

= Fifty Years of Freedom =

Fifty Years of Freedom : A Study of the Development of the Ideas of A. S. Neill is a 1972 intellectual biography of the British pedagogue A. S. Neill by Ray Hemmings . It traces how Homer Lane , Wilhelm Reich , Sigmund Freud and others influenced Neill as he developed the " Summerhill idea " , the philosophy of child autonomy behind his Summerhill School . The book follows Neill 's early life and career in rural , Calvinist Scotland and continues through the influence of his mentors , Lane and Reich , and the origins of Summerhill after World War I. Written fifty years from Summerhill 's founding , *Fifty Years* is a sociological and historical analysis of Neill 's ideas in the context of intellectual and educational trends both during Neill 's life and at the time of publication . Hemmings also surveyed progressive school leaders about Neill 's impact on the field , and reported their perception of influence on teacher ? pupil relations . *Fifty Years* was first published in England in 1972 by George Allen and Unwin , and was later renamed *Children 's Freedom : A. S. Neill and the Evolution of the Summerhill Idea* for its 1973 American publication by Schocken Books .

Contemporary reviewers considered *Fifty Years* to be the best available biography of Neill . They largely praised its clarity and biographical detail and insight , but found the book 's philosophical sections comparatively weak and the author biased , as a former teacher from the school .

= = Overview = =

Fifty Years of Freedom is an intellectual biography of the British pedagogue A. S. Neill that traces the influence of Homer Lane , Wilhelm Reich , Sigmund Freud and others on his thought . Released fifty years after the school 's founding , the book is a sociological and historical analysis that presents the development of Neill 's " Summerhill idea " ? the philosophy of his Summerhill School ? in context of related social , political , educational , and intellectual trends . Hemmings himself saw the work as less of a biography than an analysis of Neill 's ideas in development and of the outward reception of these ideas . The book was first published in England in 1972 by George Allen and Unwin as *Fifty Years of Freedom : A Study of the Development of the Ideas of A. S. Neill* , and was later renamed *Children 's Freedom : A. S. Neill and the Evolution of the Summerhill Idea* for its 1973 American publication by Schocken Books . The book includes photographs .

The book follows the course of Neill 's life sequentially from his youth in " rural , Calvinist Scotland " to the start of Summerhill between the two World Wars . Hemmings focuses on Neill 's relation to education but also minds other biographical detail : the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis and Homer Lane 's theories in the 1920s , and of Wilhelm Reich 's psychological theories in the 1930s . Hemmings compares Neill 's thought with that of Maria Montessori , Bertrand Russell , Fred Clarke , Erich Fromm , Susan Sutherland Isaacs , Benjamin Spock , and contemporaries Paul Goodman , Ivan Illich , R. D. Laing , and Herbert Marcuse . Compared to pedagogues such as Russell , who advocated for the inculcation of certain virtues in a child 's education , Neill instead insisted that the child be left to make its own values and decisions apart from adult influence and manipulation . Hemmings also reviews the roles of freedom , authority , and anarchy throughout the maturation of Neill 's thought . The final sections explain Summerhill 's internal processes , philosophy , and position in both British and global social order . Hemmings contends that Summerhill has remained consistent to its principles while it cycled through roles as one of many 1920s educational experiments , a bastion in the 1930s , and an advocate for " children 's freedom " throughout the post @-@ World War II movement for " ' informal ' education " .

Hemmings conducted a study that surveyed 102 progressive heads ? broadly defined ? of infant , elementary , and secondary schools about Neill 's influence . Their responses indicated that Neill had significant impact on how the profession perceived teacher ? pupil relations . The respondents also reported significant influence from Neill on moral and sex education . Contrarily , Neill had little impact on school curriculum and classroom teaching methods . Hemmings received little response from heads of state comprehensive schools .

Hemmings had previously taught at Summerhill . In 1973 , he was Lecturer in Education at the University of Leicester . Other contemporaneous and significant biographies of Neill include Neill 's

autobiography (Neill ! Neill ! Orange Peel ! , 1972) and Robert Skidelsky 's Part Three of English Progressive Schools (1969) . Jonathan Croall 's Neill of Summerhill (1983) later cited Hemmings 's book .

= = Reception = =

Though Hemmings did not think of his work as a biography , Richard L. Hopkins (Comparative Education Review) said it essentially was strongest as one . Hopkins wrote in 1976 that Hemmings 's book was the best biography of Neill available at the time , and called it " comprehensive " , " objective " , and " sympathetically thoughtful " . In comparison , Neill 's autobiography " rambles " and Skidelsky 's biography " preens " over " small insights " , while Hemmings unpacks larger issues to contextualize " a complex man in a complex world " . Reflecting on these three biographies of Neill , Hopkins added that Hemmings 's book would interest " comparative educators " most , as that it addressed the two points readers would find most interesting about Neill : the role of his history on his ideas , and the role of his ideas in the outside world . Still , Hopkins thought many readers would find the work " too long and detailed " . Hopkins himself found Hemmings 's book " a struggle to work through " , though more complete compared to Neill 's " easy " , " stream @-@ of @-@ consciousness " prose . Leonard W. Cowie (British Journal of Educational Studies) said that Fifty Years was written with " great competence " and would be both " interesting and essential " for those interested in understanding Neill . Choice recommended the " excellent volume " for " all readership levels " , and considered it more telling than Neill 's own autobiography . Shelley Neiderbach (Library Journal) agreed that Hemmings 's " admiring ... historical biography " remained " clear , cool , and evenhanded " . Sarah Curtis (The Times Literary Supplement) wrote in 1972 that Hemmings 's account of Neill was " the most lucid , dispassionate yet sympathetic " published . No system , she wrote , has reconciled the needs for individual freedom and societal regulation .

Commenting on the book 's survey study , Cowie (British Journal of Educational Studies) wrote that it was hard to ascertain Neill 's true pedagogical influence when state schools , which constitute the majority of schools , had a poor response rate . He added that the progressive education topics reported to be most influenced by Neill continued to be controversial in 1973 . Cowie asked whether challenges to authoritarian education were replaced by Neill 's methods or by chaos . Hopkins (Comparative Education Review) said the sociological study was more descriptive of Neill 's role than contributive to the evolution of his philosophy . Hopkins wrote that the book functioned best as a biography , and that its philosophy sections were " piecemeal " and " sketchy " rather than " comprehensive and coherent " . Indeed , he felt that the study and the philosophical portions were more illuminative of Neill 's life than of " any broader picture " . Robert B. Nordberg (Best Sellers) appreciated some of the book 's " important points " , such that many advocates for educational freedom , in practice , instead seek more insidious techniques for controlling children . While Curtis (The Times Literary Supplement) felt that the book added little new content , she appreciated the book 's detail , such as that Neill 's A Dominie 's Log was based in fact , not fiction .

Multiple reviewers highlighted Hemmings 's association with the school . Cowie (British Journal of Educational Studies) wrote that although Neill did not want disciples , Hemmings " accepts generally the ' Summerhill idea ' " and would fit the role . Nicholas Tucker (New Statesman) too noted the book as " very one @-@ sided , verging on the uncritical " despite its readability and signs of thorough research . He said that a balanced account of Summerhill was elusive because of the " sensationalized " press and " rosy " recollections of Neill and his former pupils , similar to the memoirs of " Old Boys ' clubs elsewhere " . He wrote , however , that Hemmings 's position was understandable when considering the criticism that Summerhill and Neill withstood from " conventional educational wisdom " and " horrified hearsay " , which had turned the school into " a type of scholastic folk myth " to set straight . Still , Tucker saw less cause for Summerhill 's defense by the time of publication as Neill had wider acceptance . He had become a powerful figure in education and his school a template for the American free school movement . Cowie wrote that Neill seemed to be enjoying greater acceptance in his later life as Summerhill was " losing its uniqueness

as ' that dreadful school ' " . Nordberg (Best Sellers) said that while Hemmings has some criticism for Neill and " open education " , " he is basically an enthusiast " who wrote a " sympathetic portrayal " . Even from this sympathetic angle , Nordberg felt that Neill came across as " the child of an overly strict and demanding father who has spent the rest of his life in a rather one @-@ dimensional crusade , more visceral than rational , against authority in all forms . " Altogether , Nordberg wrote , Fifty Years succeeds in its " systematic , scholarly look at the Summerhill idea " but fails to provide " a balanced , profound look " at its counterpart : " need for restraint , rationality , and responsibility in the world " .

Neill himself " liked " Fifty Years and thought Hemmings had done a " wonderful job " but " wasn 't critical enough " . He noted that the work received few reviews compared to his own .