

HUMPHREY JENNINGS  
PANDÆMONIUM

*The Coming of the Machine  
as seen by contemporary observers*



# Praise for PANDÆMONIUM

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‘A masterpiece of collage that reads like a novel.’ *The Times*

‘*Pandæmonium* is a fascinating and disturbing anthology . . . the extracts are brilliantly chosen . . . a very fine book.’ *Times Educational Supplement*

‘Stimulating to mind and imagination . . . a monument to one of the unique artists of our time, a visionary poet . . . Jennings was absolutely exceptional in his combination of intellectual curiosity and wit with deep and subtle human response . . . you will be illuminated and enriched.’ Lindsay Anderson, *Spectator*

‘*Pandæmonium* is an extraordinary and wonderful book.’ *Sunday Times*

‘The first thing that strikes you is the high quality and enormous variety of the “images” that he assembled . . . It is what Ezra Pound called an “active anthology”, a book that sets ideas in motion and establishes a complex network of internal cross-references.’ *New York Times*

‘Jennings sought to use the writings of others to create something entirely new. What he was after was a continuous narrative on the Industrial Revolution, woven from contemporary observations and opinions . . . [he has] produced a book which is at once a treasure-chest of quirky, unusual pieces and a memorable account of the most devastating and exciting sea-change which has yet engulfed mankind.’ *Observer*

‘[The] magnum opus of one of the most remarkable English talents of [the twentieth] century.’ *Bookseller*





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HUMPHREY JENNINGS

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*PANDÆMONIUM*  
1660–1886

The Coming of the Machine  
As Seen by Contemporary Observers

Foreword by Frank Cottrell Boyce

Edited by Marie-Louise Jennings  
and Charles Madge



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**Humphrey Jennings** was educated in Cambridge at school and at Pembroke College, where he read English. He joined the GPO Film Unit in 1934. In 1936 he, Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge founded Mass Observation, and in the same year he exhibited at the International Surrealist Exhibition. He is best known for the documentary films he made during the war. He died in 1950.

**Marie-Louise Jennings** was educated in London and New York and at Birkbeck College. She is a historian of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland. As Marie-Louise Legg she published her thesis on the growth of the Irish provincial press in the nineteenth century and she has edited a number of eighteenth-century Irish diaries and letters.

**Frank Cottrell Boyce** is a children's writer who was part of Danny Boyle's creative team for the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games. His Carnegie Medal-winning novel *Millions* was filmed by Danny in 2004. He also wrote the films *24 Hour Party People*, *Hilary and Jackie*, and *The Railway Man*. His latest book is the official sequel to *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

# FOREWORD

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*Pepys, the Domesday book, the films of Mitchell and Kenyon – there are certain works of record without which the lineage of our lives would be lost. For those who care how we are what we are and how recently that journey took place, this book is essential.*

**Danny Boyle**

The thing about a gift – as opposed to a deal or a meeting – is that its consequences are impossible to predict. This book first began to take shape as a kind of gift. Humphrey Jennings spent six months shooting his extraordinary film *The Silent Village* in Cwmgiedd. As a way of thanking its people for their hospitality and co-operation, he gave a series of talks on the Industrial Revolution – using extracts from journals, newspapers, novels and letters that he had collected for an edition of *The London Bulletin*. He continued to collect these extracts – ‘images’ he called them – throughout his life, but it was only after his death that his daughter, Marie-Louise, and his Mass Observation colleague, Charles Madge, were able to pull a selection of them together into a book. I was given a copy of that book – again as a gift – by the film director, Julien Temple. Julien’s own best films about the Sex Pistols, Joe Strummer, Glastonbury, London – are brilliant, disorientating collages of ‘images’ of Britain, just like this book. They’re one of the unpredictable consequences of Jennings’ Cwmgiedd talks. When, a few years later, Danny Boyle told me he was going to direct *Frankenstein* for the National Theatre, I said, ‘You’ve got to read *Pandæmonium*. I’ll get it for you.’ The book was out of print by then. The cheapest copy I could find set me back £42.50. I was generous enough to buy it but not generous enough to forgo mentioning the cost. I put a note inside saying ‘You’d better read this. It cost me £42.50’. Danny dutifully read it and loved it (he was especially fond of paragraph 23). I don’t know how much influence it had on *Frankenstein* but it became the backbone of the first section of the Opening Ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games. Its most striking images – an industrial powerhouse rising before your eyes, a green hill disgorging workers into the arena, rings forged from molten steel – all come from here. In fact the section was called ‘Pandæmonium’. Who could even have foretold that a series of talks given in a miners’ institute seventy years ago would form the backbone of a massive global media event of the age – watched, tweeted, favourited, streamed by billions of people across the planet?

*Pandæmonium* documents the Industrial Revolution. We’ve had another revolution since then, of course. The Opening Ceremony was an event that both celebrated and immersed itself in the digital revolution. But at its heart was that most analogue of things – a book. Only books can free us from the tyranny of the Present. The internet gives us the whole world now but it has shrunk ‘now’ to the moment. As Danny Boyle put it, ‘we are children of the machine age, locked inside this terrifying beast, increasingly innocent of how it makes things for us’. Only books can let us hear the voices that brought us here. Also they can be given as gifts.

As a book, *Pandæmonium* comes freighted with all those bookish extras. An index, introduction, contents, that all offer different pathways through it. But can I suggest that you ignore them for now? Start at the beginning, read it through and you will feel the heat and velocity of the greatest revolution in the history of the world. You’ll hear the clank of machinery, the roar of the furnaces, the bawling of orders, the tears of farewell, the exultation of discovery, the shouts of protest. Let Jennings’ ‘images’ follow each other in sequence, as though this was a movie, but a movie that can only be made visible

in that unstable force field that is briefly created between the eye and the page.

~~As a homage to Jennings' technique, here are some 'images' of my relationship with his great book.~~

## **1. The World is not perishing from lack of wonders, it is perishing from lack of wonder (G.K. Chesterton)**

We started work on the Opening Ceremony by plastering the walls of a little office in Soho with images and quotations. Jesse Owens, William Blake, Shakespeare, Tim Berners-Lee and this one from G.K. Chesterton, which has been my own motto for years. I'm a children's writer. I believe my job is not to dazzle with new wonders, but to scrub off the patina of familiarity so that my readers can see again how dazzling things already are. *Pandæmonium* did this job for me. I grew up in a small Merseyside town called Rainhill. It seemed like a dull commuter sprawl for factory workers – Ford, Beechams, Pilkingtons, BICC. Across the back fields were the slag heaps of Sutton Manor Colliery. In *Pandæmonium*, Rainhill appears as the scene of earth-shattering events and a shocking moment of violence. Those factories reverberate to the sound of a new age being moulded and hammered. At school I had read endless poems and novels lamenting the passing of rural England. Poets were telling me I'd already missed the best of England. *Pandæmonium* was the first time I'd read anything that caught the excitement, the unpredictability, the power of the landscape I grew up in. And of course that too has gone like the greenwood. I can be nostalgic for the sight of factory gates opening and workers pouring out, for pit wheel and the siren, for riding down the bright blue mud slides on Sutton Manor slag heap on a tin tray, for splashing through its pools of rainbow coloured water, just as Harold was nostalgic for the ploughboy. As Danny puts it, 'at first these may not look like our times but Jennings makes clear these are our recent footprints.'

## **2. The More Personally You Speak, the More Universally You Speak**

Here's an image – a schoolboy at some sort of civic occasion staring up at the stained glass window in Saint Helens town hall. I see the town's striking motto 'Ex Terra Lucem' (out of the ground light) in a stained glass window. It stays in my mind but means nothing to me but boredom – the boredom of the town hall, the boredom of a teacher explaining that the motto is ungrammatical (it should be 'Ex Terra Lux'). Thirty years later in that room in Soho, I put that phrase up on the wall. Out of the ground comes light. It ties together coal mining and the Resurrection. Danny finds it really striking. He mentions it to David Hockney who is also amazed by it. Think of it, he says, the sun pours down its energy onto the surface of the planet for millennia. The leaves soak up the energy. The trees fall and turn to coal. Coal is solid sunlight, the stored memory of millions of uninhabited summers. Then one day, in Coalbrookdale, someone opens a hole in the ground and all that stored energy comes pouring out and is consumed in furnaces, engines, motors. Somehow all these thoughts are communicated to Thomas Heatherwick who creates his beautiful Olympic Cauldron, in which 204 tongues of fire rise out of the ground and join together to make one flame. It's an image that moved billions of people across the world. It tells a story about unity and peace. It seems to have echoes of Pentecost. But somewhere in its DNA is the motto of St Helens town council.

This is another reason why *Pandæmonium* is an important book. Yes, it's the story of a moment in British history – perhaps the most important moment in British history. But for many nations the industrial revolution is not history. It's present. It's future. The stories in this book of lost landscapes, of family goodbyes, of thrilling rides and new ways of seeing are being acted out today in China, and all over Africa. And in individual lives. *Pandæmonium* gets some of its force from the fact that

Jennings himself had a wild and lonely childhood in a remote part of Suffolk and did not see a city until he was much older.

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### **3. The Isle is Full of Noises**

When I first held this book in my hand, I swear I could feel it shaking with its own internal energy. Percussion is the music of industry. Rick Smith – the musical director of the ceremony – bought his own copy of this book. ‘I’m ashamed to tell you,’ he said, ‘how much I paid for it.’ He created a piece of music that caught perfectly the soaring beauty and the churning energy of industry. He did it with ranks of volunteers drumming on plastic buckets, led by Dame Evelyn Glennie. He reversed a famous line of Goethe’s. ‘Music,’ he said, ‘is the fluid architecture we inhabit.’ Another thing that Jennings was not expecting was that a great musician would find in his book a way to reconnect landscape and rhythm.

### **4. Chameleon, Comedian, Corinthian and Caricature (David Bowie)**

Jennings was concerned with national identity. Of course he was, there was a war on. His most famous film is called *Listen to Britain*. Whenever we talked to people – whether neighbours or political leaders – about the Opening Ceremony, I could sense that there was some expectation that it would pin a pin in the national identity, that we would have to decide – is Britain rural or urban, ancient or modern, riot or clean-up, roundhead or cavalier, multi-cultural or divided? And since the ceremony have met people who have seen it as a celebration of industry and others who saw it as a condemnation of it. Jennings did have an agenda about the Industrial Revolution but his collage of images transcended his ideology. This book allows you to experience both the thrill and the fear, the injustice and the excitement. It puts highly charged images alongside each other and lets sparks fly between them. I think we subliminally used that lesson in the Opening Ceremony. We didn’t need to do a pageant of the history of the NHS or of children’s literature. We put the NHS and Voldemort and swing music and Nye Bevan and Mary Poppins all alongside each other and stood back to see what would happen. When he was asked for one word to describe the ceremony Danny said ‘visceral’ – the job is not to communicate an argument but to create an experience. Maybe the most important thing is that we share that experience with all its contradictions.

### **5. What Motivates Us is Who We Are**

Maybe the most important lesson of this book is how clearly it demonstrates that although the Industrial Revolution brought unprecedented wealth, it was not created by people who were interested in money. Danny Boyle’s favourite passage in here is image number 34, ‘Effects of Lightning in Northamptonshire’ – an account of studying a shepherd struck by lightning. Jennings gives a harsh gloss on this passage but what struck Danny about it was the part that eccentric, obsessive behaviour plays in discovery. Progress is not motivated by money. Progress comes from those who are happy to embark on a course of action without quite knowing where it will lead, without doing a feasibility study, without fear of failure or too much hope of reward. The engine of innovation is reckless generosity – something we celebrated at the Opening Ceremony by having Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor (but not patent-holder) of the World Wide Web – make an appearance. But the whole of the 2012 Games was testament to the truth of this. People who were paid huge sums of money (G4S scandalously failed, where those who were motivated by fun, by loyalty, by love, by idealism – the volunteers and the athletes – performed wonders in the face of real cynicism. The Olympic Park had a dystopian side – rapier missiles in the East End – but inside the stadium itself was a fragile, temporary

Utopia. We discovered that no matter how much sponsorship money you pay out, you can't own or buy the Games. Games belong to those who play them. National identity is not a settled thing – it is not a typical dish or a national costume. A nation is what Philip Larkin would call 'a frail, travelling coincidence' – a ragtag of people on a journey together. Jennings listened to Britain and he found that Britain was not a place but a project. To quote the Olympic programme:

*... flickering in the smoke and noise and excitement, you can sometimes glimpse a single golden thread of purpose – the idea of Jerusalem – of the better world, the world of real freedom and true equality, a world that can be built through the prosperity of industry, through the caring nation that built the welfare state, through the joyous energy of popular culture, through the dream of universal communication. A belief that we can build Jerusalem. And that it will be for everyone.*

**Frank Cottrell Boyce, 2012**

## INTRODUCTION

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In this book I present the imaginative history of the Industrial Revolution. Neither the political history, nor the mechanical history, nor the social history nor the economic history, but the imaginative history.

I say 'present', not describe or analyse, because the Imagination is a function of man whose traces are more delicate to handle than the facts and events and ideas of which history is usually constructed. This function I believe is found active in the areas of the arts, of poetry and of religion – but is not necessarily confined to them or present in all their manifestations. I prefer not to try to define its limits at the moment but to leave the reader to agree or not with the evidence which I shall place before him. I present it by means of what I call Images.

These are quotations from writings of the period in question, passages describing certain moments, events, clashes, ideas occurring between 1660 and 1886 which either in the writing or in the nature of the matter itself or both have revolutionary and symbolic and illuminatory quality. I mean that they contain in little a whole world – they are the knots in a great net of tangled time and space – the moments at which the situation of humanity is clear – even if only for the flash time of the photographer or the lightning. And just as the usual history does not consist of isolated events or occurrences – so this 'imaginative history' does not consist of isolated images, but each is in its particular place in an unrolling film.

And these images – what do they deal with? I do not claim that they represent truth – they are too varied, even contradictory, for that. But they represent human experience. They are the record of mental events. Events of the heart. They are facts (the historian's kind of facts) which have been passed through the feelings and the mind of an individual and have forced him to write. And what he wrote is a picture – a coloured picture of them. His personality has coloured them and selected and altered and pruned and enlarged and minimised and exaggerated. Admitted. But he himself is part of the period, even part of the event itself – he was an actor, a spectator in it. So his distortions are not so much distortions as one might suppose. Moreover they altered him. The event had its effect on him. Undistorted him, opened his eyes.

What have these extracts in common? They have no political or economic or social homogeneity. They are all *moments* in the history of the Industrial Revolution, at which clashes and conflicts suddenly show themselves with extra clearness, and which through that clearness can stand as symbols for the whole inexpressible uncapturable process. They are what later poets have called 'Illuminations', 'Moments of Vision' – some obviously clearer than others – some intentional, others unintentional – but all in some degree with this window-opening quality – it is this which differentiates these pieces of writing from purely economic or political, or social analyses. Their is a different method of tackling, of presenting the same material, the same conflicts, the method of poetry.

These extracts are to be considered as documents which illuminate – in one way or another – the conflicts of the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

In what ways? What conflicts?

1. Class conflicts – in their simplest form Luddite riots, Peterloo
2. The conflict of animism and materialism
3. The conflict of the expropriated individual with his environment
4. Conflicts of ideas

## 5. Conflicts of systems – religious systems

political systems

moral systems

But do not expect to find each of the extracts dealing with one of these conflicts only. That is precisely what they do not do. They are *not* texts to illustrate histories of economics etc. In treating separately the Trades Union, the political-historical, the social, the economic sides of the Industrial Revolution, the writers have themselves simply perpetuated the law of division of labour. But they should not blind us to the fact that Life – of which their analyses are analyses – is a synthesis and that the interactions between its parts are infinitely more complex than any analytical machine can follow. This is not in any way to invalidate the analytical method – or to suggest that the poet, for example, is more capable of presenting the whole – of course he is not. But what he can present is the sense of complexity – the type of pattern and so the type of inter-actions of which it consists. The analytical historian's business is to disentangle shred by shred like plucking the strand out of a rope. The result is the length of the rope but only one strand's thickness, and although the strand may still be twisted from its position among the other strands it is presented nevertheless alone. The poet might be compared to a man who cuts a short section of the whole rope. The only thing is he must cut it where it will not fall to pieces.

The history of poetry is itself a history of mechanisation and specialisation. At the time of Homer, Hesiod, Moses, Lao-Tze, poet-sages dealt with *all* problems of life – religious, scientific, social and personal. In the course of history, the actual mental process of poetic production has hardly altered but the division of labour has produced specialisation here as everywhere. Since that time we have seen the appearance of specialist writers on every subject, who have in the main avoided poetry as far as possible – since their reason for specialisation was in reaction against the universal poetic writer. In the last two hundred years the division of labour and specialisation have gone so far that the poet can only write about the subject of poetry itself (Gray, 'The Progress of Poesy') or definitely poetic subjects (Keats – supreme example) or his own thoughts.

It would take a large work on its own to show, in the great period of English poets 1570–1750, the desperate struggle that poets had to keep poetry head into the wind: to keep it facing life. But by 1750 the struggle – like that of the peasants – was over. *In other words poetry has been expropriated.*

Poetry was created in primitive and feudal societies – patriarchal societies – and in these societies the subjects with which the poet dealt were not *then* poetical subjects; they were vital everyday facts and necessities – *religion* – the cosmos and the fate of the human soul . . . *kingship* – the character of the man in power and the fate of the people under him. As agriculture was the principal means of subsistence of these societies, the language and metaphors of poetry (what is called 'flowered language') are full of agricultural memories.

But in a process (conflict) which culminated between 1660 and 1880 the peasants were destroyed and the land capitalised – the power of money – capital – substituted for the power of the Crown and the religion. The poet – as an individual – reacted to this major crisis of his career in many differing ways but it must be admitted not very successfully. We cannot say that any poet understood the process – much less applied it to his own view of the world or in any way modified his writing through it.

But the written language itself – the poets' raw material – did not stand about unused – unwritten. I mean that the conflict between animism and materialism – between poetry and science – the conflicts between agriculture and industrialisation – the fundamental class conflicts – did not g

unrecorded. *Poetry survived* – although it would be untrue to say that a synthesis was evolved from any of the above conflicts. In what ways may we say it survived?

In the work of certain well-known poets – Milton, Blake, Shelley; plus novelists – Disraeli, Dickens: who from time to time but only rarely, found a point in their work where it *met*, so to speak, the current economic and political and social revolutions on equal ground and where they were capable of recording the conflict: adaptation of the classic line of poetry to industrial revolution.

In the work of scientists and philosophers (natural philosophers as they were called) where very occasionally they are looking beyond the immediate scientific issues and recording the conflict of their own new systems with others such as religion – Newton, Berkeley, Darwin.

In the work of social critics as we may call them – Cobbett, Swift, Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold – who made it their business of life to comment on the conflicts they saw in front of them and whose commentaries are often passionate, and lively. Also social documents as by Defoe, Head, Hawthorne.

In the autobiographies, memoirs, letters, diaries and so on of scientists, artists and especially in the 19th century of working men and social workers – Samuel Bamford, Hugh Miller, Charles Kingsley, Caroline Fox – which not only record some of the conflicts but also show the growing consciousness of those conflicts among the people most nearly involved in them: principally the newly-formed working class.

In other documents in which the authors were in the main unconscious of the effect and value of what they were recording – memoirs of capitalists (Nasmyth, Bessemer) – newspaper accounts – would-be comic writers.

#### THE MEANS OF VISION AND THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION

*The Means of Vision* – matter (sense impressions) transformed and reborn by Imagination: *turned into an image*.

*The Means of Production* – matter is transformed and reborn by *Labour*.

At a certain period in human development the means of vision and the means of production were intimately connected – or were felt to be by the people concerned – I refer to the Magical system under which it was not possible to plow the ground without a prayer – to eat without a blessing, to hunt an animal without a magic formula. To build without a sense of glory.

In the two hundred years 1660–1860 the means of production were violently and fundamentally altered – altered by the accumulation of capital, the freedom of trade, the invention of machines, the philosophy of materialism, the discoveries of science.

In what sense have the Means of Vision kept pace with these alterations? I am referring not to the Arts as a commodity for Bond Street, or as a piece of snobbery in Mayfair, or as a means of propaganda in Bloomsbury, or as a method of escapism in Hampstead . . . but to the Means of Vision by which ‘the emotional side of our nature’ (Darwin’s phrase) is kept alive and satisfied and fed – our nature as Human Beings in the anthracite drifts of South Wales, in the cotton belt of Lancashire, in the forges of Motherwell – how the emotional side of their nature has been used, altered, tempered, appealed to in these two hundred years.

Man as we see him today lives by production and by vision. It is doubtful if he can live by one alone. He has occasionally however tried. Dr Ure speaks of a factory as ideally ‘a vast automaton composed of various mechanical and intellectual organs, acting in an uninterrupted concern for the production of a common object, all of them being subordinated to a self-regulated moving force’.<sup>1</sup>

At the other extreme we have the Tibetan living naked in the caves of the Himalayas, eating on



nettles and devoting himself to contemplation, and turning green in consequence. But in fact the factory man is living on the vision of others and the Buddhist Yogi on the production of others. In some societies (civilisations) the two have been mixed, in others clearly distinguishable. The relationship of production to vision and vision to production has been mankind's greatest problem.

Unless we are prepared to claim special attributes for the poet – the attribute of vision – and unless we are prepared to admit the work of the artist (that is to say the function of 'imagination') as an essential part of the modern world there is no real reason for our continuing to bother with any of the arts any more, or with any imaginary activity. No reasons except money, snobbery, propaganda or escapism. In this book however it is assumed that the poet's vision does exist, that the imagination is a part of life, that the exercise of the imagination is an indispensable function of man like work, eating, sleeping, loving. I do not propose to ask the obvious next question 'What then is the place of imagination in the world of today?' I prefer to inquire what may have *been* the place of imagination in the making of the modern world.

**Humphrey Jennings**

*This introduction was written up by Charles Madge from extensive notes left by Humphrey Jennings.*

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Marx in *Capital* where he calls Ure 'the Pindar of the automatic factory'.

**TO THE READER.** There are at least three different ways in which you may tackle this book. First, you may read it straight through from the beginning as a continuous narrative or *film* on the Industrial Revolution. Second, you may open it where you will, choose one or a group of passages and study them details of events, persons and thoughts as one studies the material and architecture of a poem. Third way, you begin with the Index – look up a subject or an idea, and follow references skipping over gaps of years to pursue its development.

My father, Frank Humphrey Sinkler Jennings, was born in 1907 in Walberswick, Suffolk. He was the elder son of Frank Jennings, an architect, and Mildred Hall, an artist. His father was the fourteen child of a successful racehorse trainer; his mother the only child of a London solicitor. My grandfather restored and designed houses, using materials from demolished 16th-century buildings, and travelled around East Anglia collecting beams, bricks and stained glass. He was a gentle, unworldly man, due to his service in the First World War. My grandparents subscribed to the tenets of guild socialism, which took its ideals from John Ruskin and William Morris, believing that the devaluation of the workman's labour in a capitalist society could only be arrested by the creation of small, self-governing groups of craftsmen. My grandparents founded such a workshop, the Walberswick Peasant Pottery Company, which bought, made and sold furniture and pottery. My grandmother was the stronger character; of her my father said, 'My mother believes she carries the keys of the universe in her pocket'. They read the radical weekly magazine, *The New Age*, founded by A.R. Orage as a bulletin for socialist ideas on culture. Like Orage himself, my grandmother became involved with the mystic world of Gurdjieff and 'the Work', and by the end of the 1930s she had left my grandfather and lived in a community near London. Throughout their married lives my grandparents had little money and as far as I know my father never inherited any during his lifetime.

As a result of a recommendation by Orage, my father was sent at the age of eight to the Perse School, Cambridge. The headmaster then was W.H.D. Rouse, a liberal eccentric, who made the Perse very different from the other minor public schools of the period. What he described as his 'wild lonely childhood' gave my father a considerable knowledge of English literature which was enlarged by the teaching of English at school by Caldwell Cook, who encouraged boys to write and act plays and to stage dramatic disputations. Acting, set building and design appealed strongly to my father and he continued to work on Perse productions after he left. The Perse also gave him – again through unconventional teaching methods – an ease and fluency in French, Latin and Greek. Later he told my mother that in his early school days he was lonely and bullied, but he was in fact very successful, though this success may well have made him difficult for others to tolerate. Excelling at academic subjects, he also led in acting and in sport. He refused to join in the other conventional organisations of a public school, and was dismissed for misconduct from both the Officers' Training Corps and the Scouts.

From the Perse he gained a scholarship to Pembroke College, Cambridge to read English. At that time the English school was particularly exciting, before what William Empson has called 'the great wave of self-righteous dismalness broke into "Eng-Lit"'. He attended lectures by I.A. Richards and Mansfield Forbes, of whose work Richards wrote: 'He gave original character to the English Tripos – an imagination from which ours caught fire – a sureness of taste and rightness of judgment.' Empson wrote of my father at that time: 'He was, though quite unaffectedly a leader, not at all a bully. He was not interested in "mastering" people or "possessing" them, let alone frightening them or bribing them – in fact he was rather unconscious of other people, except as an audience – he did have a good deal of consciousness of whether he was swinging round his audience to vote to his side.' Of my father's later academic work, Richards wrote that 'his powers of assimilation, of perceiving possible and hitherto unnoticed connections and synthesising his perceptions with systems are most impressive . . . his work may be of real importance in illuminating the tradition of English Literature.' Between 1926 and 1929, while he was at Pembroke, he designed and acted in seven productions at the Amateur Dramatic

Club and the Festival Theatre, among them Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of Perth* and the first production in Britain of Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale*, with Lydia Lopokova. During his finals in May 1929 he designed the first production of Honegger's *King David* as a theatrical pageant, supervising the scenery and forty costumes. He went on to gain first class honours in both parts of the Tripos examinations with a mark of distinction.

In late 1929 my parents married in the face of strong family opposition. It is not hard to see why my father had an income of £1 a week from a scholarship for postgraduate work, supplemented occasionally by money for designing and painting scenery at the Festival Theatre. My mother, Cicely Cooper, who was tall and elegant, beautifully dressed in clothes from Paris and Brussels, came to Cambridge with a white Pekinese dog and no income of her own. They lived in a flat above a gallery of modern art which they attempted to run with the painter Julian Trevelyan. My mother hated Cambridge. It was not just that they were poor: it was her feeling of isolation and exclusion from my father's circle. When Jacob Bronowski, Empson and my father had what Empson has described as 'heady, bouncy' talk, my mother, extremely shy, felt unable to join in. They appreciated her elegance and taste but she could not share their lives.

My father began research for a doctoral thesis on Thomas Gray, supervised by Richards with whom he kept in touch until the end of his life. He edited Shakespeare's 1593 Quarto of *Venus and Adonis*, and together with Bronowski and others founded and wrote for the magazine, *Experiment*. His knowledge of the state of modern art in France in the late 1920s and early 1930s put him ahead of others in the use of colour and materials and he designed sets and costumes for productions of Lockhart and Gibbons' *Cupid and Death*, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and *King Arthur*, and *The Bacchae* of Euripides. From this one might have thought he would go on to gain a fellowship, remaining for the whole of his life in Cambridge, or that he would work in the theatre. But to his wife he wrote in 1929 'You know I hate "Art", but I want to draw and that is the business of a lifetime, not of leisure hours'. This, in part, may have been why he gave up his work on Gray. He taught in a boys' school for a term in 1931 and then went to Paris for two months to paint, supported by my mother who worked as a fashion model. In 1932 a small legacy enabled them to live in the south of France for a few months and in 1933 they were back in Cambridge, where my father painted scenery at the Festival Theatre and where I was born. However, any progress at the theatre was blocked by a serious disagreement with the director, Terence Gray, who wrote to him: 'Surely your experience of the theatre has shown you that, without unity of conception, a play can only succeed by accident. Giving artists an opportunity does not mean offering them the stage as a canvas independently of the play and its method of performance. A scenic artist needs a capacity for co-operation.' The difficulty was one for which my father was open to criticism later in life. A failure to submit coherent designs, clear synopses and finished film scripts, and a working method written on the backs of envelopes caused panic and resulted to often, and perhaps not surprisingly, in producers being unable or unwilling to back his ideas. At the point too, in a serious emotional and financial crisis, my mother with a small baby had had enough of a cold basement flat and lack of money and Cambridge, and returned to her parents. At this my father seriously attempted to get his material on Gray published and to return to academic work. He obtained testimonials from Richards and from his former tutor and in early 1934 sent a long piece, 'A Passage on the Progress of Poesy' to T.S. Eliot at *The Criterion*. Eliot welcomed its content and asked him to shorten it for publication. My father seems never to have replied, probably because by the end of the year he had left Cambridge to work for the GPO Film Unit, and we had settled in London where my sister was born.

Stuart Legg, a contemporary at Cambridge, had introduced my father to John Grierson, the founder

of the Unit. Although Grierson gave my father a job editing, designing and directing documentary film, they did not get on well. Their views of the role of public service cinema could never be reconciled. Between 1934 and 1939 my father was involved in twelve films, some lightweight (*Po Haste* and *Pett and Pott*), some visually experimental (*The Birth of a Robot*), and a number which demonstrated his interest in the machine. While making films he was still painting and by the mid-1930s had become involved in surrealism. He had by then met Roland Penrose the painter and art collector, and Edouard Mesens, a Belgian painter and gallery owner. Penrose's close friendship with Picasso and André Breton was instrumental in bringing surrealist ideas to this country and in the scheme for an International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936. My father translated the poetry of the surrealist, Paul Eluard, and Eluard and his wife Nusch remained my parents' close friends. The International Surrealist Exhibition was a *jeu d'esprit* but from it came Edouard Mesens' London Gallery in Cork Street and the magazine, *London Bulletin*, on which both my parents worked at one time or another. At this moment my father saw himself as having 'survived the Theatre and English Literature at Cambridge and . . . connected with colour film direction and racehorses'. But 'to be already a "painter", a "writer" an "artist", a "surrealist" what a handicap'.

In 1936, the public debate about the abdication of Edward VIII saw politicians and the press asserting that they knew what the public really felt about the conduct and ultimate fate of the King and Mrs Simpson. My father, together with Stuart Legg and David Gascoyne, felt strongly that more should be done to attempt to discover the national consciousness through 'an anthropology of our own people'. In a letter to *The New Statesman* signed by the anthropologist Tom Harrisson, Charles Madge then working on the *Daily Mirror*, and my father, the aims of Mass Observation were set out – an invitation to self-selected 'Mass Observers' from all over the country who would be ready to write 'reports' on their day-to-day lives. My father's involvement in Mass Observation was, in fact, short-lived. He worked on one large project with Charles Madge, publishing observers' 'reports' on Coronation Day, May 12th 1937, but then moved back into film. The scientific analysis of the 'reports' did not interest him; what was important to his work was the content. He himself had written poetry in report form before 1936, and in 1937 he wrote monthly reports on his own day on the 12th of each month. In later life he would occasionally write reports of a particular day: the weather; how he felt mentally and physically; the content of the day's newspapers and his work.

At this point it is possible to discern a change in my father's work. England was a more serious place at the end of the decade: unemployment and the real threat of war affected everyone physically and intellectually. My mother's younger brother had been killed fighting for the Spanish Republic at Jarama. Until the late thirties it seemed as though my father had dealt only in ideas. Now other peoples' daily concerns became important. In 1938 he did a series of talks on the radio on poetry and national life. Poetry he said, enabled man to deal with himself: to protect and arm himself. He spoke of Apollinaire who said that the poet must stand with his back to the future because he was unable to see it: it was in the past that he would discover who he was and how he had come to be. In this sense my father began to work on material that was later built into *Pandæmonium*. In July 1938 he edited an issue of the *London Bulletin* devoted to the machine. A 'collection of texts on the Impact of the Machine' was included: these were the germ of *Pandæmonium*. In 1939 he went north to make a film *Spare Time* which drew directly on his Mass Observation work. This visit he later described to Allen Hutt as the most important turning point in his life. He had never been to the industrial north before and wrote to my mother, 'Cotton seems to produce a desolation greater – more extended – than any other industry. . . . The desolation – the peculiar kind of human misery which it expresses comes to think from the fact that "Cotton" simply means *work*: At Manchester there was a sort of thin w

sunlight which makes it look pathetic. It has a grim sort of fantasy. And a certain dignity of its own from being connected with certain events in history.'

With the outbreak of war, my father's work with what later became the Crown Film Unit had intensified; between 1939 and 1950 he worked on twenty films. My mother, my sister and I went to America in 1940 and he had no permanent base: his books and our furniture went into store, and he worked all over the country on location: not the ideal conditions for working on an extended literary project. It is for the films made between 1940 and 1944 that he is best known. In 1941 he made *Listed to Britain*, a film without commentary which is close in some ways to the construction of *Pandæmonium*: each a series of images carefully placed to illuminate not just themselves in isolation but each other. In 1943 he wrote and directed *Fires were Started* which used amateurs as actors. His relations with other people had changed for the better, as he himself admitted. The men and women in the film were asked to stage real fires in a phoney blitz and it was dangerous. The writer, William Sansom, who served as a fireman during the war and acted in the film wrote 'Why did we do these things? In a way, they looked and felt more dangerous than they were, and we were in uniform and duty bound. Yet I think also our immediate acceptance came because it was Jennings who asked for it and we had by then developed a kind of hero worship for him. Humphrey had a personal passion, an obsessive drive and the knowledge that he was a thoroughly intelligent tough aesthete carried him well above the ordinary run.' Making a film in Wales about the destruction of Lidice in 1943 my father wrote 'I feel we have really begun to get close to the men – not just as individuals – but also as a class – with an understanding between us: so they don't feel we are just photographing them as curious wild animals or "just for propaganda",' adding that he had got out the material assembled years back on the Industrial Revolution to give a series of talks to miners in the Swansea Valley on poetry and the Industrial Revolution which is 'really a golden opportunity – so doing some work on that, I have gone as far once again as thinking of it as a book and looking for a publisher and so on. Masses of new material – but again no time, or very little.' He made contact with Herbert Read at Routledge, who gave him a contract for a book to be delivered by June. But film location work, including filming the invasion of Sicily, made that impossible.

In early 1944 he moved to Allen Hutt's house in Camden Town, where he lived until his death in 1950. Here he had not only his books and a settled life but also Allen Hutt's encouragement. My father's politics have been crudely assigned to being of the left. But it was not as simple as that. He described them in 1944 as 'those of William Cobbett'. Like Orwell in *The Lion and the Unicorn* he was intensely patriotic, believing that patriotism was not just the possession of the right. His view of Britain at the end of the war is expressed in the film *Diary for Timothy* which reflects on how life would be in post-war years. 'England has, you will find, changed a great deal', he wrote to my mother 'not so much any one person is different but the young coming up are pretty determined – and people in general have had a good think . . . are very definite as to what went wrong five years ago.'

After the war, my father left the Crown Film Unit to work with Ian Dalrymple, the producer with whom he had the greatest rapport during the war. Together they looked at a number of possibilities: a film of H.E. Bates' *The Purple Plain*, for which he went to Burma for three months in 1947; a film about the century of industrialism between 1846 and 1946; a film on the London Symphony Orchestra at work. None of these came to anything. He made three films between 1947 and 1950 which are generally regarded as a critical disappointment. In 1950 he went to Greece to make a film on health for the European Economic Commission. He died in an accident on the island of Poros. He was forty-three years old.

My father's method of working on *Pandæmonium* has been compared with Isaiah Berlin's article

who hopped from subject to subject: the fox who had no continuity of thought and aesthetic approach, no evolution. I believe that although on the surface he gave the impression of being foxlike, my father was inwardly more like Berlin's hedgehog: he might seem to be hopping about, but in fact he was in pursuit of one end: the purpose of the poet. He wrote 'The poets are guardians of the Animist system; the scientist of the Materialist system.'

When it was first published, some reviewers believed *Pandæmonium* was an anthology. It is not. Unlike an anthology where the texts may be ordered but are discrete, its composition can be compared to a film: each piece moves on to the next, telling a story which never stops. My father used the word 'image' constantly, whether about film, painting or writing. Each piece in the book is an image of thoughts, ideas, and experiments from 1660 onwards. They show how the Industrial Revolution could inspire wonder and horror. They show how the pastoral land of Britain was transformed – for better or for worse. The readers must make up their minds.

In 1982 Riverside Studios in London staged a major exhibition of my father's paintings, photographs and collages, with screenings of his films. Roland Penrose, David Gascoyne and Lindsay Anderson discussed the importance of his work. This event led indirectly to the publication of a new edition of *Pandæmonium* in 1985.

Since then interest in the work and ideas of Humphrey Jennings has grown. There have been conferences in London and Paris, and his films screened at film festivals in London, Paris and Marseille. A conference at the Imperial War Museum led indirectly to a Blue Plaque being installed on the house where he lived in Camden Town. In 2007 in Walberswick, Suffolk where he was born a film festival was held by the village to mark his centenary.

A number of books, theses and monographs have been brought out on his life and work. *The Humphrey Jennings Film Reader*, a collection of letters, scripts and poetry edited by Kevin Jackson was published in 1993. Kevin Jackson also wrote a biography published in 2004. Kevin Macdonald made a film about his work for Channel 4 in 2000, now on DVD. The British Film Institute has brought out a complete collection of Jennings' films on DVD.

Last, Danny Boyle and Frank Cottrell Boyce were strongly influenced by *Pandæmonium* when they staged the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics in London in July 2012. The millions of people who watched the ceremony on television would have been unknowingly touched by the genius of Humphrey Jennings.

The present book is about one third of the original text. One day when money can be found it is planned that the complete text will be published with illustrations.

**Marie-Louise Jennings, 2012**

## Acknowledgements

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