
Poet, friend and activist: Stanley Richardson and the Arden Society for Artists and Writers
Exiled in England, 1938–40

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At this time of global conflict, I look back to the 1930s to examine how a young poet and postgraduate student took action to support writers and artists fleeing fascism in Europe. While Stanley Richardson and his organisation, the Arden Society, are almost forgotten today, the list of people they aided includes many significant writers, among them one of Spain's leading twentieth-century poets, Luis Cernuda. In turn, Richardson developed his own understanding of the social and political role of poetry.

This article discusses how Stanley Richardson left a potential academic career and created the Arden Society for Artists and Writers in Exile. Originally intended to help refugees in Britain develop networks that would allow them to continue their work, Arden Society members quickly took on additional roles, including assisting refugees in court and attempting to bring anti-Nazi writers to safety. Previous scholarship discusses Stanley Richardson as part of a European literary network, including his friendships with Federico García Lorca and Cernuda. This article explores how social and artistic networks can become a basis for political action. Moreover, I consider how, within contemporary debates on the role of poetry in wartime, Stanley developed his own approach to the balance of art, 'truth' and propaganda.

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Poet, friend and activist: Stanley Richardson and the Arden Society for Artists and Writers Exiled in England, 1938–40

Harriet Truscott

Life as a postgraduate student in the 1930s

In 1933, Stanley Richardson was a PhD student at Cambridge University.¹ Having grown up on his parents' small farm in Lincolnshire, he was awarded a prestigious postgraduate scholarship to research the eleventh-century Spanish epic, the *Poema de mio Cid*.² Alongside his academic success, he maintained a lively social life. Stanley was gay, relatively openly so, and 1930s Cambridge allowed him to flourish.³ He was charming, sociable and confident, with striking looks and white-blond hair: one friend compared him to the Romantic poet Shelley.⁴

The resemblance to Shelley was not only a matter of looks: Stanley was also an aspiring poet. He did not see poetry as a solitary activity, but sought to bring writers together, setting up the Merry Meeting poetry club.⁵ This concept of creativity as a social and societal endeavour was core to his beliefs: later he would attempt to offer similar communities to those fleeing fascism. And while the Merry Meeting was simply a student society, it also appears to have been the first opportunity for Stanley to develop his administrative skills.

Stanley's poetic ambitions were supported by critic and academic J. B. Trend, a friend of T. S. Eliot.⁶ Trend may have been Stanley's supervisor: he certainly read and supported his work.⁷ It was probably Trend that introduced Stanley to two young Spanish writers, Manuel Altolaguirre and Concha Méndez, in the spring of 1934.⁸

¹ *Register of Twentieth-Century Johnians: Vol 1 1900–1949*, ed. by Fiona Colbert (St John's College, 2004) p. 128.

² James Valender, 'Stanley Richardson and Spain', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 7 (1983), <<https://archive.ph/20130419152034/http://www.abdn.ac.uk/spanish/idealist/pages/page954.shtml>> [accessed 25 March 2025].

³ Roger Tinnell, 'A new look at John Stanley Richardson in Spain', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 63 (2011), pp. 9–19, (p.10, p. 15).

⁴ Volkmar von Zühlsdorff, *Hitler's Exiles: The German Cultural Resistance in America and Europe*, trans. by Martin H. Bott (Continuum, 2004), p. 103.

⁵ Valender, 'Stanley Richardson', [unpaginated].

⁶ George Berridge, 'Remembering J. B. Trend — an unlikely Cambridge don', *The Times Literary Supplement* <<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/regular-features/from-the-archive/remembering-j-b-trend-an-unlikely-spanish-don>> [accessed 25 March 2025].

⁷ J. B. Trend. Letter to Veronica Wedgwood, 4 June 1941. Cambridge, St John's College Archives, GB276 Misc/Box 14/RI1, item 12.

⁸ Manuel Altolaguirre, *Epistolario: 1925–1959*, ed. by James Valender (Publicaciones de la Residencia de Estudiantes, 2005), p. 295.

Altolaguirre and Méndez were newly married and living in London while Altolaguirre carried out academic research.⁹ Among their friends were some of Spain's leading young writers, Federico García Lorca among them.¹⁰ Though Altolaguirre had been awarded research funding from the Spanish Government, administrative problems meant the grant was delayed: in practice, the couple had almost no income and experienced severe financial hardship, though Altolaguirre gave occasional paid lectures.¹¹ Their financial situation improved somewhat when he was awarded a major literary prize, and the couple used the money to set up a poetry magazine, *1616*.¹²

Stanley was *1616*'s most active English contributor.¹³ In addition to his own original poetry, he translated Méndez's poems in which she explored her grief after the loss of a baby.¹⁴ It seems that he was well aware of the couple's struggles, both financial and emotional; and we will see that their needs map closely onto the Arden Society's outline of what exiled writers need to work. It was this involvement with immigrant poets that gave Stanley his first insight into supporting refugees.

In February 1935, Stanley visited Madrid, where he met the Altolaguirres' literary friends.¹⁵ Roger Tinnell has shown how a shared homosexuality allowed Stanley to build bonds swiftly with Federico García Lorca and Luis Cernuda.¹⁶ Stanley and Cernuda probably began a sexual relationship: Cernuda dedicated a poem to Stanley, while Stanley gave Cernuda a copy of his second publication, *Way Into Life*, inscribed 'For Luis Cernuda, For whom from now on I shall write poetry'.¹⁷

However, the deadline to submit his PhD was nearing. Stanley returned to Cambridge to complete his work on the *Cid*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, having published two poetry pamphlets, contributed to *1616*, visited Madrid and had a love affair, Stanley's PhD thesis was a little underdeveloped. Trend commented after Stanley's death that 'I always thought it a good and original piece of work, though the 'referee' did not agree with me. [...] There was an awful lot of it, tho! and some of the best stuff was in the appendices'.¹⁸

⁹ Concha Méndez, *Memorias Habladas, Memorias Armadas* (Editorial Renacimiento, 2018), pp. 97–98.

¹⁰ Méndez, *Memorias Habladas*, p. 93.

¹¹ Harriet Truscott, 'How financial precarity shaped bilingual modernist poetry magazine *1616*', unpublished paper delivered at the conference 'New Work in Modernist Studies' (UEA, 13 December 2024).

¹² Truscott, 'How financial precarity shaped bilingual modernist poetry magazine *1616*'.

¹³ Valender, 'Stanley Richardson', [unpaginated].

¹⁴ *1616: English and Spanish Poetry*, ed. by Concha Méndez and Manuel Altolaguirre, 10 (1935).

¹⁵ Tinnell, 'A new look', p. 12.

¹⁶ Tinnell, 'A new look', p. 14.

¹⁷ Stanley Richardson, 'Way into life'. Image available on Duran Arte y Subastas, 27 December 2018 <<https://www.duran-subastas.com/es/subasta-lote/ricardson-way-into-life/564-670>> [accessed 25 March 2025].

¹⁸ Cambridge, St John's College. GB276 Misc/Box 14/R11, item 12. Tinnell states that Stanley 'did not complete his thesis' but this letter and item 11 indicates that the thesis was examined.

Despite the optimism of the early 1930s and Madrid's flourishing cultural scene, Spain was experiencing increasing political unrest.¹⁹ Altolaguirre and Méndez nonetheless returned to Madrid, while Stanley took a short post as a French teacher at Mill Hill School in London.²⁰ In July 1936 an attempted military coup in Spain turned unrest into brutal civil war.

The Spanish Civil War was portrayed in Britain both as the attempted overthrow of fledgling democracy by General Franco, and as representative of broader struggles between anarchy, communism, nationalism and fascism.²¹ Supporters of the Spanish Republican government from across Europe volunteered to fight with the International Brigades.²² Stanley chose to assist the Spanish Medical Aid Committee.²³ A convoy of ambulances, bringing medical staff and supplies from Britain, set off in August 1936, with Stanley as interpreter. This was his introduction to the brutality of Europe at war, and no doubt his first sight of the thousands of refugees fleeing their homes, heading into exile across the border with France. In a later poem, he would describe the refugees as 'little foxes' pursued by hunters who 'smeared all Spain with blood'.²⁴

The Medical Aid Committee was greeted with a 'terrific ovation' at its arrival in Barcelona: 'thousands of people cheered us [...] as our ambulances went by', recalled one of the leaders.²⁵ Spain offered Stanley an exhilarating mix of literature and nightlife. Tinnell has explored how Stanley found a gay cafe, where people quoted Lorca and improvised poetry. No doubt his blond hair, foreign accent and poetic ability made him distinctive: Stanley apparently 'found great success in that cafe'.²⁶ However, the Committee's leader recalled dismissively, 'the noise and the killings became too much for him'.²⁷ This may have been an unfair interpretation of Stanley's decision to return to London: a poet might well have thought his talents could best serve Spain somewhere other than a field hospital.

Stanley Richardson as poet, press attaché and propagandist

Arriving in London towards the end of 1936, Stanley went to work for the Spanish Embassy as press attaché.²⁸ He would hold this post until February 1939 and the fall of

¹⁹ Giles Tremlett, *España: A Brief History of Spain* (Head of Zeus, 2023), pp. 213–217.

²⁰ Méndez, *Memorias Habladas*, p. 99; *Register of Twentieth-Century Johnians*, p. 128.

²¹ Simon Martin, *Conscience and Conflict: British Artists and the Spanish Civil War* (Pallant House Gallery, 2014), pp. 14–15.

²² Martin, *Conscience and Conflict*, pp. 57–8.

²³ Tinnell, 'A new look', p. 14.

²⁴ Stanley Richardson, 'The Calpe Hunt', ([n. pub.], 1937).

²⁵ Tinnell, 'A new look', p. 15.

²⁶ Tinnell, 'A new look', p. 15.

²⁷ Tinnell, 'A new look', p. 15.

²⁸ *Register of Twentieth-Century Johnians*, p. 128.

the Spanish Republic.²⁹ The British Government had declared an ostensible policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War.³⁰ Stanley's role was to try to win British support for the Republican cause.

It was at this point that poetry, the arts and the political became increasingly united for Stanley. As we will see, 'good custodianship' of cultural heritage was asserted to be aligned with legitimacy of government; Stanley was active in making this argument on behalf of the Republic. Meanwhile, an ongoing literary debate in Britain and Ireland addressed the relationship between poetry and war. Poets including Yeats and Auden reflected on poetry's capacity to move people to action; whether poetry therefore had a responsibility to move people to the *right* action; and if so, whether the poet had a responsibility to those who had taken action.³¹ The Spanish Civil War provided a focus for this debate, and Auden's poem *Spain 1937* was a rallying cry to fight with the International Brigades.³²

Stanley's employment as press attaché involved assessing and attempting to influence mass media in Britain. In addition, the Embassy had its own publication programme. One element of Stanley's press campaign emphasised Spain as a centre of shared European culture, and the Republican government as worthy stewards of European art heritage. The Embassy arranged a visit to Spain for art historians Sir Frederic Kenyon and James Mann, allowing them to inspect and report on the current condition of Spain's historic monuments and art works. The Embassy published *Art Treasures of Spain*, the report of their visit, and presumably also facilitated Mann and Kenyon's newspaper articles about the visit.³³ These included an illustrated article in *The Listener* magazine and one in the *Illustrated London News*, reassuring readers that works by Velázquez were being carefully preserved. The Nationalists saw this as an opportunity for a propaganda war: the initial pro-Republican article in the *Illustrated London News*, 'Guarding Spanish Art Treasures', appeared on 11 September 1937, and was promptly followed by the anti-Republican 'How Treasures of Art and Architecture have suffered in the Spanish Civil War' on 27 November 1937.³⁴ The latter featured 'photographs of pictures now in the hands of the Nationalists', the photographs presumably provided by Nationalist propagandists.

²⁹ Valender, 'Stanley Richardson', [unpaginated].

³⁰ Martin, *Conscience and Conflict*, pp. 14–15.

³¹ Seamus Perry and Mark Ford, 'Political Poems: W. H. Auden's *Spain 1937*', *London Review of Books*, 28 February 2024 <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/podcasts-and-videos/podcasts/close-readings/political-poems-w.h.-auden-s-spain-1937>> [accessed 25 March 2025].

³² Perry and Ford, 'Political Poems'.

³³ Sir Frederic Kenyon and James G. Mann, *Art Treasures of Spain* (Embassy of Spain in the United Kingdom, 1937).

³⁴ 'Guarding Spanish Art Treasures', *Illustrated London News*, 11 September 1937; 'How Treasures of Art and Architecture have suffered in the Spanish Civil War', *Illustrated London News*, 27 November 1937.

Elena Cueto Asín has noted that ‘new technologies of warfare and forms of mass media and propaganda to disseminate news of combat are among the elements that cause the Spanish Civil War to be considered the first thoroughly modern war’.³⁵ However, she concluded, newspapers were not the only way in which information was circulated: ‘poetry, a very traditional literary form, also played an important role of dissemination in the conflict’.³⁶

This triple role for poetry — as art form, news source and propaganda — challenged Stanley. As an enthusiast for Yeats, he was no doubt aware of the broader debate about whether poets should encourage military action. While we must presume that, as press attaché, it was his aim to see leading authors writing in support of the Republic, he was distressed by ‘the distortion of poetry in the service of propaganda’. He described Auden’s *Spain 1937* as evincing both ‘badness as poetry’ and ‘badness [...] of understanding of the subject’.³⁷ Nonetheless, Stanley wrote and published at least four pieces of war poetry. ‘The Calpe Hunt’ and ‘Air-Raid over Barcelona’ explore his own understanding of the relationship between ‘propaganda’, ‘understanding’ and ‘poetry’.

Both poems frame themselves as responses to articles in the British press, articles which Stanley portrays as misleading. ‘The Calpe Hunt’ responds to a *Daily Telegraph* article praising ‘the kindness of General Franco’ for allowing a Gibraltar-based British fox hunt to extend their chase into Spain.³⁸ Franco is, by implication, a supporter of wholesome British values. Stanley’s sonnet challenges this with a vivid, if incoherent, portrayal of the Nationalist army as hunters, and the Spanish people as prey. The volta of the sonnet speaks of a ‘Truth which neither dies nor yields,’ summoned by ‘life’. For the sincerely Christian Stanley, ‘Truth’ will be, in part, religious; in the context of the poem, it is also a particular form of poetry, a poetry that aims at a deeper understanding. ‘The Calpe Hunt’, with all its passionate complexity, is in opposition to the simple but mendacious newspaper statement.

‘Air-raid over Barcelona’ similarly situates itself in dialogue with the dishonesty of the press. It opens with two quotations. The first, from an ‘Article in *The Times*’ states ‘the number of houses hit and of people killed ... is not very great’; the second, from a source titled ‘Official Report,’ reads ‘800 Killed, 1,000 Wounded’.³⁹ The poem itself consists of

³⁵ Elena Cueto Asín, ‘Guernica and *Guernica* in British and American Poetry’, *The Volunteer*, 17 September 2012 <<https://albavolunteer.org/2012/09/guernica-and-guernica-in-british-and-american-poetry/>> [accessed 25 March 2025].

³⁶ Cueto Asín. ‘Guernica and *Guernica*’.

³⁷ Valender, ‘Stanley Richardson’, [unpaginated].

³⁸ Richardson, ‘The Calpe Hunt’.

³⁹ Stanley Richardson, ‘Air-Raid over Barcelona’ ([n. pub.], [1938]).

seven four-line stanzas, and moves through three stages of argument. It opens with the bombing in Barcelona, where 'Through the bright air Death has made his entry'. The poem then argues this foreshadows:

When German bombers fly
To rain down loads of poison gas and metal
Dark over London's sky.

As a poem, it is not successful, shifting as it does over-rapidly from one metaphor to another: the result is confusion rather than an immersive image of the besieged city. It is in the final lines that it gains power:

when in the world's wreckage
Their suffering eyelids closed,
Some one wrote to 'The Times' saying the damage
Was less than we supposed.

Here, Stanley reveals his ear for the cadences of circumlocution and the evasions of the press; poetry works to re-humanise the news. March 1938 saw Stanley's support for Spanish refugees take a practical turn, encouraged by Cernuda's troubles in wartime Spain. Tinnell has shown how, despite breakdowns in their relationship, Stanley arranged a visa for England for Cernuda, and for him to earn money by lecturing and teaching.⁴⁰ Cernuda was a notoriously 'difficult person', and he may have resented his dependence on an ex-lover; one account describes Cernuda as feeling 'tied to Richardson's apron-strings'.⁴¹ Certainly, a feeling of frustration would be understandable. Cernuda was a writer in a country whose language he hardly spoke, while Stanley's poetry and Embassy work had made him well-connected: he was now 'the protégé of the Archbishop of York' and a close friend of the German anti-Nazi campaigner Prince Hubertus zu Löwenstein.⁴²

The Creation of the Arden Society

Cernuda was just one of the many exiles struggling in a new country. It was this recognition that led to Stanley's most significant work: the co-founding of the Arden Society for Artists and Writers in Exile. The German Academy of Arts and Sciences in Exile was formed in

⁴⁰Tinnell, 'A new look', pp. 15–16.

⁴¹Tinnell, 'A new look', p. 16. Translation from Spanish my own.

⁴²Tinnell, 'A New Look', p. 10; Prince Hubertus zu Löwenstein, *Towards the Further Shore* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1968), p. 180.

the US in 1935.⁴³ This organisation attempted to support the scientific and cultural work of exiled Germans in America, with a view to rebuilding German society after the defeat of Nazi ideology. With the encouragement of Prince Hubertus, Stanley proposed to set up the English equivalent.⁴⁴ Stanley clearly had the necessary qualities: a commitment to the arts and to artists, a pragmatic understanding of the administration involved, and a social network he could leverage.

The Arden Society's own records are lost, so its activities must be recreated through memoirs, contemporary newspapers and letters, including those letters sent to the American Guild of German Cultural Freedom, part of the Academy in Exile. Richardson was creating his plans for the Arden Society by the summer of 1938. Volkmar von Zühlsdorff, in his memoir of the Academy, noted that in setting up the Arden Society:

it was important to enlist the help of eminent, respected figures, whose influence would be needed — even more in England than in America — to persuade the general public to accept and support the German exiles. Richardson played an important part in this regard. [...] He had connections in high places.⁴⁵

Stanley suggested the committee members who should be invited, including his university mentor, J. B. Trend. Alongside this, he recruited both active members and distinguished patrons. The latter included the Archbishops of York and Canterbury, the Duchess of Atholl, the Master of Balliol College Oxford, writer Walter de la Mare and artist Augustus John.⁴⁶ There was a careful balance to be struck between 'eminent, respected figures', and writers and artists themselves. Stanley seems to have identified the targets and then directed Prince Hubertus to reel them in. He wrote to Prince Hubertus in July 1938:

One of the key persons to be got is the Dowager Marchioness of Reading. [...] Could you write to her winningly [...] Don't frighten her that she will have to work hard: we only want her name. [...] Once I have a list of some dozen notabilities who are in support, I shall send out a typed statement with this provisional list, and a more or less confidential and personal letter. Then, having got about forty acceptances, send out a printed form, with a tag for cheques to be paid to the Treasurer. [...] By this time, September will be here, we can call the most important people together, elect Chairman etc, and get going to collect money, get up a public meeting, arrange for speakers in the Universities, etc.⁴⁷

⁴³ Zühlsdorff, *Hitler's Exiles*, p. 105.

⁴⁴ Zühlsdorff, *Hitler's Exiles*, p.103.

⁴⁵ Zühlsdorff, *Hitler's Exiles*, p. 103.

⁴⁶ Zühlsdorff, *Hitler's Exiles*, p. 103.

⁴⁷ Zühlsdorff, *Hitler's Exiles*, p. 104.

Stanley's social and administrative experience is clear here: he knows the order in which tasks should be done, how long they will take, and what the initial actions ought to be to support the Society's further goals. His specialist knowledge as press attaché and poet is also clear in the way he distinguishes between what will be typed (a statement of current supporters), what will be written (a 'more or less [...] personal letter') and what must be printed (donation forms).

In August 1938, Stanley proposed an annual budget, whose priorities reflected his background as a writer, and his experience supporting Altolaguirre and Cernuda. The budget included monthly scholarships for up to 50 recipients and their families, with funds for translation fees, subsidies towards printing costs, lecture fees, and competition prizes.⁴⁸ These are of course all useful items, but it is notable that prizes, a scholarship and lecture fees had proved sources of income for Altolaguirre, while translation fees and printing subsidies would have helped in publishing *1616*. In addition to this, the Society hoped to create a physical space that would function as 'a club, an information bureau', and could hold 'exhibitions of [exiles'] paintings, performances of [exiles'] music'.⁴⁹

The Society was active by autumn 1938. More and more writers were in need of asylum as people fled Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. These included Jesse Thoor, whose story I discuss below. For some refugees, the Arden Society could draw on the funds of the American Guild. Surviving correspondence with the Guild lists 18 individuals in need of financial assistance, whether for living expenses or the cost of visas.⁵⁰ Prince Hubertus would later estimate that '800 writers, scientists and artists had been assisted' through the American Guild and the Arden Society.⁵¹

Fundraising was of course necessary: surviving records suggest that it was centred around literary activities. In January 1939, Virginia Woolf contributed a manuscript to an auction fundraising for the American Guild, with the writer May Horton asking Woolf:

to part with a written fragment of yourself for this purpose. It seems rather horrible, but also necessary as anything that can be done must be done for these people.⁵²

⁴⁸ Zühlsdorff, *Hitler's Exiles*, p. 108.

⁴⁹ Herbert Read, Letter to T. S. Eliot, 19 January 1939, [TSEliot.com](https://tseliot.com), <https://tseliot.com/letters/search/person/Herbert%20Read/vol9letter_41> [accessed 25 March 2025].

⁵⁰ Frankfurt, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek. Deutsches Exilarchiv, EB 70/117.

⁵¹ Löwenstein, *Towards the Further Shore*, p. 205.

⁵² Rebecca Wisor, 'Versioning Virginia Woolf: notes toward a post-eclectic edition of *Three Guineas*', *Modernism/modernity*, 16.3 (2009), pp. 497–535 (p. 511).

The Society also organised fundraising poetry readings, with readers including T. S. Eliot and Stanley himself.⁵³ There were limits to the support Eliot would offer the Society, however. When asked by Herbert Read to attend a fundraising dinner, Eliot did not feel the cause's merit outweighed the prospective tedium:

I wish you well for your Arden Society, but [...] wild horses would not get me to the dinner. The next time you want me to come to a dinner, you had better conceal from me the fact that the Archbishop of York is going to be the principal speaker.⁵⁴

Eliot's letter indicates how the Arden Society chose to present itself as a solidly establishment organisation. These relationships with establishment figures would be increasingly required as German refugees were treated with greater suspicion.

February 1939 saw the end of Stanley's Embassy employment, as the Spanish Civil War neared its end, and the Republicans faced defeat.⁵⁵ More and more Spanish refugees were making the arduous journey across the Pyrenees, only to be sent to internment camps in France.⁵⁶ Discussing Spanish exiles, Sylvia Townsend Warner wrote to Oliver Stonor in March 1939 about:

the problem of looking after the refugees who are in [Britain]. This is the function of the Arden Society, which sets itself to supply social and professional kindnesses, ranging from the giving of English lessons to the arranging of [...] jobs for writers. [...] Stanley Richardson is a friend of mine, you might mention my name if you write to him.⁵⁷

We see that the Society functioned on networks of friendship and trust between fellow writers. Stanley and Prince Hubertus were at the centre of this network: that they were both writers who conceived of writing as a social and societal endeavour gave them both the connections and the credibility to request assistance.

For the Society, things continued optimistically. In April 1939, Stanley visited New York for a major fundraising dinner for the American Guild.⁵⁸ By July 1939, the *Times Literary Supplement* reported that the Arden Society was:

⁵³'Arrangements for Next Week', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8 July 1939, p. 402.

⁵⁴T.S. Eliot, Letter to Herbert Read, 26 January 1939, [TSEliot.com](https://tseliot.com), <https://tseliot.com/letters/search/person/Herbert%20Read/vol9letter_41> [accessed 25 March 2025].

⁵⁵Valender. 'Stanley Richardson', [unpaginated].

⁵⁶Méndez, *Memorias Habladas*, p. 93.

⁵⁷'Sylvia Townsend Warner's Letters to Oliver Stonor', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 9.1 (2008), pp. 9–16 (p. 12), doi.org/10.14324/111.444.stw.2008.04.

⁵⁸Löwenstein, *Towards the Further Shore*, p. 205.

planning to open in London this coming autumn a centre where meetings and discussion may take place. [...] In general, the Arden Society hopes to be able to offer to these men and women without a country at least one corner of London where they can find quiet and recreation.⁵⁹

The Arden Society at war

Rather than the opening of a centre for refugees, Autumn 1939 instead saw the declaration of war on Germany. The German refugees already supported by the Society were badly affected; and the Society turned from planning art exhibitions to attending tribunals.

Jesse Thoor offers an excellent case study of their work. Thoor was a staunchly anti-Nazi German poet whose sonnets were admired by many leading writers.⁶⁰ Stanley arranged for a visa and plane tickets for him to come to England. When Thoor arrived at Croydon Airfield in November 1938, Stanley met him and immediately supplied him with accommodation and a stipend.⁶¹ While Thoor initially settled well, things became increasingly difficult. When Britain declared war, Thoor was considered an enemy alien, and summoned to an Aliens Tribunal. Thoor was friendless in the country except for the Arden Society. A Society member, writer Anne Fremantle, attended court in his support.⁶² Unable to prevent his internment, she nonetheless drew attention to the injustice of the process in *The Times*:

the fact that an alien may not be represented by either a barrister or a solicitor, but may bring friends to speak on his behalf, surely makes for an invidious distinction between the poor and lowly and the well connected.⁶³

Once Thoor was taken into custody, the importance of the Society's patrons became evident; Stanley called on the Archbishop of Canterbury to appeal for Thoor's freedom.⁶⁴ While these were traumatic experiences, the 'social and professional kindnesses' of the Society in helping him integrate were presumably successful: Thoor chose to stay in England after the war.⁶⁵

⁵⁹'News and Notes', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 22 July 1939, p. 1.

⁶⁰Zühlsdorff, pp. 113–5.

⁶¹Zühlsdorff, p. 116.

⁶²Anne Fremantle, 'An Alien's Tribunal', *The Times*, 28 October 1939, p. 4. Fremantle wrote again to *The Times* about Thoor's case on 7 November 1939, p. 6.

⁶³Fremantle, 'An Alien's Tribunal', p. 4.

⁶⁴Zühlsdorff, p. 120.

⁶⁵Zühlsdorff, p. 121.

With conscription implemented, Stanley joined the Royal Navy.⁶⁶ However, he was apparently able to delay his active service. In January 1940, he began a three-month lecture tour of the USA, speaking both as a poet and as Secretary of the Arden Society.⁶⁷ It had been Stanley's literary connections that facilitated the Society's creation in the UK; it was now his poetry that allowed him to draw attention to 'the refugee situation'.⁶⁸ A New York radio producer noted that while he could not invite the Society's Secretary to give a radio lecture, 'which would give the impression propagandists are employed', he could certainly arrange for Stanley to give a lecture on 'Poetry and Democracy'.⁶⁹ His scrapbook, which preserves invitations, press cuttings and photos of his America trip, shows how he was able to interweave the two themes. He gave lectures 'on modern Spain', 'English Youth and its International Outlook', and finished by reading 'some of his best loved poetry'.⁷⁰ If Stanley had been concerned by the tendency for war poetry, in acting as a news source, to become propaganda, he appears to have found a personal solution: conveying news in a lecture, and then humanising it through poetry.

This successful lecture tour, however, seems to have marked the end of the Arden Society. Stanley returned to Britain, and was called up for active service in the Royal Navy.⁷¹ It may be at this point that the Arden Society was dissolved: a record in the American Guild's archive indicates discussions in 1940 on the topic.⁷² I have found no references to the Society after 1940.

Stanley continued to write during his tragically short period of service.⁷³ On the evening of 8th March 1941, Stanley was on leave in London. Despite warnings that the Blitz would be particularly heavy, Stanley went out to a nightclub, the Café de Paris, which offered a cabaret and live band.⁷⁴ With jazz music drowning out the noise of planes overhead and the mix of fear and revelry, he might have felt himself back in Barcelona, reciting Lorca's verses in the gay club in 1936. At 9.45pm a high explosive bomb dropped through the glass ceiling and onto the dance floor. Stanley Richardson, alongside 33 other people, was killed.⁷⁵

⁶⁶ Löwenstein, *Towards the Further Shore*, p. 193.

⁶⁷ The Stanley Richardson Scrapbook is held in a private collection.

⁶⁸ The Stanley Richardson Scrapbook, fol. 4.

⁶⁹ Letter from George Field of Radio Station WEVD to 19 Jan 1940, contained in the Stanley Richardson Scrapbook, fol. 7.

⁷⁰ The Stanley Richardson Scrapbook, fol. 1.

⁷¹ *Register*, p. 128.

⁷² Deutsches Exilarchiv, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, EB 70/117-D.10.34.0016.

⁷³ 'London Day by Day', *The Daily Telegraph*, March 13th 1941, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Andrew James, 'The bombing of the Café de Paris', *The National Archives Blog*, Friday 8 March 2013. <<https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/the-bombing-of-the-cafe-de-paris/>> [accessed 25 March 2025].

⁷⁵ James, 'The bombing of the Café de Paris'.

Yeats, on being asked for a war poem, wrote in 1915,

I think it better that in times like these
A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth
We have no gift to set a statesman right.⁷⁶

Stanley, though an admirer of Yeats's poetry, would surely have disagreed with these lines.⁷⁷ He believed that poetry was a social endeavour, one that brought people together, and that could speak for those who were misrepresented elsewhere. His work with the Arden Society aimed not only to save people's lives, but to enable them to publish, to see their work translated, to preserve cultures and share different perspectives. To achieve this, he called on the many friendships he had made through literature, a practical demonstration of the way in which poetry can connect.

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⁷⁶ W. B. Yeats, 'On being asked for a War Poem', *Poetry Foundation* <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57313/on-being-asked-for-a-war-poem>> [accessed 25 March 2025].

⁷⁷ Valender, 'Stanley Richardson', [unpaginated].

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