

## On Anarchism – Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract.

For a discussion on anarchism, one encounters a branching taxonomy of versions of it, sprouting from the various overlappings and crosscutting intersectionalities with other ideologies. The logical structure of likeness leaves no room for equivocation: to see the like is to see the same in spite of, and through, the different. But the presupposition underlying it is that there is *a difference*. And this is precisely my goal, namely to show that, in spite of overlappings, anarchism is different from other ideologies and, first and foremost, to justify the unique way in which anarchist discourse surfaces, namely in metaphorical garments. The texts which will be analysed are R. L. Stevenson's "Britain, a Garden Enclosed" and Hilaire Belloc's "Love of England". Detectable isotopies, repetitions of semes belonging to the same semantic field, the anarchist one, are manifest in Stevenson's "Britain, a Garden Enclosed", though entangled with radicalist upsurges, smouldering throughout the text and surfacing in a manner which is contrapuntal of anarchist avowals. The expectation to find recurrent elements, of the kind mentioned above is confirmed on perusal of Hilaire Belloc's text, as well.

**Keywords:** ideational cluster; tropological mode; anagnorisis; construction; ideology.

### 1. Introduction

Any attempt at textual analysis ought to be preceded – so as to avoid and prevent attracting, in its wake, criticism on lack of propriety of terms – by a clear definition of precisely those terms under discussion, in our case, the anarchist mode of thought and action. Yet anarchy, as an ideological movement is difficult to pin down with precision. In fact, ideologies as a whole are more complex internally than we are often aware. We are faced with doctrines which look, at first sight, moderately coherent. Yet closer analysis often reveals profound internal disagreement. There does not appear to be any ultimate truth or foundation to the ideologies, rather they might be said to emerge as a series of metaphors or fictions. Though we couldn't possibly assume that reality lies in our conceptual and linguistic appraisals, we cannot, on the other hand, ignore the fact that ideologies usually constitute and seek a metaphysics of real presence. They want their positions to be considered as *the* ontology. And perhaps, in that sense, they are not fictions. This seems to be the inherent human condition. We believe in systems and real absolutes, and have

doubts, occasionally quite paralysing reflexive doubts. But we cannot live by reflexive doubt. That is both a burden and a blessing of the negative side of our reasoning capacity.

## 2. Body of paper

Besides these ontological misdemeanours, meant to lure us into taking as *the* truth something which can only be a partial truth, we are also confronted with formal phallacies, which account for an inherent outward projection of internal discontinuities. This explains why, according to Andrew Heywood's discussion on anarchism, there is a branching taxonomy of versions of anarchism, sprouting from the various overlappings and crosscutting intersectionalities with other ideologies. (Heywood, 2014, 3)

I will not lay particular emphasis on such overlappings, which might be considered, after all, destructive of the pristine purity – on the need of which we decided beforehand – of a particular cognitive attitude. Instead, I will try to establish relations of similarity, which will stress upon points of convergence, but, most of all, on those of divergence. The logical structure of likeness leaves no room for equivocation: to see the like is to see the same in spite of, and through, the different. But the presupposition underlying it is that there is *a difference*. And this is precisely my goal, namely to show that, in spite of overlappings, anarchism is different from other ideologies and, first and foremost, to justify the unique way in which anarchist discourse surfaces, namely in metaphorical garments.

Anarchism has a common core, embracing three concepts: first – indicated in the name of this ideational cluster – antagonism to power, culminating in the desire to annihilate it (power is considered as centralised and hierarchical and manifested above all, though not exclusively, in the state). Second, a belief in liberty, as spontaneous voluntarism. For many anarchists the reason why the state is to be abhorred is that it is the root of all compulsion. The anarchist commitment to liberty necessarily entailed a rejection of the state. Liberty was not, on this reading, an abstract philosophical end to aim for, but it was the vital concrete possibility for every human being. Third, the postulation of natural human harmony. This is yet another explanation why, for the majority of anarchists, nothing redeems the state. It does not undermine and destroy individuals as such, but rather the natural, harmonious, organic communities in which individuals develop.

As with any ideology that elevates one core concept at the expense of others, the result is a simplistic worldview combined with a faith in easy remedies to social ills. These creeds gloss over the invariable complexity of ideological structure. While anarchists share with liberals a high esteem for the idea of liberty, they diverge from liberals by not drawing the limitation of power into their core conceptual structure. One reason for this are the adjacent conceptions of human nature to which they subscribe. As Andrew Heywood points out, some individualist anarchists associated an individualism read as self-government with a progressive rationalism that included benevolence towards others. (Heywood, 2014, 29-30) That objective and universal rationalism ensured that self-government would be compatible with social life, and it could therefore contain an embryonic notion of community. As with liberalism, anarchism paid particular heed to the individual capacity for rational self-development and self-regulation. Indeed, it overvalued them, as a consequence allowing liberty free rein. The potential conflicts which might have risen from

its maximisation had been ruled out by this quasi-utopian vision. But, unlike liberalism, it was confident enough about self-government not to prescribe enabling institutions, designed to facilitate individuality. The recognition of authority is inconsistent with our overriding obligation to act as autonomous self-directing agents. Any duty to obey authority *de jure* implies an abdication of authority. (Ștefănescu, 2016, 41-4)

Consequently, in spite of intersectional interstices, anarchism stands out as a professed rigorous commitment to the sovereign individual and affirmation of complete individualism, made possible only within small-scale communities that stand as symbols.

Anarchism is, to briefly word it, replete with models of the ideal society.

In my discussion so far, I have concentrated mainly on considerations of “content”, bypassing the influence of “form”. Yet my interpretation of *what* a speaker is talking about is inevitably based on *how* he structures what he is saying. I will investigate, therefore, some formal aspects of structure in discourse. In other words, the object of analysis will be constituted by the stylistic-level structure, which functions as “ideational scaffolding” in the organisation and interpretation of experience.

Now, it should be remarked that the texts under analysis, namely R. L. Stevenson’s “Britain, a Garden Enclosed” and Hilaire Belloc’s “Love of England” cannot be considered as instantiations of anarchist discourse proper. However, there are anarchist tinges detectable within them. The criterion according to which I reached this conclusion is *expectation*. We expect, in concurrence with Hayden White’s formulated predictions, that the anarchist discourse should take the form of structural metaphor, the “thought process” employed in constructing the ideology. (White, 2003, 21) On the one hand, expectations make interpretation possible and, on the other, they constitute an extension or further affirmation of their validity. So, although they are not valid a priori, prior to observational experience, they are important because they prompt us into chasing for regularities, which are a clear marker of stability, of recurrent uniqueness. And the regularity with the anarchist discourse is the metaphorical mode of patterning reality.

Consequently, detectable isotopies, repetitions of semes belonging to the same semantic field, the anarchist one, are manifest in Stevenson’s “Britain, a Garden Enclosed”, though entangled with radicalist upsurges, smouldering throughout the text and surfacing in a manner which is contrapuntal of anarchist avowals.

So, when he metaphorically describes England as “a garden enclosed”, the tendency is conspicuously twofold: one is the anarchist propensity to provincialise the country in its self-sufficiency, to perceive it as an “in-group”: “Britain hath been as a garden enclosed, wherein all things that man can wish, to make a pleasant life, are planted in her own soil [...]”, (Stevenson, 2000, 62) while the other is the radicalist propensity to deprovincialize it, to single it out from among any aspiring peers, and thus to maximise the differences between them and “out-groups”: “[...] an obligation to continue in that magnanimity and virtue, which hath famed this island, and raised her head in glory, higher than the great kingdoms of the neighbouring continent”. (Stevenson, 2000, 64) This co-occurrence of diametrically opposed attitudes is somewhat suspicious. Shouldn’t we look out, then, for a Jakobsonian *dominant*? Since the discourse analyst has no direct access to a speaker’s intended meaning in producing an utterance, s/he often has to rely on a process of inference to arrive at an interpretation for utterances or for the connections

between utterances. (Jakobson, 1999, 9-12) Also, pragmatics could come in handy, if the greatest attention is focused on illocutionary acts, the very stuff of discourse, on the communicative purpose of utterances and on the force with which they are produced.

Thus, the co-occurrence of the two types of discourses in the same text, one metaphorically-based, the other set in obvious antithesis, compels us, instead of interpreting them semantically in their own right, to make reference to one another for their interpretation. In other words, the anarchist fragments we wanted to hunt down will have the whole of their interpretation forcibly constrained by the context. A tentative conclusion would be that, by extolling the “happiness of the soil”, “the delight of man’s life” which it enables – a clear stance of an anarchist’s predisposal of viewing the community and the location of it as an earthly paradise – Stevenson is in fact constructing the material basis for a radical antithesis, by means of which he opposes England to any other country: “Better laws and a happier constitution of government no nation ever enjoyed [...]”. (Stevenson, 2000, 67)

The expectation to find recurrent elements, of the kind mentioned above is also confirmed on perusal of Hilaire Belloc’s text, which is also intent on natural abundance: “The love of England has in it the love of landscape”. (Belloc, 2010, 59) This ontological definition and representation finds an appropriate reflection on the rhetorical level of constructing reality. This explains why England is likened to a “tree”, which might be the metaphorical translation of an anarchist conception of tight, interdependent human relationships: “Say that ten centuries made a soil, and that in that soil four centuries more produced a tree, and that that tree was England, then you will know to what the love of England is in most men directed”. (Belloc, 2010, 91) There is, in metaphor, an oscillation between sameness and difference, enhanced by the fact that its scaffolding is simile-based (this situation can be construed as the rhetorical counterpart of perceived content similarities between anarchism and liberalism, whose tropological mode is...precisely the simile). Yet metaphor is not simile, just as anarchism is not liberalism – a point I attempted to make in my theoretical exposé. Metaphor goes beyond a mere analogy, meant to sharpen the awareness of some features by contrasting, comparing them. It is directed, as Paul Ricoeur maintained, toward the uncovering of concealed *identities*, to moments of *anagnorisis*, of “recognition of similarity verging on sameness.” (Ricoeur, 1994, 29) That’s why it doesn’t just create analogies, but recreates and transforms and thus, flouts – in pragmatic terms – the maxim of quality, by deliberately distorting the truth.

On the look-out for yet other concealed identities, we perceive a further implication beneath this metaphor: “England = a tree”, namely a synchronic, rather than diachronic consideration of the country. If we have the full-grown tree, we are no longer interested in its previous stages of growth, our interest is exclusively directed to the *hic et nunc*: “It lacks, alas, the love of some interminable past, nor does it draw its liveliness from any great succession of centuries.” (Stevenson, 2000, 68) This could be construed as, again, an anarchist pledge for the spontaneous construction of a nation, its present self-sufficiency.

### 3. Conclusion

These instantiations of anarchist discourse, although fragmented, not very poignant and revealing, at times, radicalist illocutionary force of propositions rather than anarchist ones, have, in the absence of auctorial prompts indicative of intentionality, no criteria of self-justification other than confirmed expectations and representations of anarchist discursive behaviour.

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