Delicate Fire*, 275.

56 Mitchison, *Blood of the Martyrs*, 25–26.

57 Ibid., 288.

58 "United front" was the name given to various moves in the early 1930s towards cooperation between the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Labour Party. After 1935, the related term "popular front" denoted cooperation among all those opposed to fascism. See, e.g., Thorpe, *History*, 96–99; Worley, *Labour,* 207–8; Morgan, *Against Fascism*, chapter 2.

tyranny and superstition."[59] Conversely, Rome suggests the Fascism of both Mussolini and Hitler, complete with the dictator appearing in uniform on a balcony and crowds shouting Hail.[60]

The version of socialism purveyed here, however, is one fully invested in the sacrificial Frazerian king, and the slaves explicitly link Jesus to Spartacus and Kleomenes of Sparta among others. These did not only die for their fellow-humans, but were also "all of them for the oppressed ones, the common people."[61] Conversely, the agency of women, especially their sexual agency, is harnessed to the revolutionary ends, as when Lalage the dancer shares her body to promote community among her fellows.[62] Equally interesting from the point of view of female agency is the fact that some of the women worship Isis as well as Jesus,[63] so that even this transcendentally influential "Frazerian king" does not have everything his own way.

CLEOPATRA'S PEOPLE

Mitchison moves into very different territory after the 1930s, writing stories set in Scotland, Africa, and outer space. But 1972 saw a return to antiquity with *Cleopatra's People*, in which some of the earlier themes appear in a new guise. Women's agency in social change and in resistance to oppression is again important, and female sexuality is explored as a part of that agency. The revolution is again led from the top, by a sacrificial ruler figure, and although it fails, its sacrificial gestures secure certain kinds of success as well, so that there are still multiple stories that may be told about it. In fact, there are two revolutions in the novel, one inspired by the other, the sequence possibly pointing forward to further attempts at justice, peace, and brotherhood. The ambiguous ending leaves room for some characters at least to find political security and harmony.

The two revolutions are responsible for the novel's complex structure, which moves back and forth between three time periods: 45–37 BC, when Cleopatra is planning how to escape Roman domi-

59 Mitchison, *Blood of the Martyrs*, "Dedication," n. p. Mitchison had worked with both groups first identified.

60 Mitchison, *Blood of the Martyrs*, 175.

61 Ibid., 132.

62 See Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, 133. Benton, *Naomi Mitchison*, 114 notes the poor reviews of this novel when it first appeared. Recent important treatments include those by Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism*, and Sponenberg, "The Pendulum."

63 Mitchison, *Blood of the Martyrs*, 74–77.

nation; 31–30 BC, at the end of independent Egypt with the death of Cleopatra and her women companions Charmian and Iras; and 26–25 BC, which marks the subsequent attempt to bring the surviving children of Cleopatra to Egypt and inspire an Egyptian uprising. The novel is thus divided between accounts of the Queen and her resistance to Rome and Octavian and accounts of the later attempt to arouse the subject Egyptians to revolt against the Romans. In the earlier period, the Queen is devising means to exploit Rome's strength against itself, by helping Antony against Octavian but also by planning to increase her own independent strength through trade and alliances in other parts of Africa and India. In the later period, the initiative passes to a family of upper-class Alexandrians, the surviving relatives of Charmian. Hipparchia, Charmian's sister, devises the plot and prevails upon her niece Aristonoë to help. The scheme is to contact the children of Cleopatra, Selene and Philadelphos, who are living in Rome in quasi-captivity, and bring them to Alexandria. Once the Egyptians see the children, Hipparchia believes, they will instantly rise up against the Romans. The holes in this plan are, of course, enormous, but it does almost work; the children are recognized, and the people of Alexandria do attempt a revolt in their name, which is immediately crushed by Rome. Hipparchia dies, although the other members of her family are spared, and the children of Cleopatra make various arrangements to escape. The Queen of Punt, an African kingdom south of Egypt, is instrumental in the rescue of Cleopatra's son Philadelphos from the Romans. The rumor is put about that he has been kidnapped and eaten by savage cannibals, a tale which the Romans are only too ready to believe.[64]

As will be clear from the foregoing, the novel is spectacularly female-dominated, although a number of men play supporting roles, and the figure of Octavian, subsequently Augustus, looms threateningly off-stage. Cleopatra is represented as a powerful queen with wide-ranging political ambitions furthered by acute intelligence; once dead, she inspires other women's initiative as they preserve her memory and try to fulfill her plans. In the parts of the novel set during Cleopatra's lifetime, she travels for trade and exploration, runs council meetings, and takes on the might of Rome. Her alliance with Anthony is far more political than erotic, and she maintains the upper hand. She is of Greek descent, but perceives herself as largely Egyptian, with responsibilities toward Egypt. After her death, it is the Greek women in Alexandria, Hipparchia and Aristonoë, who continue her work to undermine Rome. Men are peripherally involved, but they

64 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 201.

can do little because they would come under more suspicion. The women characters are often educated and relatively independent, with helpful spouses, or, in Cleopatra's case, devoted women companions. The novel's themes of political and philosophical understanding, as well as its undercurrents of revolutionary sexuality, are articulated mostly via female characters. Women are represented as desiring men in considered, tactical ways, although the Queen is the shrewdest in planning her liaisons; while she enjoys sex with generous ingenuity, on occasion also with women,[65] she is adept at contraception,[66] and her vitality is implicitly contrasted with the sexual arrangements represented among the Romans, which range from prostitution to domestic violence. In these respects, this novel builds on earlier works, but its sexual buoyancy seems almost prescient about the historical changes ushered in by the feminism of the 1970s.[67]

The initial revolution is spearheaded by Cleopatra herself. The revolutions in Mitchison's earlier works on Kyrene and on Sparta are led from the top, by aristocratic and even royal figures, in a way that is contradictory and usually compromised. *Cleopatra's People* endeavors to square that circle by making the Queen both an ordinary mother beloved of the ordinary people and a revolutionary monarch. It attempts this by way of the figure of Isis. We see the Queen identifying herself ever more closely with Isis, both devastatingly powerful and maternal.[68] As her plans to defeat Rome founder, Cleopatra understands herself also as Isis who suffers for others, and in death she identifies with the goddess even more closely.[69] However, Cleopatra differs from other aristocratic revolutionaries in Mitchison's fiction. Unlike Kleomenes of Sparta, who died in exile, Cleopatra can really claim to have died for her country, and, moreover, when she becomes Isis on death, her companions, Charmian and Iras, who will die with her, will also be worshipped as cult figures. She reassures them: "through you will come help and healing. You will never die so long as women suffer."[70] Although Iras answers that "that will be always," the Queen counters that "we shall intercede." The last classicizing novel thus gives up the quest

65 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 17.

66 Ibid., 16.

67 The same year 1970 saw the publication of both Millett's *Sexual Politics* and Greer's *Female Eunuch*. Both of these had a huge cultural impact.

68 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 12, 48.

69 Ibid., 72, 158.

70 Ibid., 157.

for a dying king and invests fully in the dying savior queen instead, adding the hopeful note that she died for the good of women.

Despite this investment in Cleopatra's positive leadership, it is never completely clear what her revolution entails, as it appears under different signs at different times. When Cleopatra is traveling on the Nile, she sees the temple of Akhnaton and contrasts the god's peaceful way of uniting the world with that chosen by her ancestor Alexander.[71] She, meanwhile, builds up her country by means of trade and plans to evade the increasing power of Rome; Romans may rule by force of legions, but she proposes that money will ensure genuine dominance.[72] Later on, she offers her council two alternatives as counters to Rome. First, she suggests that they could leave Alexandria and found a new city "looking to East and South,"[73] forging connections to India and other parts of Africa. Or they could accept that Egypt must take sides in Rome's civil struggle and support the weaker side against the stronger in order to encourage Rome's self-destruction.[74] Her plans to marry Antony are simply a method to secure Egypt.[75] She dreams too, it seems, of living in friendliness with other nations, trading fairly, and promoting brotherhood. After all, both her ancestor Ptolemy II Philadelphos (ca. 309–246 BC) and her son, Ptolemy XVI Philadelphos (36–29 BC), bear it in their names (Φιλάδελφος, lit. brother-loving).[76] Others claim that she wanted even more, convinced that the expulsion of the Romans would usher in an age of peace and justice. A councillor remembers that: "The Queen has said it will be different. We shall live in friendliness, trading fairly with other nations, not forcing our will on them."[77] Charmian speaks of her as wanting:

> a golden age when there would be enough for everyone. No wars. No famines. A kind of light over us all … She could have been like the great Alexander and conquered the world, but not by war. By trade and friendship, by treaties, by justice everywhere.[78]

Similarly Iras says of Antony that "he seemed to want the same things as she did. The Golden Age, the rule of love. She showed him that and

71 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 14–15.

72 Ibid., 21.

73 Ibid., 45.

74 Ibid., 46–47.

75 Ibid., 50–51.

76 Ibid., 58.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid., 69.

he followed."[79] Charmian's daughter Elpis, however, gives a slightly different notion of what Cleopatra wanted: "Certainly she wanted to rule the world. And destroy Rome. Who wouldn't?"[80] If Cleopatra's revolution appears in different guises for different followers, we might nonetheless conclude that it continues to inspire, perhaps because of its very amorphousness.

Although this revolution is thus represented in sketchy terms, it commands the allegiance of many ordinary Egyptians and Greeks in Alexandria, especially once the Queen is dead. Aristonoë's maid explains that the ordinary people remember the Queen and "believe she will give them justice and mercy."[81] Even if Cleopatra was mainly interested in resisting imperial Rome, we can conclude that it is her "people" who have developed the further progressive implications of her politics, toward justice and brotherhood, and that this is how the figure of Cleopatra inspires the second revolution by which Hipparchia and her associates try to incite the Egyptians to rebellion. Although this rebellion is crushed, Cleopatra's children manage to escape the destinies designed for them by Rome, and we are invited to conclude that they are free to initiate their own kinds of political change. Her daughter Selene is set to build a new Alexandria in her husband's land of Numidia, and her son Philadelphos escapes into the unknown regions of Africa.

This novel thus canvasses two related revolutions, one inspired by the other, both led from the top, and in one case by a figure who is not only royal but also eventually divine. This duality is developed by the double way in which revolution is discussed, being both desirable and also highly difficult and improbable – unlike, for instance, the troublingly swift resolution in "Lovely Mantinea." The novel opens with a scene in which Aristonoë says of the Queen "I know two things … two separate kinds of things."[82] These turn out to be the two stories about Cleopatra, in which she is either a scandalous horror, as for the Romans, or as for the loyal Egyptians, a goddess. The "truth" is different in Rome and Alexandria.[83] Different characters acknowledge the supreme difficulty of mounting a revolution, in a way that has not been notable in the narratives previously discussed. Aristonoë questions her aunt: "Everyone hates the army of occupation, but that

79 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 70.

80 Ibid., 107.

81 Ibid., 53.

82 Ibid., 3.

83 Ibid., 106.

doesn't prove that they'd risk their lives, does it?"[84] Aristonoë's father Polemo, weighing up the fact that Egyptians pray to the Queen as Isis, reflects that "Praying and fighting, they're two different things."[85] Elpis concurs: "The people … love the memory of the Queen and the story of the Queen. But it is another thing to risk one's life."[86] Juba, Cleopatra's son-in-law, wonders how long oppression can go on if it has the means: "Forever? Or is it possible that, after all, there are gods watching? It did not look like that to him."[87] The duality of the discussions about revolution, simultaneously insisting on its success and doubting it, suggests stories told by the victors and the defeated respectively, but they are not the only possible stories. We know that the uprising in Alexandria has been defeated, like the earlier plans of Cleopatra herself, but the escapes of Cleopatra's children allow us to imagine other possibilities.

It is relevant that the salvation of Cleopatra's children is entrusted to Africa. Selene and Juba decamp to Numidia, and Philadelphos escapes to Punt, where the stories of being eaten by barbaric cannibals shield him from Rome. The prominence of Africa in the novel connects with Mitchison's own life, as Murray notes,[88] but also registers the geopolitical shifts of the postwar period and the profound changes in relations between Britain and her former colonies. By 1972 the various successful movements for independence in Africa could contribute to the idea that positive political change, even revolutionary liberation, is a realistic goal and not always doomed to failure; "other possibilities" had sometimes been successfully imagined. The African dimension of the novel also opens up the classical world beyond Greece and Rome, and beyond even Egypt, which had figured prominently in *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* (1931). It thus returns to the classical world of the 1920s and 1930s fiction with a renewed optimism about the possibilities of revolution in antiquity.

As noted above, the work of Naomi Mitchison is frequently rediscovered, and the time may be ripe for such a development again.[89] It would be highly appropriate for classicists to take their places among those who are thus rereading the relations between classics and the progressive movements of the early twentieth century.

84 Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, 66.

85 Ibid., 155.

86 Ibid., 179.

87 Ibid., 199.

88 Murray, "Introduction" to Mitchison, *Cleopatra's People*, ii.

89 See Purdon, *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beall, Hazel S. "Historical Fiction on Classical Themes." *The Classical World* 54, no. 1 (1960): 8–12.

Benton, Jill. *Naomi Mitchison: A Biography*. London: Pandora, 1990.

Bluemel, Kristin. "Exemplary Intermodernists." In *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920–1945*, volume 8, edited by Maroula Joannou, 40–57. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Bullock, Ian. *Romancing the Revolution: The Myth of Soviet Democracy and the British Left*. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2011.

Calder, Jennie. *The Nine Lives of Naomi Mitchison*. London: Virago, 1997.

Cole Babbitt, Frank. *Plutarch: Moralia*, *Volume IV; Roman Questions, Greek Questions, Greek and Roman Parallel Stories, On the Fortune of the Romans, On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander. Were the Athenians More Famous in War or in Wisdom?* Loeb Classical Library 305. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936.

Goff, Barbara, and Michael Simpson. "Introduction." In *Classicising Crisis: The Modern Age of Revolutions and the Greco-Roman Repertoire*. London: Routledge, 2020.

Green, Peter. "Aspects of the Historical Novel." *Essays by Diverse Hands* 31 (1962): 53–60.

Greer, Germaine. *The Female Eunuch*. London: McGibbon and Kee, 1970.

Hoberman, Ruth. *Gendering Classicism: The Ancient World in Twentieth-Century Women's Historical Fiction*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997.

Humble, Nicola. "The Feminine Middlebrow Novel." In *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920–1945*, volume 8, edited by Maroula Joannou, 97–111. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Joannou, Maroula. "Introduction: Modernism, the Middlebrow and Modernity in Context." In *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920–1945*, volume 8, edited by Maroula Joannou, 1–20. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

———. "Naomi Mitchison at One Hundred." *Women: A Cultural Review* 9, no. 3 (1998): 292–304.

Leavis, Q. D. "Lady Novelists and the Lower Orders." *Scrutiny* (September 1935): 112–132.

Magnelli, Enrico. "Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Ulrich von." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, edited by Michael Gagarin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, available online.

Miller, Gavin, ed. Naomi Mitchison Special Issue. *The Bottle Imp 19*. Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2016.

Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday, 1970.

Mitchison, Naomi. *The Delicate Fire*. Introduction by Isobel Murray. Kilkerran: Kennedy & Boyd, 2012. First published 1933 by Jonathan Cape, London.
———. *All Change Here: Girlhood and Marriage*. Oxford: Bodley Head, 1975.
———. *Among You Taking Notes: The Wartime Diary of Naomi Mitchison*. Edited by Dorothy Sheridan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
———. *Black Sparta: Greek Stories*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928.
———. *The Blood of the Martyrs*. New York: Whittlesey House, 1948. First published 1939.
———. *Cleopatra's People*. Introduction by Isobel Murray. Glasgow: Kenney & Boyd, 2010. First published 1972 by Heinemann, London.
———. *The Corn King and the Spring Queen*. London: Virago, 1983. First published 1931 by Jonathan Cape, London.
———. *You May Well Ask: A Memoir, 1920–40*. London: Gollancz, 1979.
Morgan, Kevin. *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics, 1935–41*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989.
Murnaghan, Sheila. "The Memorable Past: Antiquity and Girlhood in the Works of Mary Butts and Naomi Mitchison." In *Remaking the Classics: Literature, Genre and Media in Britain, 1800–2000*, edited by Christopher Stray. London: Duckworth, 2007.
Perrin, Bernadotte, transl. *Plutarch: Lives, Volume x; Agis and Cleomenes, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, Philopoemen and Flamininus*. Loeb Classical Library 102. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921.
Purdon, James, ed. *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming.
Raphaely, Judith. "Nothing but Gibberish and Shibboleths? The Compulsory Greek Debates 1870–1919." In *Classics in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Cambridge: Curriculum, Culture and Community*, edited by Christopher Stray, 71–94. Cambridge: The Cambridge Philological Society, 1999.
Smyth, A. E. "The Delicate Fire." *The Times Literary Supplement*, June 29, 1933, 444. The Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive, available online.
Sponenberg, Ashlie Kristin. "'The Pendulum is Swinging Backwards': Gender, Politics, and Modernity in the Interwar Writing of Winifred Holtby, Storm Jameson, Naomi Mitchison, and Rebecca West." PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 2002.
Stead, Henry. "From Argyll with Love: Naomi Mitchison and the Soviet Union." In *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time*, edited by James Purdon, 89–107. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming.

Thorpe, Andrew. *A History of the British Labour Party.* Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015.
Wallace, Diana. *The Woman's Historical novel*: *British Women Writers, 1900–2000*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
Wilson, Catherine. "Historical Fiction for the High-School Latin Class." *The Classical Journal* 28, no. 2 (1932), 107–115.
Worley, Matthew. *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party Between the Wars.* London: I. B. Tauris, 2008.

ABSTRACT

The writer and activist Naomi Mitchison (1897–1999) came from a prominent establishment family but was a member of the Labour Party and the wife of a Labour MP. Her work was explicitly marked by the Russian Revolution, even when she wrote about antiquity. In the 1920s and 1930s, she produced a number of works of historical fiction set in ancient Greece and Rome, which were highly regarded at the time. The works use the canvas of antiquity to experiment with many forms of political and social radicalism, with a challenging focus on female sexuality. The article discusses four specific representations of revolution which mobilize female agency in ways that are themselves highly unconventional. However, these representations also invoke the Fraserian figure of the dying king who leads the revolution to disaster, compromising the revolutionary energy. This tension speaks to Mitchison's own contradictory social positioning as a patrician radical. In 1972, however, the novel *Cleopatra's People* revisits the theme and stages a more successful uprising. This novel is centered on the sacrificial queen instead of a king, it enlists a mass of people, and saves the revolution by hiding its key figures in Africa. During her final excursion into antiquity, Mitchison thus found a way to press history into useful service.

KEYWORDS: Naomi Mitchison, revolution, Scotland, Labour Party

Revolucija v antiki: Klasiki in leposlovje Naomi Mitchison

IZVLEČEK

Pisateljica in aktivistka Naomi Mitchison (1897–1999) je izvirala iz ugledne in visoko situirane družine, vendar je postala članica laburistične stranke in žena laburističnega poslanca. Njeno delo je bilo izrazito zaznamovano z rusko revolucijo, tudi ko je pisala o antiki. V dvajsetih in tridesetih letih 20. stoletja je napisala več dobro sprejetih del historične proze, postavljenih v antično Grčijo in Rim. V delih je na platnu antike eksperimentirala s številnimi oblikami političnega in družbenega radikalizma, pri čemer se je izzivalno osredotočala na žensko spolnost. Članek obravnava štiri upodobitve revolucije, ki žensko agentnost izkoriščajo na nekonvencionalne načine. A te upodobitve se sklicujejo tudi na Fraserjev lik umirajočega kralja, ki vodi revolucijo v katastrofo in ogroža revolucionarno energijo. Ustvarjena napetost govori o lastni protislovni družbeni poziciji patricijskega radikalca, ki jo je izkušala avtorica. Leta 1972 se je v romanu *Kleopatrino ljudstvo* vrnila k revolucionarni tematiki in uprizorila uspešnejšo vstajo. Omenjeni roman se osredotoča na žrtveno kraljico namesto na kralja, k delovanju spodbudi velik del ljudstva, revolucijo pa na koncu reši tako, da ključne osebe skrije v Afriki. Med zadnjim izletom v antiko je Naomi Mitchison torej našla način, kako prisiliti zgodovino, da postane koristna.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Naomi Mitchison, revolucija, Škotska, laburistična stranka