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**MODERN TENDENCIES  
IN  
ENGLISH LITERATURE.**

BY

**DR. AMIYA CHAKRAVARTY**

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Amiya Chakravarty". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

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*Dedicated to*

*Krishna Hutheesing*



## INTRODUCTION.

Beware of those who rebel against the fine arts in the name of "power." The theory that poetry is unsuited to the growth of a virile civilisation is based on a dual fallacy. Poetry which does not awaken the creative mind but merely lulls an indolent conscience may be verse, but it is not poetry in any real sense. True poetry is dynamic in that it is one with life's movement and makes for the liberation of mind.

The cult of unashamed virility again has little to do either with poetry or with civilisation. Great poetry cannot be produced under any sort of dictatorship, malignant or "benign." Intellectual and moral faculties defy compulsion, and any "causal urge" imposed from outside. Conscripted poetry in the hands of propagandists, we contend, would lead to the same dire results.

The true inspiration of creative literature is lost in an atmosphere of acquisitive passion, or of megalomaniac dreams. Violence, or mere passivity fails as an incentive to art. Exquisite dandies or aggressive penmen would here meet as extremes do, in agreeing to produce verse dictated by cotery or cult. They would both escape the primary need of harmonising their vision with reality, of seeing them as one, of applying great ideals in a wide human arena with the sense of creative purpose.

The main function of poetry, we know, has been an attempt to reveal the deeper significance of experience, to link up actions with principles, and to invoke the Will

while making the ends of achievement, and the means used by us, worthy of humanity.

Poetry has sought to generate power through its own technical laws of rhythm and music while delivering its message of harmony. But to sustain this purpose of art, an artist would need an undefeatable urge for the expression of human freedom and an uncompromising loyalty to truth. That is what we mean by true "poetic faith." To express this faith it is not enough to invoke inspiration, it is necessary for a poet to know how to express. Poetry, therefore, has guided man's vision by urging him to reveal himself, and his civilisation in the light of the deeper experiences of the spirit, and related them with our daily existence. Human civilisation down the ages has been guided by these ideals of harmonised living fashioned by the creative artists who have, of course, employed mediums other than words, in their service of mankind. Poets have dealt with beauty and beneficence; they have ranged themselves with truth and moral perfection in the struggle against evil. They have sought the sources of human power and potentialities and revealed them to us. They have seen the unity of things and discovered that we stand together in a great universe of life.

## TWO

In English poetry this effort to show life as "one compacted whole" (Hardy) moved by interlinked forces, can be seen in the *Metaphysicals*. In Blake, the sense of interconnection assumed a more self-conscious form, and implied the necessity of moral action. A woman condemned to sin affects somehow the blossoming, anywhere, of perfect marital love; a caged robin disturbs the harmony of the

heavens; an aggressor in arms brings a wrong note into the summer sunlight; evil is never shown as happening disconnected with the texture of an inclusive whole. Blake sees that goodness and beauty appearing anywhere, must also change the balance and affect the totality. The wild deer wandering about unfetters the human soul from the bondage of care.

Here, then, is a challenge to daily civilisation coming even from the heart of mystical poetry. Constant realisation of the fundamental unity of life must lead to the conception of moral law, and poets from Wordsworth and Shelley to the moderns have applied the moral law, which is also the law of beauty and truth if you will, to social systems and government. Even Symbolists, who "sit on a green knoll apart," have, like Yeats, hungered to build up a life nearer to their heart's desire. All uncomely and broken things, worn-out old survivals, a crying child, a creaking cart wrong the mystic's image of the ideal.

In the poetry of the Symbolists the challenge of beauty in man's shaping of life had already become insistent. This aspect of the 'nineties has not been sufficiently recognised. The ivory tower atmosphere had become almost stifling for some of the poets, and they were trying to give an answer to their age, by offering, in their own way, something that would "disengage the ultimate essence, the soul, of whatever exists and can be realised by the consciousness." (Symons). They would get near to the heart of Nature and in some direct manner affect human society. There was a deliberateness about their procedure of using symbols which seems significant to-day. Yeats was trying to evoke the "great ~~mind~~" and "the great memory" by symbols which would ~~rectify~~ the wrongs of civilisation. Imagists

led by Ezra Pound made much mystery of "the Image," but it was obvious that they also connected it with some direct potency for changing the society with which they were at war. Immediately before the war, along with Wyndham Lewis, Pound published "Blast," in which violent attacks were made on forms of art, of society, and on warfare, which, to the Imagists, seemed incompatible with a controlled purposive existence. They were wrong in some of their denunciations, but to their credit it must be said that their attack on Futurists, like Marinetti and on his unsocial, dehumanised art, was categorical.

Modern Poetry is concerned with the exploration of causal links between nature and the human will; a knowledge of unity, given by the revelations of science and by the extension of man's awareness in varied spheres of experience, has brought a new responsibility to the artist. The cataclysm of civilisation during periods of war, and the continuing tragedies of our age have made the poets conscious of their function in a social system with which their thoughts and action are inevitably allied.

The failure of social sanity at this hour would not only threaten their existence but make art surrender to the exigencies of circumstance. The conception of poetic truth and poetic justice would be tarnished. Confronted with the international background of modern humanity, and with the persistent habits of mind and living which are based on an earlier epoch of evolution, modern poets find themselves compelled to expose the disparity and to suggest ways of removing it. Genuine, propaganda in the hands of an artist, is transmuted into the stuff of imagination, and in the best modern verse one can find ample evidence of such utterance. Auden's "Spain" or the recent poems

of Day Lewis are good examples. The criterion of poetic achievement, as the moderns would admit, lies in the excellence of technique and in the validity of inspiration; in some poets this essential combination has given to their reformist urge the final veracity of Art.

Poetry, today, is actively engaged in giving values to the gifts of civilization. It is also exposing the unrealities of 'progress' which thrives on the destruction of the human spirit. Man, being a tool-making animal, has always idealised his tools, to-day the new mechanical tools of civilization have come in for their proper share of poetic appreciation. The new poetry of machine—such as Spender's "The North Express"—reveals curves of beauty and colour which are heightened by an inward feeling of worth. Men's use of machinery as an engine of destruction has been mercilessly attacked by the generous poetry of our age.

In the poetry of the great modern, Rabindranath Tagore, a fine balance of values can be found, and that is so because his genius accepts the Age under the scrutiny of full poetic responsibility. "Creative Unity" for him, is the principle of life and of growth, wherever this unity has been denied, in man's ideals, or in his actions, civilization is bound to suffer. "Self-creation," according to Tagore, lies at the root of human existence, and the self-creative urge of man makes him use the materials of life by mastering the law of perfect being.

Poetry reveals the unity of truth and leads civilization in its striving to give the diverse riches of humanity an enduring harmony of expression.

THREE

The following pages are an attempt to indicate the basic trends of modern English literature. The medium of verse being more immediately communicative, it is the poetry of these newer years which has been discussed in this book. But though some of the recent tendencies have been discussed in some detail, particularly in connection with Auden's intriguing and terse volume, "Poems," this assessment of the between—two—Wars poetry stops at the end of the earlier phases of modernism. The development of the poetic drama and the further enhancement of verse libre need a fresh sequence of critical appreciations which cannot be included here.

AMIYA CHAKRAVARTY

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## YEATS AND THE MODERNS.

Yeats climbed the stairs, and made the Tower his home this was the turning point of his poetry. This was not the Ivory Tower where he had dwelt alone from his early days, carving verse through which echoes of the world would pass with delicate convolutions. High-sorrowing songs, a tranced aloofness, and "bitter" mysticism ruffled into inwardness by trafficking events, had led him to a new door. Consider this as a second birth; the Tower, in Co Galway near the sea-shore was converted into a poet's household where Yeats settled down with his wife Georgie Lees. A stone-built Innisfree, it lacked nine bean-rows and perpetual glimmer and glow, but possessed beauty's strength a portion of life, not a flight from it At last Yeats faced the world, and though by right a dreamer, made poetry out of clamorous facts. Imagine Yeats walking into a restaurant, and writing about tea-cups and shop, not forsaking the sudden sight, but using it. But of that later on.

" I, the poet William Yeats,  
With old mill boards and sea-green slates,  
And smithy work from the Gart forge,  
Restored this tower for my wife George;  
And may these characters remain  
When all is ruin once again."

This second Tower drew the modern crowd, and Yeats looked around. Post-war youthfulness admired the quaint gaelic doors, the whimsical but weather-proof architecture,

the stained glass, and they knew also that the giant within was friendly From this tower, Yeats wrote to his friend Rabindranath Tagore, in 1931,

“ Since we met I have married I have now two children, a boy and a girl, and feel more knitted into life, and life, when I think of it as separated from all that is not itself, from all that is complicated and mechanical, takes to my imagination an Asiatic form That form I found first in your books and afterwards in certain Chinese poetry and Japanese prose writers What an excitement it was this first reading of your poems, which seemed to come out of the fields and rivers and have their changelessness ”

“ Knitted into life ” is the phrase ; this interweaving of life with art’s texture gives his recent poems their validity.

Much difference lies between a poet who clings to turrety life, making art an instinctive shell in which to seek aesthetic confirmation, and one who not deviating from his vocation builds a tower in the market-place, challenging muddled living or unbeautiful living by the creation of poems. Even worthy people have sometimes to be reminded by a craftsman that not merely the science, but the art of living must be learnt, and that both meet. Poets to-day face a dilemma how can a jeweller express his social conscience save by using his skill and giving gold’s worth? By making the jeweller hammer out spades for a kitchen garden-propagandist literature?—his art then would be annulled. As a jeweller, the gifted citizen can and does fulfil a purpose which is useful, and makes for happiness. There are some who still hope that festivals

and friendly gifts will remain to adorn the wealth of leisure hours without which man would perish. The conscientious goldsmith might refuse to gild a crown for a tyrant but this does not carry the argument beyond exceptions, jewels, in poetry, fortunately are made with words and lie within people's reach. Yeats decided to stick to art, much of which must be ornamentation, meant to please though not all of it.

Modern poets have praised Yeats for his early verse, the term "escapist" comes for a good deal of approbation from Auden. "There must always be two kinds of art, escape-art, for man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep, and parable-art, that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and to learn love." Auden defines "high browism" well, another term which goes with escapism, Ivory tower, and "unsocial" art. "The artist like every other kind of 'high-brow' is self-conscious, i.e., he is all the time what every one is some of the time, a man who is active rather than passive to his experience." There are, of course, two different types of "self-conscious" artists; the "instinctive" or purely inspirational artist is also self-conscious in his own way, and differs from the multitude. Yeats carried both types till the end, in his first phase, too, he never lacked sensitive understanding of life. Macneice is appreciative. "Yeats' early poems, which many would take as typical escape-poetry, were very much more adulterated with real life than . . . the beery puerilities of Messrs. Chesterton and Belloc."

Macneice goes on to examine modern affinities with the Irish poet whose technique, never diffuse or at the mercy of inspiration, became astonishingly terse and moving in his new tower.

“ Mr. Yeats is the best example of how a poet ought to develop if he goes on writing till he is old. I am not one of those who have nothing to say for his earlier poems and everything to say for his later poems. He is a fine case of identity in difference .. But, he has, in his own way, kept up with the times. Spender is like him in that they both have worked hard to attain the significant statement, avoiding the obvious rhythm and the easy blurb. Auden, Day Lewis both use epithets in Yeats' latest manner.”

Of the “ latest manner,” according to moderns, the following is a good example.

“ Although I can see him still,  
 The freckled man who goes  
 To a grey place on a hill  
 In grey Connemara clothes,  
 At dawn to cast his flies,  
 It's long since I began  
 To call up to the eyes  
 This wise and simple man ”

The early Yeats would hardly have noticed the Connemara clothes, he would have preferred to drape an Irish peasant in embroidered Gaelic legends or made him mystically naked. His three beggars, three hermits, fiddlers and cripples have a strange air of irrelevance. In his new tower, however, Yeats can be fanciful yet load his imagination with facts.

“ I declare this tower my symbol ; I declare  
 This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a  
 stair is my ancestral stair.”

he says with “ majestic taciturnity,” and uses his symbol with diverse intent.

" I summon to the ancient winding stair ;

Set all your mind to the steep ascent."

But once he has done that steep ascent with you, he talks at ease about " My House," " My Table," " My descendants;" discusses " The Road at my door," " The Stare's Nest by My Window," proving, in his own words, that " the wise are always the merry, save by an evil chance." He tells us that the rest of his life he would like to spend in re-writing what he had written before. " I tried after the publication of *The Wandering of Oisín* to write of nothing but emotion, and in the simplest language, and now I have had to go through it all, cutting out and altering passages that are sentimental for lack of thought."

As early as 1906 Yeats had felt the lack of something life-blooded in his verse, but he sought consolation in finesse. " Partly from lack of that spoken word which knits us to the normal man, we have lost in personality, in our delight in the whole man,—blood, inspiration, intellect running together." " But," he continues, we " have found a new delight in essences, in states of mind, in pure imagination, in all that comes to us most easily in elaborate music." Both elaboration and the spoken word are necessary, and the later Yeats knew how to combine them. In his reaction, he clattered words like " pale," " dim," " dream-heavy," " cloud-pale," " passion-dimmed," almost too ruthlessly. He would attain

" To that stern colour and that delicate line  
which are our secret discipline."

He had to describe " cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn " as they were, and discard extra foliage now that he was rooted in life.

“ Though leaves are many, the root is one,  
 Through all the lying days of my youth  
 I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun,  
 Now I may wither into the truth ”

No “ withering ” for him, however, his words became terse and vivid with life’s sap

“ Never had I more  
 Excited, passionate, fantastical  
 Imagination, nor an ear and eye  
 That more expected the impossible ”

Many of his later poems are good humoured tirades against old age and prove his lyrical prowess

“ Decrepit age that has been tied to me  
 As to a dog’s tail . . . ”

is, for him, an external accident, and he protests

“ An aged man is but a paltry thing  
 A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
 Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
 For every tatter in its mortal dress ”

Poetry of protest such as this carries the secret of his imagination, with an alert mind nurtured by meditation, and a natural enjoyment of beauty he has been able to escape aesthetic passivity. Emotional fulfilment is not enough, for, he declares,

“ Caught in that sensual magic all neglect  
 Monuments of unageing intellect,”

—his later verse is built on a fundamental cerebration. His earlier poetry lacked the tension which experience can bring to an artist; technical discipline and emotional enrichment

must harmonise and grow together. It would be wrong to say that Yeats in his full maturity was compensated for the loss of legendary dreams by "realism," or that his Celtic Twilight days were untouched by hunger and thirst for knowledge. Yeats' poetry never admitted this monism, satisfying to theorists who must discover terminal points in his art, poets never arrive, save at a higher tension of power. The poet who dreamt "a Druid dream of the end of days" lived till the last, the aesthete who saw

" Under the boughs of love and hate  
In all poor foolish things that live for a day,  
Eternal beauty wandering on her way "

charms us in his latest songs. Yeats' aesthetic mysticism, characteristic of his late period, revealed for instance, in what he calls his "supernatural poems" (in "*A Full Moon in March*") finds parallel in such earlier verse as this—

" My rhymes more than their rhyming tell  
Of things discovered in the deep  
Where only body's laid asleep "

The profound spiritual identification which we admire in "Words for Music Perhaps," is already there in these exquisite lines,

" I have been many things  
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light  
Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,  
And old slave grinding at a heavy quern,  
A king sitting upon a chair of gold—  
And all these things were wonderful and great."

But his Muse had ascended the *Winding Stair*, and the vision seen from above presents a more complete incorpora-

tion of the elements which had appeared before in moods largely coloured by music and imagining.

“ I am content to live it all again.  
 When such as I cast out all remorse  
 So great a sweetness flows into the breast  
 We must laugh and we must sing,  
 We are blest by everything,  
 Everything we look upon is blest ”

(“ *The Winding Stair* ”)

There is a natural transcendence here, not an “ escape.” His art does not “ come clear of the nets of wrong and right,” but leads him to the centre of things. “ Poetry ” said Yeats “ is made of the poet’s quarrel with himself,”—and none knew better how to be spiritually gay about it. His supremacy as an artist lies in the self-possession with which he had learnt to share an experience; one finds in his later lyrics the Shakespearean air of circumstance and brevity of despatch, which attend our supreme moments.

“ My fiftieth year had come and gone,  
 I sat, a solitary man,  
 In a crowded London shop,  
 An open book and empty cup,  
 On the marble table-top.  
 While on the shop and street I gazed  
 My body of a sudden blazed,  
 And twenty minutes more or less  
 It seemed, so great my happiness,  
 That I was blessed and could bless.”

Yeats admired in Synge “ an astringent joy and hardness,” these qualities, in his own later poems, appear in the large humanity of his thought. “ I too have rhymed my

reveries " he had said, but in his rendering, at an earlier date, the reverie would remain obliterating time, the tea-cup and the London shop; while, in the poem above, all these march into the movement, in a single bar of music. " Twenty minutes more or less " secure measurable eternity for us, and admirably defines his statement—" Poets are not allowed to shoot beyond the tangible " But the poet's golden arrow might, with such poetic providence as often visited Yeats, strike truth; it also revealed the beauty of the flight.

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**ENTER MR. ELIOT.**

The dreamland atmosphere of Symbolist poetry had suddenly become heavy with shadows. It is as if the Lady of Shalott, forgetting her magic vow, had gone to the window and looked at life. The mirror cracked and an unreal existence in the tower at Camelot was shattered into fragments, but there was a beauty in the dying song of Symbolism.

The newcomers on the road to Camelot proudly declared their brigandage, on the lips of the Imagists were words as far removed from Sir Lancelot's lispng numbers as any shout could be. The breaking of the "Imagist storm" coincided with the Great War, but it passed away sooner. Mr. Eliot's poetry of the first period depicts a mind paralysed by the impact of events, the fall of Ivory Tower, the riot of Images, and the crude entrance of the "world" into his Bohemia, had upset his neatly arranged traditions. His poems show how uncomfortable existence had become in the finest drawing-rooms and studios. The general disaster in Europe overwhelmed his imagination. His early poetry, indeed all that he wrote up to *Ash Wednesday*, was affected by the "misere psychologique" of the period; his death-haunted imagination saw human beings as bones, the contemporary scene as a Wasteland, a rocky barrenness, and nothing but a miracle, a sudden shower from above could save humanity. An oppressive consciousness of the Past, a cosmopolitan awareness of the Present and always a fretting with Time, with problems of will, and the futility of mere existence and death, are to be found in his poetry.

The *Hugh Mauberley* and the Canto experiments of Pound, with their historical sense, fluent quotations and

speech-rhythms, as Mr Eliot himself has acknowledged, played an important role in Eliot's poetry he also borrowed, being a cultured American, from various literatures of Europe, chiefly French. But Mr Eliot followed warily in the footsteps of his colleague While Pound was filling his verses with Continental luggage labels, Eliot was developing a more careful allusiveness, in his *Wasteland* the Imagist mixtures (if Pound's *Cantos* can be called a development of the Imagist "association") are used as cementing material to hold together large chunks of Symbolist imagery and Metaphysical preoccupation. The Symbolist element in Mr. Eliot's poetry has been admirably dealt with by Mr Edmund Wilson in his *Axel's Castle*, the deliberate patch-work composition, with all its references to pre-historic rites, burial customs, Tarot pack of cards, etc, and its whimsical literary references, has also been more than exhaustively analysed by Mr. Eliot's admirers. His concern with Will, purpose and his thoughts on Time and the ultimate salvation, however, can only be dealt with here as the pivot on which Mr. Eliot's productions turn

"Historicity," a quality held up for admiration in Mr. Eliot's prose, has in his poems little significance Human Time in Mr. Eliot's poetry means merely a continuity where only shadows move and the Will never acts; in Eternal Time which is apparently quite different from ours, and can only come when death-in-life (or life-in-death) is done away with, freedom may be won from this coil of futility. Man's consciousness in this world of Time struggles vainly; the barriers within and without are too great, there is a central paralysis in human existence. Unending hesitation is therefore the burden of his moder-

nist song; in his *Prufrock* the hero's terrible problem is how to do even the simplest thing, to speak the simplest word, to force any moment to its crisis. Prufrock's Time is eternal indecision, and he worries about it all the time, chiefly at tea-parties and during light conversations:

"Time for you and time for me,  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of a toast and tea."

again, when wavering between several irresolutions, he asks himself

"Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,  
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?"

But he cannot formulate himself, for, as he points out,

"When I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,  
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,  
Then how should I begin  
And how should I presume?"

He can only "measure out life with coffee spoons," wait till he grows old, and "wear (his) trousers rolled," stop eating a peach, perhaps, walk on the beach, and do such other things—till, having seen mermaids singing each to each, he hears voices, and is drowned. Salvation in Mr. Eliot's poetry, whether coming as drowning, as rain, as a world ending with a bang, a knock on the door or the sudden self-giving of a martyr, or resignation of officials, invariably results in the total disappearance of the whole process of humanity.

In *The Portrait of a Lady* the hero appears to be in a similar plight; his Time is composed of moments of vanishing self-possession.

“ My self-possession flares up for a second,”  
again,

“ My self-possession gutters we are really in the dark ”  
says the hero. So when placed in front of a tea table,  
he can only try to maintain an amiable futility,

“ I smile, of course,  
And go on drinking tea . . . .”

(“ the smile falls heavily among the brick-a-brack ”), he  
does not really exactly smile, but as he points out.

“ I feel like one who smiles, and turning shall remark  
Suddenly, his expression in a glass.”

So he reads the sporting page, glances at the exciting  
social items, keeps his countenance; the lady in whose  
room he is taking his tea and to whom he seems to have  
had half a mind to propose, is in an identical state of  
indecision. They decide to leave everything undecided,  
they turn to Fate, and rather think that they will write,  
at any rate. He ends by thinking of another smile—this  
time in connection with the thought of the lady’s death,  
some afternoon;

“ Well and what if she should die some afternoon,  
Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand  
Doubtful for a while  
Not knowing what to feel . . . .”

he continues ·

“ Now that we talk of dying—and should I have the  
right to smile?”

The accumulation of such material begets a peculiar kind of pathos. The torments of a drifting consciousness become pathological. The paralysis of Will in a social vacuum is painted with realism, human beings in his *Unreal City* are placed in the same category as streets and lamps and the phenomena of Nature—lifeless but somehow conscious, or about to become conscious. House-maids described as “damp souls sprouting at area gates” are not very different from “the morning” which “comes to consciousness,” or

“The conscience of a blackened street  
Impatient to assume the world      ”

(*Preludes*)

—the whole of it is part of the blind Unconscious, the *It* of Hardy “living and partly living,” moving but meaningless. Events are merely

“The                    masquerades  
That time resumes”

(*Preludes*)

In the *Gerontion*, his major poem before *The Wasteland*, is shown the wasteland of the human brain; it is the dry, rocky, half-dead, waiting, remembering, waiting consciousness locked up in the brain of a symbolic old man; a memory without meaning

“Here I am, an old man, in a dry month  
. . . waiting for rain.”

It is consciousness seen as a huge web woven by Time, a mere accretion. History is seen as an immense Past, whose meaning is not known. History

“ Gives when our attention is distracted  
 And what she gives, gives with such supple  
 confusions  
 That the giving famishes the craving,”

or History

“ Gives too late  
 What's not believed in, or if still believed,  
 In memory only, reconsidered passion,”

—that is to say, nothing emerges or develops from the process of History; only memories are interwoven, passions engendered as before. Sometimes the Past seems to give something, but the hands which would receive it are weak, so that for want of an active consciousness the legacy of Time is again lost. The fate of mere consciousness is that, like Gerontion, it can only die unconcluded

“ We have not reached conclusion, when I  
 Stiffen in a rented house ”

These are all “ thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season ” on which the rain has not fallen, the Will has not germinated. This utter Will-lessness, this Time-conscious continuity on Earth is shown as an *Egdon Heath* of humanity. Hardy gave a dim stir of life to his Heath, the wasteland of human society shows no more. In *The Hollow Men* also there is the same picture of diseased Will—

“ Paralysed force, gesture without motion ”

(*Hollow Men*).

It is a sightless world, with shadows interposing between thinking and action, emotion and response, the existence and the essence, etc. The only hope is that this whole affair should end, perhaps “ not with a bang but a

whimper"—there may be final sorrow—but nothing short of extinction of this life can restore sight to the blind humanity.

“ Sightless, unless  
 The eyes re-appear  
 As a perpetual star  
 Multi-fohate rose  
 Of death's twilight kingdom  
 The hope only  
 Of empty men.”

The shadow, however, is the only real thing in the sightless life of the Hollow Men,—it is the assertion of the existence of some other kingdom. Since the Shadow does intervene between the idea and the reality, there is a promise that the final intervention and redemption will not be long in coming

*The Wasteland*, as Eliot's own notes tell us, is a picture as seen through the eyes of the blind Tiresias—a composite of man-and-woman. Tiresias, like Gerontion, is merely a flickering consciousness which dimly reveals Past and Present as a continuous twilight. Not only is the present humanity (in other poems, composed of Sweeney, Mr. Appolinax, Grishkin, Doris, Burbank, the Hollow Men and the Empty Men, etc.) shown up as a handful of dust, or a mound of bones, or a procession of shadows, but all humanity of the Past and Present in one country and in another, are, to use Mr. Eliot's favourite metaphor, scraps of paper blown about by blind gusts of Fate. Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, London, all are unreal, all is barren rock. Whether walking in a foreign garden or in London streets, on bridges or desert tracks, or floating down on boats; whether automatically happy or functionally sad, men and women are merely shadows on the screen.

In other poems the women who come and go talking of Michael Angelo, or "lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows," are mere dust; "dust of dust" *The Wasteland* is a composite picture of all those other poems (and dust) put together, here, in some parts, the power with which the "burning," rocky desolation is painted, helps the mind to conceive a vast blind continuity in which things happen and never really are. In Hardy's *The Dynasts* the dark destiny of blind automata is shown in titanic conflict; here there is a sullen stupor, instead of the Napoleonic wars and senseless slaughter there is a succession of automatic pictures of humanity equally helpless, will-less, decaying and destructive. The Tyrant of war sits in the citadel of the brain.

But out of this the Will has to be born. Till the mercy comes, the thunder clashes and the rain descends, there can only be waiting and a perpetuity of nothingness. At last the terrible "burning" ends; there is a promise of deliverance, a question is asked "Shall I at last set my lands in order?" But mere consciousness of purpose, of the need of liberation is not enough;

"We think of the key, each in his own prison  
Thinking of the key."

The function of the higher will begins with *giving, sympathizing, controlling.* How these higher powers can be released, humanity being as vile and futile as it is in this *Wasteland*, is not explained, evidently with the falling of the rain there will be a sudden transformation. Then, to change the metaphor, as Mr. Eliot does, life will move into the sea, and with the use of the Will a new voyage will begin:

“ The boat responded

Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar . . .”  
this is possible only because of life

“ Being obedient  
To controlling hands ”

The new dynasty has therefore just begun in the *Wasteland*, but as Mr. Forster has pointed out, almost too late Hardy shows the *process* and evokes feeling, suffering for him is a sign of developing consciousness, and out of the reactions of Reason, Pity, and the analytical consciousness of Irony, a co-ordination may be possible whereby humanity will extend its dominion over the unconscious—that is the final hope of Compassion. Eliot has expressed his belief more definitely in the release of the human will, to be made possible only by some external act of miracle. As soon as the miracle arrives, however, the necessity for the exertion of the will on earth disappears, everything is dissolved into nothingness.

In the meanwhile the best that man can do is to be patient; he will feel

“ The anguish of the marrow  
The ague of the skeleton ”

he will suffer because of *Original Sin*. And he will be irresolute, he will wait. His *Animula* is

“ Irresolute and selfish . . .  
Unable to fare forward or retreat . . .  
Shadow of its own shadows, spectre in its  
own gloom . . . .”

The ladies and gentlemen in *Sweeney Agonistes* prologued their ghostly mirth, not knowing whether they are

dead or alive, waiting for the knock on the door. In the *Wasteland*, too, are the multitudes

“ Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for the knock  
upon the door ”

In *Ash Wednesday* the bones talk to each other—presumably after death—and acknowledge that

“ We did little good to each other.”

but they also ~~wait for the~~ wait for the ~~divine~~ divine ~~benediction~~—to melt away. They wait for the “ word ”—“ but speak the word only ”: till then there is endless waiting, and the prayer is,

“ Teach us to care and not to care  
Teach us to sit still.”

In *A Song for Simeon* there is a promise of

“ The certain hour of maternal sorrow ”

when a new birth will take place for humanity; till then

“ I am tired with my own life and the lives of  
those after me,

I am dying in my own death and the deaths of  
those after me.”

Simeon only wants to depart, having seen the salvation of a Birth. The same idea appears in *Journey of the Magi*; there is the reality of a Birth but for the others life is a Death, and it can only be born by a more real Death. In *Marina* death appears in numerous forms. Those who live in violence, vain glory, false contentment, animal enjoyment, are all merely living a Death-life. In the

poem *Triumphal March* men and women march forward; somewhere, hidden in the figure of mystery, is the meaning of it all. All the others merely raise dust and the noise of traffic; they shout and babble and speak of "crumpets."

In *The Difficulties of a Statesman* all the statesmen, politicians, committee workers, etc., are asked to

"Resign Resign Resign."

In *Ash Wednesday* the attitude of submission is developed, there is haunting poetry in it, and the usual variations on the idea of Time, but it is to prayer for termination that the poem turns. When it is realised that

"these wings are no longer wings to fly  
But merely vans to beat the air  
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry  
Smaller and dryer than the will"

there is a prayer to the Virgin

"Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our  
death

Pray for us now and at the hour of our death . . ."  
There is an appeal that life, whether contented or not,  
should terminate:

"Terminate torment  
Of love unsatisfied  
The greater torment  
Of love satisfied  
End of the endless  
Journey to no end  
Conclusion of all that  
Is inconclusive . . ."

The bones lying "in the time of tension between dying and birth" ask that they may bear it all

"Even among these rocks."

The poem ends with the idea of Divine *Will*

"Our peace in His will."

Belief in the use of the human Will, in some meaning in suffering which may help men here below, is expressed clearly rather late in Mr. Eliot's writings. To the working multitude the saviour, the Rock advocates the need of fashioning their will.

"Make perfect your will," says the Rock,  
and again

"Let us therefore make perfect our will.  
O God help us."

In *The Rock* there is also for the first time a definite expression of belief in some form of life after the miracle has happened.

"The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil"

is mentioned, and a resolute facing of this struggle is insisted upon. Not only so but the social consciousness, that is to say, the exercise of the Will for changing and bettering the condition of humanity, which is the dominant note in modernist poetry, has for the first time shown its existence in Eliot's verse:

"What life have you if you have not life together?  
There is no life that is not in community"

There is also the promise of

" Work together  
 A Church for all  
 And a job for each  
 Every man to his work "

Having brought Mr. Eliot's poetry to this point of the use of the Will, it would not be inappropriate now to examine the poetry of his contemporaries. In their poetry, it will be seen, almost the whole of the emphasis is placed on the activity of the Will; it may be said that their work has begun *after* the rain has fallen on the Wasteland, "the knock sounded on the door, the miracle happened . . . . They are beginning on a new territory which, in spite of all its diseases, disasters, wrongness and the pressure of false traditions, at least sees a clear reason for using the Will, for bringing the new Dynasts into being.

In the *Murder in the Cathedral*, in which very definitely the actors are not ghosts and the land is not a Wasteland, the development of Mr. Eliot's conception of History, of Time and of Will, at last found a lucid expression; but that leads us to a later chapter in his story.

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**THE EARLIER PHASE OF MODERNIST VERSE.**

When poetry tries at every step to connect rather than isolate aspects of experience, it must suffer from its suggestibility. Life's logic being full of contradictions and unknown factors, the attempt to make emotion depend upon a rational analysis, when carried too far, would lead the poet into a maze. The reader may well feel that not only has the key been hidden from him but that the poet himself has lost it. The "Metaphysicals" appeared incomprehensible for this reason, though compared to the moderns they were naïf poets, guided more by their feelings than by theory.

Dr. Johnson when denouncing Cowley, and the others whom he included in his label did not recognise that there might have been a creative effort behind the apparent unbalance; that metaphors drawn from "twin compasses" (Donne) or "multiplying glasses" (Cowley), sublilities interlocked with Physicians' and Cosmographer's art (Donne), bold assertions about "the amorousness of the harmonious soule" (Donne) could proceed from a genuine perception of unity, a desire to show the hidden relationship of things in terms of new knowledge. Lovelace, a very sane poet, could not help speaking of "Skilful Minerallists" when singing a love-song, Crashaw used Horoscopes and "Chrystal flesh," and employed chemical analogies to describe the higher ecstasies. These poets were, evidently, led by a pragmatic impulse. intellectual knowledge had to be made significant by an active co-operation of the mind and feelings, the material and the moral had to be shown in closer interconnection. To-day this is being done with a more scientific deliberateness; new hypotheses of physics and psychology are being used by the moderns in their scientific medievalism: the old "correspondence" idea is being expressed in text-book terms.

Johnson, however, as a critic-patriarch was justified in warning his contemporaries against the virtuosity of their predecessors: the effect of excessive deliberation on poetry, he knew, could not be beneficial.

Keats, as usual, was sound in his criticism about the "tapestry empyrean"; he knew that it could be woven best when the artist chose a vivid experience and invested it with the magic of poetry. But the problem for the young poet to-day, it must be admitted, is complicated. The modern age presses upon our lives a multitude of unharmonised elements; a daily paper is a bedlam of unrelated pictures, the interactions of events, in all fields of modern activity, in finance, economics, politics defy our powers of unravelling. The modern mind is haunted by the interdependence of things, emotions evoked by the fragmentary experiences of city-life move in a whirl, and the creative imagination, excepting in a finely balanced personality, soon gets tired; the criterion of inward truth is obscured by the crowded complexity of facts.

The Metaphysicals could take shelter in a few fundamental assumptions, when the experiences of life seemed chaotic they tried to find a "logical reason," but essentially they were at peace with themselves and could rest in reserved areas of belief into which the dissecting mind was not admitted. The modern poet has hardly any reserved areas, though he is trying to create some with the barbed wire of psychological jargon, or of economic doctrine. Life is being psycho-analysed in verse, and consciousness tortured to yield new materials. Modernist poetry, however, proves that as yet no safe anchorages have been found, and both the struggle for new forms of expression, and the character of the literary materials assembled show that the

effort to introduce the novel associations and links which lie below consciousness has yet to find its literary justification. The foundation of belief cannot be established by method and law, or by the analysis of interconnections. In short, something more than a pursuit of the *process* is called for.

Like the Metaphysicals, the moderns began by sacrificing clarity for the sake of chromatic effect. The sonnet-form, which demands a unity of mood, and a corresponding structural sense, has therefore fallen into disuse, just as it did in the period of the Metaphysicals. Excepting for a few poems in which the clarity of artistic purpose has not been ignored, few post-war poems of the immediate phase can be remembered as individual works of art. Most of the earlier poems of Day Lewis, Spender and Auden seem to run into each other and form a chain of verses, revealing hardly any sense of form, even though so much was made in those days of the objective reality of "expression." Even when the subject of the poem can be expected to impose a certain logical structure, as in the poem *A Time To Dance* by Day Lewis—his two brave pilot friends had a definite ground (or rather air-area) to cover. Beginning, and continuing for a time on a fairly high level of poetic journalism, essential to narrative poetry, Day Lewis allows his poetic idea to dissolve into thin air, leaving a feeble smoke-trail in the mind. Often, again, his poem sags, is choked by assortments of thought, as with weeds, and in trying to offer opinions on various problems of the day it reaches nowhere. His *Feathers to Iron* written in immaturity shows greater incoherence because of its mix-up of machine, terminus, child-birth, revolution and what-not; though the meandering, semi-narrative nature of that long poem permitted a cycle of paragraphic structures. The

*Magnetic Mountain* shares this quality, but it is a more fully developed poem, passages can be isolated from it, and remembered. But both Auden and Day Lewis would in their early phase rather swim than walk on the land; their poems offer the kind of aquatic continuity for which one has to go back to the excesses of the Metaphysicals.

Mr. Auden's earlier poems run into charades, they often demand from the reader the ingenuity of a crossword puzzle expert, used to the ready handling of reference books, notes and current controversies. The *Orators* is meant to be half nightmare and half psychology, and succeeds in being so. *Paid on Both Sides* was his earliest attempt and its fun appears through a mist. The *Dance of Death* is clearer, but the ideas lack sufficient body, though a large number of characters do a number of needless things. Auden's human interest was, however, from the very beginning real, and the psychological hypotheses to which he is addicted, have had often to yield to the challenge of his vivid reactions to life, and this impulse, allied to a dramatic sense, has rightly led him to the poetic drama. With an audience in front of his mind, and the requirements of a successful stage performance, he soon began producing plays which, more than his psychopolitico-metaphysical *Dog and/or Man*, not only came out of their unreal skin, but impressed us with their reality.

Free verse, in these days, has been widely exploited for lyrical as well as dramatic poetry. But only a conscientious craftsman can justify its use; the Imagists far too often employed it to match the diffuseness of subject matter. Mr. Eliot learning from their experience has achieved fine effects in this medium. The later Yeats,

claimed by moderns to be a modernist edition of himself, never set one foot forward in its forbidden area.

There has been much discussion about the heredity of Free Verse; that it is neither the spontaneous creation of this Age, nor the invention of Whitman, is acknowledged. *Samson Agonistes* and *The Strayed Reveller* occur to the mind. The Imagists betrayed their usual confusion when, after referring to Arnold's *Philomela* and Henley's *London Voluntaries*, they went on to say that Free Verse derives also from Dryden's *Threnodia Augustalis*, and Chaucer's *House of Fame*. Browning's and Gerard Hopkins' speech rhythms have added to its vigour; the effect of Owen's internal rhymes is discernible. Osbert Burdett dates *Vers Libre* in English to Henley's poem "A Late Lark Twitters in the Quiet Shies." Free Verse has indeed come to stay, within strict limits. It is interesting to which its transformation into Choruses in some parts of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Auden's *Dog Beneath the Skin*. The pressure of the "multiple-correspondence" mind has often tortured it out of shape, and it has ended in being used for unending prerorations, and since it is clearly unsuited for many kinds of poetry, and can never replace blank-verse, the rhymed lyric, or sonnet, it remains, to-day, mainly as an evidence of the daring explorations of the modern craftsman rather than of major creative achievement.

While the genesis of Free Verse is a subject of much controversy; its limits and basis also lie undefined. Robert Bridges in his article on Free Verse had no difficulty in showing that freedom in verse cannot mean the absence of restrictions but the acceptance of "some positive quality. . . by which it will be distinguishable from prose." The border-

line between poetry and prose cannot be drawn as in a map, and yet there is a very real difference,—Bridges speaks of certain fundamental characteristics of verse, such as regular “expectancy” of rhythm and so on. Flint’s theory of cadences is too indefinite, but then, in spite of his technical training and close acquaintance with French poetry (which, on the whole, is formal and traditional in spite of the emergence of *Vers Libre* and much impulsive experimentation) he could commit himself to vague statements like this —“wherever you feel the warmth of human experience and imagination in any writing, there is poetry, whether it is in the form we call prose, or in rhyme and metre, or in the unrhymed cadence” . . .

Osbert Burdett quotes the above in his “*Critical Essays*” and pertinently asks—surely there is a difference between Shelley in letters and Shelley in poems? The question of content is important, but as Burdett points out, though metre and rhyme may not be enough, the quality of the content either cannot justify describing prose as poetry.”

In *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (by Laura Riding and Robert Graves) the authors remark, “the recent *verse Libre* movement, . . . tried to Coue poetry back to health by depriving it of its crutches”—this reflection on the negative side of the Free Verse movement justified. It is true that often dead poetry is bolstered up by rhyme and metre, etc., but the absence of those devices plus emotional fervor will not make good verse, whether free or fettered. Technical analysis of Free Verse would prove that successful experiments are based not on denial of the laws of verse-making but on variations of the principles on which it is based.

**STEPHEN SPENDER**

(The Earlier Phase )

The main characteristic, perhaps, of Spender's poetry is a feeling for Time; a subtle inter-play of memory and present experience can be found in some of his successful poems. The historical sense is often mixed up with vague perceptions of some previous existence, sometimes it appears as a continuity, sometimes links are lost and elements of the past seem to him to contradict each other and lack coherence; but he has not, like Day Lewis, an antagonism with tradition as such, though some of his theories and beliefs lead him to defy what he considers to be wrong traditions. When his poems lapse into obvious propaganda, his conception of the future is made merely to serve a political programme, but in what can be considered to be his truer vein, he gropes for an ideal continuity which may preserve and develop the best elements of civilisation.

Spender's pre-occupation with Time makes him approach the mystery of the past, which geology cannot fathom nor the historical mind fully analyse,

“ The history of man traced purely from dust  
Lives risen for a moment, joined or separate,  
Fall heavily, then are always separate,  
A stratum unreckoned by geologists,  
Sod lifted, turned, slapped back again with  
spade.”

The inscrutable Sphinx-like Past hiding the meaning of its sufferings and wrongs and its message for the Present, baffles him:

" I suffer like history in Dark Ages, where  
 Truth lies in dungeons, from which drifts no  
 whisper;  
 We hear of towers long broken off from sight  
 And tortures and war, in dark and smoky rumour  
 But on men's buried lives there falls no light" . .

Sometimes, as in the poem on " The Prisoners," the continuity of a wrong system appears to him as a chain which binds helpless human beings from one age to another.

" Their Time is almost Death. The silted flow  
 Of years on years  
 Is marked by dawns  
 As faint as cracks on mud-flats of despair."

In man's inner life immemorial Time shows itself in motions, only to be merged into the dark when the moments of illumination vanish.

". . . love  
 Is soaked in memory and says  
 I have seen what I see, and I wear  
 All pasts and futures like a doomed, domed sky—  
 At night my life lies with no past nor future  
 But only Space,"

external life, environment and the usual activities reveal pattern; but the hidden perspective of social existence is own to eyes opened by love.

" Behind centuries, behind the continual hill,  
 The wood you felled, your clothes, the slums  
 you built,  
 Only love knows where that bird dips his head,  
 Only the sun, soaked in memory, flashes on his  
 neck."

The bird referred to is the bird of Joy, a simple delight in existence; and this bird, according to the poet, is clipped and bound in our days.

Spender's consciousness of the past, though it cannot forget the hidden wrongs, does not deny value to those innumerable individuals who through their sacrifice, their efforts and their work, have created man's civilisation. He remembers

“ The names of those who in their lives fought  
for life  
Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre  
Born of the sun they travelled a short while  
towards the sun,  
And left the vivid air signed with their honour. ’

There is in his poems an endeavour to go back to those perennial sources of the spirit, to some “ageless spring” of being, in which the delight of the soul is not at war but in essential harmony with the life of the body. In the poem referred to above he speaks of

“ . . . the soul's history  
Through the corridors of light where the hours  
are suns  
Endless and singing . . . ”

and continues,

“ What is precious is never to forget  
The essential delight of the blood drawn from  
ageless springs,  
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother  
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit.”

With this conception of time, following Hardy, he blends his idea of the growth of Will. In the symbolist poetry,

preceding Hardy's *The Dynasts*, references were frequently made to a sense of Time and history, but the modern link-up with the evolution of consciousness was absent. In Spender's poetry the effort to relate the Unconscious of Time with the Conscious of human Will often appears in terms of social responsibilities. When he extends his sense of time and takes "a quick perspective of the future" he paints a symbolic "pylon," which appears

" Tall with prophecy.  
 Dreaming of cities  
 Where often clouds shall lean their  
 swan-white neck "

But his city, unlike the ideal vision evoked by O'Shaughnessy in the lines:

" With wonderful deathless ditties  
 We build up the world's great cities "—

refers to a city with a better sanitation, a changed economic system and completely lacking in slums. Spender tries, however, to maintain a balance between his advocacy of the concrete goods of life and the values of fundamental humanity, without which any conception of material Utopias must appear empty and void of content. In his *Vienna*, as will be seen later on, he has failed to achieve this balance, but some of his poems show a sensitiveness for his fellow-beings which transcends mere denunciation of wrongs and achieves a better harmony between poetry and propaganda.

Faced with sufferings he cries out—

" There is no consolation, no, none  
 In the curving beauty of that line  
 Traced on our graphs through history, where  
 the oppressor  
 Starves and deprives the poor . . . ."

He knows that there can be another kind of time, a blind perpetuity of events which aimlessly drags people along. Out of a mere series of events nothing emerges ; it is like the futile old war of the dynasts which Hardy depicted. Any appeal to an instinctive tradition, or gilding it by imagination is a betrayal of truth. People soon forget the lessons of the past, and evils remain unrectified.

“ Let the wrong cry out as raw as wounds  
 This Time forgets and never heals, far less  
 transcends. .”

The historical sense which accepts facts without challenging them is not, therefore, according to the poet, a dependable guide.

To those “ Who build a new world in their heart ” the challenge of Time is drastic. The creative worker must not identify success with the possibility of his own personal achievements or with the desire of his being remembered.

The problem of the after life is a thing apart. In life as known here below there is no continuity for us on earth, but our work will go on without us, even though the future lies unrevealed to our imagination.

“ Tomorrow Time’s progress will forget us even  
 here,  
 When our bodies are rejected like the beetle’s  
 shard,—  
 Time’s ambition, huge as space, will hang its  
 flags  
 In distant worlds, and in years on this world  
 as distant.”

In one of his great poems Spender brings this argument to its conclusion; the sense of history and the significance of the world process brings him to enunciate the principle of creative action. We have not only to watch, like the Spirit of the Years, the panorama of events as it appears in life. The whole challenge for us is that our better nature, our humanity is *engaged* in the process. Spender speaks of this challenge—

“ *To will this time's change. . .*”.

He invokes

“ . . . The polished will  
Flag of our purpose which the wind engraves.”

In his “New Year” poem he refers to this directive consciousness as “*tempered will*” and indicates that as man develops his initiative,

“ Our tempered will shall plough across the nations.”

Even though, in his lesser vein, Mr. Spender has sometimes tended to accept panaceas of progress, and indulged in slogans, his poetry is concerned with the problem of the inner will, and in advocating the objectives, he says,

“ Our goal which we compel. Man shall be man.”

He puts his final compulsion not on any external movement or on “the mass” but on the inward truth of the individual:

“ For I had expected always  
Some brightness to hold in trust,  
Some final innocence  
To save from dust.”



**C. DAY LEWIS.**

In Mr. Day Lewis' poetry the contrast between the Past and the Present is depicted in a series of black and white antitheses; the sense of tradition, as it were, is incompatible with the creative life. Mr. Day Lewis is "behaviouristic"; he is more concerned with the description of conduct, programme, manifestos and "facts" of the Promised Land than with the problems of the mind, or with the difficulties of inner adjustment. His rhetorical gifts are employed to castigate social evils; he is, like his fellow-poets, often unjust, but, he has a nimble wit and polished phrasing which give an artistic point to a series of invocations to action. His poetry at its best has a touch of the 18th century wit, but he uses new economic and psychological phraseology and has a thoroughly modern outlook. There is a preciseness and clarity in his poetry which his contemporaries often lack.

His poems teem with attacks, hardly any aspect of the society of the Past or Present escapes his pointed arrows. In the "*Transitional Poem*" he attacks the Past without indulging in analysis or discrimination. Sections 8, 10 or 11 of that poem could be taken at random for illustrating his intolerance of links with the "ancestral curse"—a phrase meant to cover almost all that has gone before:

" I am no English lawn  
To build a smooth tradition  
Out of Time's recession  
And centuries of dew . . . "

In another poem he lightly mentions,

" Since the heroes lie  
Entombed with the recipe  
Of epic in their hearts "

there is no necessity to bother about those that have gone before.

In a reaction against the spurious traditions which may block the path of new initiatives, Mr. Day Lewis uncomfortably rejects the legacy of history. It is important to note, however, his persistent concern with the past.

In a similar manner, being himself prone, as all his metaphors and imageries show, to face the need of maintaining a unity of experience, he boldly takes up a defiant position:—

“ I am content experience should  
More discontinuous than the points pricked  
Out by the mazy course of a derelict,  
Iceberg, or Flying Dutchman . . . ”

There is a disarming 'freshness in such frank acceptance of contradictions, in a disinclination to achieve a harmony of thought. One comes to his verses with relief after the multiple correspondences in Auden's poetry; not to speak of the involved compositions of Mr. Empson. He welcomes "thought's chameleon" and knows that in human beings, more usually than not

“ Single mind copes with split intelligence,  
Breeding a piebald strain of truth and nonsense.”

In section 14 of the same book he points out with reason:—

“ In heaven, I suppose lie down together  
Agonised Pilate and the boa-constrictor  
That swallows anything: but we must seize  
One horn or the other of antitheses.”

His very lines, however, show the peculiar complexity of the modern imagination; and he does not fail to confess

that . . . . " An eccentric hour may come . . . ." when the deeper mind may start a disturbing necessity to connect and to find out a reason:

" At once that rhythm arrests the blood,  
Who would be satisfied his mind is no  
Continent but an archipelago?"

He, therefore, has to admit that he envies those who

". . . can integratē  
A million selves, and where disorder ruled  
Straddle a chaos and beget a world . . ."

Social progress, in Mr. Day Lewis' poetry, involves not only a choice between two irreconcilable forces but the necessity to fight the other one out of existence. He uses the language of warfare and would have a violent end for the rival, in a clear-cut contest of adversaries. Those who may try to find out connecting links, a middle path, and therefore, believe in inner adjustment not necessarily involving outside compromise, are categorically ruled out of his verse. The two worlds of right and wrong are sharp and complete—

" Who . . . dreams of contact with the two worlds  
Earthquake will wake, a chasm at his feet  
Crack of doom overhead.  
What deeds can survive, what stone can  
Shoulder the shock of a new world "

He is himself torn by this conflict of opposites,

" Living here,  
As one between two massive powers I live  
Whom neutrality cannot save nor occupation  
cheer."

He refers to the concrete panacea of class-war, to a blind conflict in which Hardy's Spirit of Pity seems to find no place,

“None such shall be left alive:  
The innocent wing is soon shot down,  
And private stars fade in the blood-red dawn  
Where the two worlds strive.”

By his acceptance of categories, he can quietly dismiss the fact of innocent individuals being destroyed because of “dialectical necessity.” Being engaged in war with himself

“In me two worlds are at war . . .”

—he thinks in terms of war and extermination about all those who are ideologically opposed to him. Not only does his poem threaten the innocent but offers “*A Warning to Those who Live on Mountains*”.—

“Beware, for a heavy  
Charge is laid against you, oh little longer  
Will the hand be withheld that hesitates at the  
wire's end  
And your time totters like a tenement condemned.”

It is when describing his new world that Mr. Day Lewis' verses flow with ease; his expression is more natural and individual;

“Move then with new desires,  
For where we used to build and love  
Is no man's land . . .”

Though the whole of the past and most of the present is summarily dismissed, a feeling of hope brings a deeper note into his poems. *The Magnetic Mountain* rises as a far-away vision—it is

"An untrodden territory . . .

Promises no coolness, invites but the brave."

Though somewhat involved in its imagery, the Magnetic Mountain is not made to appear as an external refuge, it has to be built out of our own action.

"You are the magnet and the steel," he says, and stretches the imagery further —

"O learn to feel

Away in darkness to good ore.

You are the magnet and the steel."

"Out of that dark a new world flowers.

There in the womb, in the rich veins

Are tools, dynamos, bridges, towers

Your tractors and your travelling-cranes."

"This is my land" he says elsewhere. "They overheard it Making a promise out of clay." He tells us of the future where "Beauty breaks ground" and points "To a new generation turns new faces."

In various ways, the inexorably necessary next stage of revolution is described, but as soon as he is assured that "this my land is possessed" a new graciousness informs his poem. He has then, after the new life has broken through, "a time to dance, a time to sing." There is a joyous lyricism in his description of this *time* to play, to sing and to love; we find it in the final section of his "symphonic poem." But even in this mature poem, he can degenerate into such lines as

"Revolution, revolution

Is the one correct solution

We've found it and we know it's bound to win."

He can, however, sing with his "ecstatic skylark," symbolic of the spirit which has won victory :

“ Be strong your fervent soaring, your skyward air!  
 Tremble there, a nerve of song!  
 Float up there where voice and wing are one,  
 A singing star, a note of light!”

In the *Transitional Poem* he has some fine stanzas on the lark “ who veins the sky with song ”; it is the symbol of his own striving for freedom. It can have peace only after “ the wings have earned the night,” that is to say, after the day’s work has been performed.

Since Mr. Day Lewis’ concern is for the future, one would expect that his poetry would not be without references to the problems of the Will. He touches the springs of action less often than other poets of his group, but like them his conception of beauty or of poetic truth is consciously related to utility and effort in some form or other. He is an enemy of “ passivity,” “ neutrality,” the “ contracting ” of the will in “ an indeterminate world.” In many ways he expresses his faith in action.

“ Love, love in action  
 Is best for me ”

he says. And again

“ For we are oft to act  
 Activity of young  
 And cut the ravelled string.”

He advocates “ the dance of action, the expert eyes,” and “ a cool head and safe hands.” Along with this activity of the Will, the conscious co-operation of individual Wills in a general advance of mankind, is insisted upon. Like Auden and Spender he mercilessly attacks the selfish person who even in working for reform does not think in terms of the general good. Reference has been made to his attack on the “ private stars,” sometimes he speaks of

individualistic fulfilment as "private dawn." *Transitional Poem*). Again in *Moving In*, "private good" is attacked and we are told of the "misery of isolation" (in *A Time to Dance*). How the inner transformation is to come is not clearly indicated, excepting that within the individual the harmony between personal and social ideals will be achieved by some kind of war—

"And in my body rebel cells  
Look forward to the fight."

Individualism, if allied with a social sense, is advocated as an ideal, for

"The full man must live  
Rooted yet unconfined"

When once the Promised Land is reached, not before, the poet is allowed to sing from the heights of his lonely vision. Then

"In happier times . . .  
. . . when the heart is whole . . .  
. . . . .  
Our voices may be tuned  
To solo flight, to record-breaking plane;  
Looking down from the hill  
We may follow with fresh felicities  
Wilful the light, the wayward motion of trees,  
In happier time . . ."

It is in the purely lyrical note of song, in describing flowers and mountains and clouds that Mr. Day Lewis attains his best poetry. This lyricism has often been subordinated to a rigid utilitarianism in verse, but his poems reveal every now and then a sensitiveness to beauty which may yet persuade him to be less severe with his real inspiration.

### W. H. AUDEN.

Mr. Auden could have taken as his motto the lines of Bridges in which he speaks of "mankind's crowded uncleanness of soul," for Mr. Auden has consistently applied himself to diagnose the "plague"—the plague of war and misery—which Bridges described. Auden's chief concern is to bring about a "sober return of health" to the individual and to the society.

In the final analysis it is the disease of the Will which Auden wants to cure and his method is, like Hardy, to find every means of exposing the "enemy," that is to say, the *It* or the collective Unconscious which Hardy made responsible for the havoc of war and suffering and for the blind drift of humanity which is uncontrolled by the higher consciousness. Mr. Auden, of course, is of the post-War new psychology era, but while he has had access to the science and thought of the modern age and shares its increased analytical abilities, he has been subjected to a deluge of tentative hypotheses and new experiments that neither he nor his contemporaries have yet been able to assess.

Such has been the pressure of the sense of multiple correspondences on Auden's mind, on his consciousness of the interactions between mind and body, between life and environment, the individual and the society or the reciprocities between states of disease and health, that he has practically been unable to take up any single problem or aspect of experience without running into others, and consequently, making his expression opaque. His imagination indeed has seldom been able to shine through, except in patches, in his earlier works. But there is hardly anything he has written in which his concern for the

activities of the Will cannot be seen, or his groping for co-ordination is unrevealed.

It is not necessary to analyse his *The Orators*, as its psychological diagnosis and remedies, its attempt to combine therewith an economic analysis, have been adequately discussed by Mr. Stephen Spender in the chapter on "The Airman, Politics and Psycho-analysis" in his book "*The Destructive Element*." *The Orators*—a mixture of poetry and prose—contains an elaborate clinical diagnosis of society, a Commission reports on various social ills of "this country of ours where nobody is well." Whole pages read like the contents of a doctor's case-book, specially perhaps of a homeopath. The symbolic Airman, the man with an active Will, flies over the scene of the conflict—conflict between man's purpose and the forces of disease or anti-social instincts—he intervenes, encourages, or participates guided by his unusual vision. The Airman plays the role of the *Spirit* in the *Dynasts* in giving a perspective of the human scene, but he also engages in the fight of the struggling consciousness against the tyranny of an invisible Napoleon. *The Destructive Element* or the Inconscient tool of *Nature*, appearing as a tyrant, is, however, very chaotically described; reference to the *Dynasts* is justified only because of the similarity of subject-matter.

In his "charade" *Paid on Both Sides* Auden is concerned with

" . . . the dark . . .

Shaded commemorations, midnight accidents "

of the mind. The queer mixture of meaningless action, violence and social decay is indicated and the doctor is called in to render first aid. Spies and enemies roam

about, but the higher personality is also invoked. It is not the doctor from outside but the man of Will, the conscious " Watcher " who has to save and show the way out:—

" O watcher in the dark, you wake  
 Our dream of waking, we feel  
 . . . . .  
 By your bright day  
 See clear what we were doing . . . .  
 Your sudden hand  
 Shall humble great  
 Pride, break it, wear down to stumps old systems  
     which await  
 The last transgression of the sea "

says the Chorus, indicating the lines on which Auden's Pilot hero would be developed later on.

These tentative efforts have found their most satisfactory expression in his drama *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, and, it would therefore, seem proper to deal with that book as Auden's most typical poetic creation. In his short play *The Dance of Death* there is nothing that has not been expressed in better form in his later work; the stress has been laid there on the idea of Death masquerading in many forms of life in society, to be finally discovered and " liquidated." The men and women of various kinds and descriptions, suffering from all manner of hidden neuroses and from a total suspension of individual Will or purpose, are asked to " come out into the sun."

An attempt will be made here to offer a running commentary on his book, *Poems*. Each poem will be taken separately, but as mentioned before, Auden's poems have a habit of running into each other, and this survey

will dwell rather on the connecting links and the general philosophy of selfconsciousness than on the variations. It is claimed that the structure of Auden's thoughts can be seen best in this manner, poems which have baffled analysis and been rejected as meaningless will be found to fit into the general Audenesque drama of the Will.

*Poem I*

The first poem in the volume begins on the clinical note: the spectacle of death being wheeled everywhere "in his invalid chair," it is contended, should arouse vigorous protest, and not be accepted with

" A neutralising peace  
And an average disgrace."

*Poem II*

Here begins the journey of the hero, Mr. Auden's poems are full of self-projections, the symbolic hero is the Adventurer, the Pilot, the Farer, the Airman; occasionally, as in the Fourth Ode at the end of *The Orators*, we have a saviour in the form of a character like John Warner. There is no knowing how and when Fate selects one man out of many to act as the leader—

" Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle.  
Upon what man it fall  
In spring, day-wishing flowers appearing . . ."

Nobody knows why;

" But ever that man goes  
. . . . .  
A strange to strangers over undried sea,  
. . . . .  
A bird stone-haunting, an unquiet bird."

There is a prayer for his protection:—

“ Save him from hostile capture,  
From sudden tiger's spring at corner ” etc.:

but the main danger from which he has to be protected is the weakness of Will, diffuseness of purpose,

“ From gradual ruin spreading like a stain.”

There is a hope that he will return with a definite promise—

“ Bring joy, bring day of his returning,  
Lucky with day approaching, with leaning dawn.”

*Poem III*

There is reference to

“ That sense of famine, central anguish felt  
For goodness wasted at peripheral fault.”

There is no turning back, warning is given about others who tried unsuccessfully to break out of the grooves of an old order—

“ Do not imagine you can abdicate  
Before you reach the frontier you are caught;”

*Poem IV*

The apparently happy rich man stepping into a car, envied by the poor, carries a concealed weakness within him, he too needs the remedy that

“ Would cancel the inertia of the buried;”

he has to walk

“ The longest way to the intrinsic peace.”

*Poem V*

This is a poem in the first person; in a “ new valley ” where things are uncertain, but a spirit of love is awake, though hidden;

“ I, crouching behind a sheep-pen, heard  
 Travel across a sudden bird,  
 Cry out against the storm . . . .”

there is, it seems a sudden assurance that some loving presence lies hidden—

“ You certainly remain,”

but the reassurance is fleeting. “ Your letter comes, speaking as you ”—but there is no definite call, no promise of home.

*Poem VI*

This poem begins in the Eliot tradition,

“ Between attention and attention  
 The first and last decision  
 Is mortal distraction . . . .”

(Compare—

“ Between the idea  
 And the reality  
 Between the motion  
 And the act  
 Falls the Shadow . . . .” etc.

(“*The Hollow Men*,” by T. S. Eliot.)

But whereas Eliot is thwarted theologically, here the baffling impediment is psychological. It is the frustration of the un<sup>u</sup>purposive, the vagueness of desires, and “ the personal error ” which are described.

There is an urge, the desire to proceed, but

“ These wishes get  
 No further than  
 The edges of the town,  
 And leaning asking from the car  
 Cannot tell us where we are;”

It is a graceless, divided existence; there is in this kind of life

“ No discretion, no occupation  
But registering  
Acreage, mileage,”—

—mere continuity.

*Poem VII*

Society is kind when we heep steps with others and observe “ the companionship of a game.” But any attempt to move out of line is unsafe,

“ Forward or back are menaces.”

In this poem is outlined the philosophy of an agreeable peace which can be preserved if only one could

“ On narrowness stand, for sunlight is  
Brightest only on surfaces.”

*Poem VIII*

One speaks and converses, “ throwing off reserve,” but there is no definite message, nor understanding.

“ The voice is nearer  
But no clearer  
Than first love  
Than boys' imaginations.”

There is feeling, and imagination here, but a lack of life's “ realism,” the hero is uncertain.

*Poem IX*

Indecision and question—

“ Here am I, here are you:  
But what does it mean? What are we going to do?”

The lovers find no direction in their lives. Direction is sought from the depths of consciousness. but the obscure " evolution-memory " rising to consciousness merely makes one feel that things have happened before, that life seems to have gone on repeating itself. This does not help. Not only so, the lovers feel that something is lost from their lives;

" A bird used to visit this shore:  
It isn't going to come any more."

The poem dives into the psychology of the subconscious mind.

*Poem X*

Love cannot be defined; as soon as one tries to fix it and feels sure of possessing it,

" Love is not there  
Love has moved to another chair."

This is a modernist way of expressing the " Passing of Love." It ends on a note of harsher realism; and tells how love often

" Designs his own unhappiness  
Foretells his own death and is faithless."

*Poem XI*

Scenes of contemporary life are introduced. The lonely adventurer standing on the wet road,

" Below him sees dismantled washing-floors  
Snatches of tramline running to the wood,  
And industry already comatose,  
Yet sparsely living . . . ."

The "*Stranger*" is asked to go back, as if the frustrations of life are too much for him. Apparently he is travelling in a car.—

"Beams from your car may cross a bedroom wall,  
They wake no sleeper: . . ."

His message would be lost in such a land, there is the wind "arriving driven from the ignorant sea," and there is danger.

*Poem XII*

Here is an analysis of mistakes, a description of failures. The only consolation for workers for a new cause is belief in sanity and good faith,

"As for ourselves there is left remaining  
Our honour at least,  
And a reasonable chance of retaining,  
Our faculties to the last"

*Poem XIII*

This is a poem on the senses and the normal life;

"Go through the motions of exploring the familiar;  
Stand on the brink of the warm white day."

*Poem XIV*

This is a curious "psychological" (subconscious?) portrait of the features of the face, as if eyes, nose, lips, etc., thwart and individually affect the life of the spirit. This poem is a mixture of nightmare, incoherent dream, and of the vague "primitive" sense of correspondences. Rupert Brooke's "*Thoughts on the Shape of the Human Body*" is a more successful experiment in this line; "No perfection grows," he says, "twixt leg, and arm, elbow, and ear, and

nose," but he relates this idea to a larger one, "how can We, being gods, win joy, or peace, meing man?")

*Poem XV*

He wants to enter "the new district," but how?

"Control of the passes was, he saw, the key  
To this new district, but who would get it?"

In this poem psychological associations are continued as if in a mesmeric trance.

*Poem XVI*

The mechanised life of the modern age is depicted in different ways; the "inertia," collective submission to a wrong order, the tortured self "moving along the track which is himself," death, riot, domestic scenes, sickness and sanatoria—with these are built up in this poem a series of pictures of town and village.

"Smoke rises from factory in field  
Memory of fire: on all sides heard  
Vanishing music of isolated lark  
From village square voices in hymn  
Men's voices . . ."

There is mention of the "strict beauty of locomotive" and of the public ground on which "lay fallen bicycles like huddled corpses." It is Easter; the poet-adventurer, the revolutionary, is out on the road—

"It was Easter as I walked in the public garden  
Hearing the frogs exhaling from the pond,  
Watching traffic of magnificent cloud  
Moving without anxiety on open sky—

the sorrows and sufferings, the helplessness and diseases of society make the poet decide that

“ It is time for the destruction of error;”

he speaks of the necessity of destroying the old order; there is a certain violence of expression, but it is counteracted by a note of anguish. In Auden revolution is never quite an external event; it is always charged with psychological motifs.

*Poem XVII*

A vision of the perfect beauty, which appears in eternity but baffles us in Time.

“ This lunar beauty  
Has no history  
Is complete and early;  
This like a dream  
Keeps other time.”

The poem is obscure and yet strangely evocative, there is a haunting atmosphere of feelings which seem to be on the edge of becoming real. The eternal time or timelessness of Art and of all profound experiences has here been cast into an exquisite lyrical mould.

*Poem XVIII*

This is a continuation of the sense of time which love brings, which seems to permeate family history and the daily transactions. The materials of such poems are not gathered from conscious experience; there is an attempt, however, to connect subconscious memories with a purposive urge, to draw some sort of affirmation from them.

*Poem XIX*

A short and rather inadequate poem; it tries to show how incalculable are the potentialities of any given person, so

that neither the school-record nor the family tradition can explain, even if fairy tales and superstitions may try to do so, what an individual may or may not do.

*Poem XX*

The modern society seen as a city:

“ . . . There's no peace in this assaulted city  
But speeches at the corners, hope for news,  
Outside the watchfires of a stronger army.”

There is also a desire to lift oneself up and recover detachment and power:—

“ This longing for assurance takes the form  
Of a hawk's vertical stooping from the sky.”

The hero-pilot-airman idea.

*Poem XXI*

“ The conquerors come,” the will-workers.

But they are not external, their emerging forces are dimly glimpsed through old tradition, memories, involved associations and fears. These newcomers bring

“ Unusual images  
And new tunes to old cottages;”

but they are faced with the traditions of the Past which often absorb them; the traditions which do not seem to move with the times but

“ Father by son  
Lives on and on  
Though over date  
And motto on the gate  
The lichen grows  
From year to year . . . ”

But in spite of the resistance of society the newcomers do succeed in bringing about a slight inner transformation.

“ And what was fear  
Of fever and bad-luck  
Is now a scare . . . ,”

that is to say, that which was taken as Fate is now being looked upon as something unnatural, as a menace which is not so much to be feared as resisted. Not only so,

“ . . . what was livelihood  
Is tallness, strongness . . . ”

—the mere struggle for existence has slowly changed into ideas of value, though, it is pointed out, there is much of “glory” and “story” in it that has to be replaced by activities of the Will.

*Poem XXII*

A picture of the seamy side of industrialism, of mechanised mass-life, of derelict areas, put in the light-satirical Locksley Hall metre.

“ Go there if you can and see the land you once  
were proud to own  
Tho' the roads have almost vanished and the  
expresses never run:  
Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting  
wharves and choked canals . . . ” etc.

the forced amusements, unreal relationships, misleading beliefs acquired from the past, and the banalities of an inconsequential social life are shown up; the great men, “the healers” of the earlier generation are dead . . . .  
The question comes,

“ Have things gone too far already? Are we done  
for? Must we wait  
Hearing doom’s approaching footsteps regular  
down miles of straight . . . .”

The poem ends by insisting on the necessity for action,  
and not merely

“ Lecturing on navigation while the ship is going  
down ”

The concluding couplet states the case,

“ If we really want to live, we’d better start at once  
to try;  
If we don’t, it doesn’t matter, but we’d better  
start to die ’

*Poem XXIII*

“ In the strange valley ” things begin to happen; there is  
at least a bonfire which, even if the heat it gives out is  
great, destroys some part of the unnecessary things of  
life.—

“ Bitter the blue smoke rises  
From garden bonfires lit  
. . . . .  
Good, if it’s thorough.”

*Poem XXIV*

Like the “ kestrels ” we find

“ The leader looking over  
Into the happy valley.”

He sees not only the

“ Orchard and curving river ”

but also

“ The slow fastidious line  
That disciplines the fell

—apparently the fight between the opposing forces of new initiative and the resisting wrongs has resulted, temporarily, in the victory of the former. There are references to those who have given their lives in the struggle; but

“ Bravery is now  
Not in the dying breath . . . ”

There is a warning to the victors that they must not be overcome by the applause and celebration with which their victory is greeted, but keep their decision firm and carry on.

*Poem XXV*

A call to the hero

“ Who will endure  
Heat of day and winter danger,  
. . . . .  
Nor be content to lie  
. . . . .  
Between the land and sea ’

All around him moves a succession of the futilities of modern life, yet nothing really happens,

“ Metals run  
Burnished or rusty in the sun  
From town to town  
And signals all along are down ;  
Yet nothing passes  
But envelopes between these places,  
Snatched at the gate and panting read indoors,  
And first spring flowers arriving smashed,  
Disaster stammered over wires,  
And pity flashed.”

—opportunities are wasted, emotions are aroused; there is no achievement.

The hero, seeing all this, has no words to say at the fireside ; in his mind also his own high hopes seem to appear

“ stranger and stranger . . . ”

Though the people are ignorant, great things are apparently in progress:

“ No one will ever know

For what conversion brilliant capital is waiting . . . ”

The forces of reaction are still strong, and the

“ Gartered gamekeeper with dog and gun  
Will shout ‘ Turn back ’ . ” ;

but apparently that is not the last word about it.

*Poem XXVI*

Old remembrances come, dreams of comfort and of beauty, history of old manors, of towers . . . . At the same time the “ Adversary ” is on his way . . . . There is a sadness in the thought that the new changes will disturb the tranquil beauty of village life and that a peace will be ushered in which at first will be a different kind of peace.

“ We see the farms lighted all along the valley ;  
Down at the mill-shed the hammering stops  
And men go home.

Noises at dawn will bring  
Freedom for some, but not this peace . . . . ”

There is, however, consolation in the present hour, the sight of beauty, even if it will not last:

“ . . . passing, but is sufficient now  
For something fulfilled this hour, loved or endured ”

*Poem XXVII*

This poem dives into the Subconscious, seeking for some clue to the mystery of existence, for some answer which will help "*the confused will.*" But the answers from the levels below the conscious mind, even when they come at all, do not easily connect with any purposive action. Such answers may rise up to the Conscious plane, but, as in bird, fish and sheep . . . the lessons of past memory are soon lost and the mere repetition of life with its directionless suffering goes on.

There is a wistful question here as to whether, by any process of the mind we can work our way back, man and bird and beast, to the source and meaning of existence. Can this consummation come through love?

" Can love remember  
The question and the answer,  
For love recover  
What has been dark and rich and warm all over?"

*Poem XXVIII*

The sound of "drums distant over difficult country" are heard with pleasure ; there is a hope that

" Events not actual  
In time's unlenient will "

may take shape. To bring about this change, the poet reminds "Sharers of our own day" that it is not enough merely to know and to calculate and analyse the state of industry and the chances of revolution. The real change will come with deliverance for the workers.

" From their minds' constant sniffing  
Their blood's dulled shuffling;"

there must come the high instinctive courage in a new form for those

“ Who sheer off from old like gull from granite.”

References are made here to the need of a revolution and of winning freedom from the bondage of blind purposelessness—the forces by which the Unconscious of Hardy holds us in bondage—but the dominant note is that of compassion. Though there is to be revolt and many will suffer, not having the initiative to escape from it,

“ Let each one share our pity ; hard to withhold  
and hard to bear.”

*Poem XXIX*

The distant view again is taken, the panorama of modern life is seen

“ As the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman.”

There is bitter satire of life in Sport Hotels, garden parties and so on, the areas of life

“ supplied with feelings by an efficient band ”

There is a dissertation on the perishable enemy forces, and a command to the creative worker to

“ . . . Summon

Those handsome and diseased youngsters . . . ”

who, in the usual manner of Auden's clinical analysis, used in all his writings, constitute the bulk of the modern population. There is a humorous warning to the conservative strongholds of society that things are soon going to make their old life impossible for them, Auden here indulges in his huge practical jokes about the manner in which panic will be created amongst the people.

The point to be noticed about Auden's "revolutions" is that they are good-humoured and though sometimes childish tricks are employed to bring off the new wonder, the whole power of his appeal derives from its emphasis on the changed will, on right conduct and the inner cure physical and mental, of "disease"—a term which for Auden is fairly comprehensive. He, like Spender and Day Lewis, is often unfair to many of the institutions, traditions and unassuming creative activities of his fellow-men that hold the foundation of society,—he would have lost nothing by painting the fairer side of modern life which is at least as real as the other side—but one feels that Auden is not moved by hatred and he seldom fails to touch some chords of sympathy. These three poets are poets of reaction; and reaction is not the normal condition. The response to the abiding truths of life, to the sane and noble elements appearing everywhere in all levels of society, has yet to be demonstrated in modernist poetry. But, as his recent writings have proved and some of these poems shown. Auden's psychological realism is itself a safeguard, it can never allow him to escape the realm of values.

*Poem XXX*

The last poem of this book develops the inwardness of change; there is an appeal to

" Send to us power and light, sovereign touch  
Curing the intolerable neural itch . . .";

the prayer continues:—

" Gradually correct the coward's stance"—  
and,

" Publish each healer that in city lives."

Mr. Spender has admirably described this propensity of Auden, in reviewing *The Orators* in "*The Destructive Element.*"

In *The Orators*, Auden says "Man is a spirit." The dead elements of the Past should be rejected. Man's creative will should express itself both in new forms and in feelings:—

"Harrow the house of the dead. look shining at  
New styles of architecture, a change of heart."

It is on this inner change that Auden insists.

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## RHYTHMIC VARIATIONS IN MODERN VERSE.

The dominant trend in artistic expression to-day is to bring the aesthetic ideal nearer to the crafts which attend upon our daily need of beauty. Vision and design had remained too far apart, so that the former had almost become the monopoly of visionaries, while designs, lacking the inspiration of art had mechanically submitted to the doctrine of necessary evil. Modern poetry, in trying to achieve the poetry of every-day words, and in giving to our living thoughts and experiences an ordered beauty of expression, had, therefore, to be consciously technical. Technical keenness, and a zest for new explorative forms have, of course, been always there in verse, as in other modes of creative representation. What we mean by modern technical awareness then is that it is the steady and scientifically illumined sense of the resources and *application* values of beauty, whether in sculptured stone or in a sequence of rhythmic speech—rather than dependence on impulse and on 'the magic hand of chance'—which sustains the new artist. This extra-artistic concern for apposite forms, with the weightage laid on the side of a formal elegance which mingles with current social behaviour while raising its democratic pitch, may betray a certain lack of emotional absorption. But behind the modern technique of beautiful utility there also lies an attempt to reveal complex and new ranges of feeling. Poets are intellectually alert in clearing new paths for the conveyance of experience and this work of path-breaking is largely connected with technical initiative and skill. Part of the work lies in the demolition of old and impeding thought-forms which no longer signify, of ideograms which

are metrically fixed and burdened with metaphors, and of rhythms grown stale with use. The more positive aspect of technical pioneering is seen in the skill with which new approximations are being made to every-day speech and to the complex life of to-day as revealed, in a varied sense, in the accents of a new civilisation.

When the rhythm of our social existence changes and circumstances press dramatically upon our lives, our mediums of expression also undergo new adaptations. Words and speech-patterns traditionally bequeathed can no longer serve to reveal the urgencies of an adventuring age. The essential experiences are the same, how can the themes of birth, death, love, beauty ever change in the human world?—but the colours and contours vary and the words seek new music to reveal the ancient meaning. Artists being naturally sensitive to fresh emotional and intellectual stresses of an age, are led instinctively to explore new possibilities of rhythmic enterprise. Words are recombined with the pigmentation of modern associations, while metrical surprises are offered to make us see into the reality of the unknown, to startle us into a sense of wonder and expectation. The technique of modern verse is, therefore, a reflection of the emotional and intellectual under-currents of our age, and while each poet reacts individually and creates his own technique, there is a certain general trend of form in modern verse which can be considered in relation to the entire epoch of poetry.

Modern verse-technique can be approached from different levels; we can examine the stylistic variations dealing mainly with changes in the *emphasis* of words which reflect the emphasis we now put on certain ideas and feelings. The effect of changed stresses inevitably

affects the accept of speech and, what is more, modifies the rhythms of verse, bringing new pauses and accelerations. Profound mutations take place, we know, in the language of poetry, and such mutations cannot be understood while we are involved in the immediate process of sudden changes. Roughly speaking, the war years of 1914-18 brought about more rapid and profound alterations in English verse-rhythms than many decades could have done in normal years. Feelings of dramatic intensity, of sudden and impending experience demanded frequent use of pauses, crucial pauses for which the sprung-rhythm of Hopkins had already provided a technical prototype. There is, of course, nothing new in a poet applying the vacuum brake in putting a whole train of thought to a full stop;—Milton managed to do it sometimes in the middle of blank verse which had seemed destined to reach no destination, rolling majestically for thousands of metrical miles without a thought of some mundance terminus. Shakespeare used rhythmic breaks and pauses in his sonnets to denote quick turns of thought. And yet there is immense and vital difference between those earlier uses and the sprung-rhythm as Hopkins used it. "Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!"—the poet forces us to stop everything and to follow the poetic command. "Look, look up" as put in the line corresponds to conversational speech which we had not dared to put so starkly into verse.

"How to keep—is there any any, is there none  
 such, nowhere known some, bow or broach  
 or braid or brace, lace latch or catch or key  
 to keep  
 Back beauty, keep it beauty, beauty, beauty,  
 . . . from vanishing away?"

The attempt to hold back beauty, which, Hopkins knew from the start was destined to fail, produces a clash of emotion and a mounting excitement of stresses conveyed through choppy yet effective rhythm. The relaxation too comes as dramatically; "vanishing away" being a melody of resignation achieved by sudden rhythmic release. The challenge by a sentry which forces us to stop even while we are pursuing our lawful occasions can be seen in John Donne's verse—"For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,"—but the poet takes time before giving us the permit to go our way. The older artists often detained us as a garrulous and, therefore, irresponsible sentry would, and wasted the force of eloquence; their argument would meander through many subsequent lines of verse. In Hopkins, who was a greater technical master, the crescendo of sprung-rhythm is more fully controlled, and we enter a new range of possibilities through his experimentations which were often extreme. The sprung-rhythm following upon changing speech-rhythms has been carried to subtler effects in post-war verse. Owen, in his "Strange Meeting" and in other war-time poems, used the speech-rhythm and more particularly the tonal effects of para-rhymes with great artistic poignance; the newer craftsmanship is founded on a wide range of metrical experience. Take Elot's recent poem *East Coker*.

"In my beginning is my end. Now the light falls  
Across the open fields, leaving the deep lane  
Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon,  
Where you lean against a bank while a van passes,  
And the deep lane insists on the direction  
Into the village, in the electric heat  
Hypnotised: In a warm haze the sultry light  
Is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone.

The dahlias sleep in the empty silence.  
Wait for the early owl."

The intricacy of stresses and pauses here is so subtle and natural as to pass unnoticed. Take those lines,

" . . . . . in the electric heat  
Hypnotised. In a warm haze the sultry light  
Is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone "

The order there is not the rhythmic order of poetical speech but the natural rise and fall, the cadenced involutions and stops and turns, of ordinary talk.

Here, I think, is the key to the technique of modern poetry. A determined and inflexible resolve to make poetry live the life of an ordinary day, to make it dwell on subjects of our normal emotive life, and then as a consequence, a similar resolve to make poetry talk in our own conversational language. The best effects, I think, can be found in Eliot's latest poetic drama. "*the Family Reunion*." Poetry, there, is almost an unperceived by-product of the subtle conversations of people in a drawing room—and yet the diction is pure verse though it is pure speech just as the subject is poetry because it is real life. Take almost any speech at random, and it will prove the rule. Harry, one of the main characters is talking to Warburton, a Doctor and a friend, about his mother, about many important events. And then, quite nonchalantly, he breaks in—

" I don't know why, but just this evening  
I feel an overwhelming need for explanation.  
But perhaps I only dream that I am talking  
And shall wake to find that I have been silent . . . ;

A most profound feeling has here been captured and passed on simply in the current of talk. This is the technique which is bringing about an entirely new relevance and power to modern verse. The technique of Free Verse, of the Choruses used in modern dramas as well as of the linguistic devices employed in lyrics has to be closely scrutinised in relation to this main trend of modern poetry towards speech rhythms. Auden's choruses in *The Ascent of F6* and the very remarkable conversational poetry of Macneice's *Autumn Journal* reveal, along with Eliot's chiselled verse, a totally unexpected richness in the resources of ordinary speech-rhythms. And yet this movement is still developing and leading to subtler music and simplicity.

Hopkins' "sprung-rhythm" was the modern beginning, and Hopkins also contributed to intensifying the effects of internal rhymes. This is, of course, not the usual way of speech but the effect, curiously, is to make us use words as we do in ordinary life, with just an added touch of colour; there is nothing in it to betray the rolling rhythm of conventional verse.

"Down in dim woods the diamond delves!  
elves' eyes!

The grey lawns cold where gold, where quick  
gold lies."

The interior rhymes, "cold, gold, quick gold" "delves, elves" bring the effect of excited speech by melodic repetition. Hopkins over-used interior rhymes and alliteration but the effect, as in early Anglo-Saxon verse, was a strengthening of speech-values and masculinity rather than a remoteness from daily life which such poetic devices might seemingly have produced. We should also refer to

the technique of deletion, to the unmerciful sacrifice of articles and poetic links such as "even so," "like" and the whole paraphernalia of preparatory or explanatory words which remove poetic speech from the directness of ordinary speech. Auden achieves the technique of speech in verse by an uncanny power of stark utterance which is built upon a trained denial of easy poetic felicities.

" This lunar beauty  
    Has no history  
    Is complete and early "

says Auden, almost taking our breath away by the immediacy of feeling; the timeless feeling of a completely beautiful moment. This immediacy is partially achieved by the direct technique of casual speech which is yet used with care and consummation. Auden begins without innuendo, breaking into emotional speech as we would do in life, but behind his utterances lies prodigious and trained deletion. What he has managed not to say heightens the effect of his utterance.

In such ways, by rhythmic re-arrangement, downright diction, interior subtlety, and the understatement of rhymes, modern poetry is coming near to the living word. The great movement of modern technique is to be seen in its steady and varied approximation to the poetry of everyday life and to the poetry of everyday speech. This quality of new verse, W. B. Yeats thought, derived from the wider and more exact harmony of prose, which is the medium of our actual daily expressions. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley, commenting on the lines—

" The wild grey asses fleet  
    With stripe from head to tail, and moderate ears."

Yeats writes, "No poet of my generation would have written 'moderate' exactly there; the close of a long period, the ear expecting some poetic word checked, delighted to be so checked, by the precision of good prose" That is also what Yeats meant when he wrote: "I think that the true poetic movement of our time is towards some heroic discipline." The heroic discipline has, in Eliot's poetry, come from a profound need to relate daily speech to an incantatory pattern of feeling so that a richer language of verse may evolve; the whole process demanding not only metrical experience and the urgency of speech accents but the unfaltering poetic inspiration which can use the living word. Though Kipling does not belong to the greater poetic tradition, and the newer poets in every way transcend him, he too, it must be admitted, introduced new rhythms in verse by opening the window of twentieth century poetry to a larger life of the world. New stresses of modern life surged into his swinging lines and swept away many established poetic inhibitions.

It is curious, when one comes to think of it, how arbitrary poetic inspiration had been in its choice of man's work as artistic subjects. The Village Blacksmith has found a place, but not so the village baker or dairy-man. Shopkeepers, laundrymen—not to speak of the butcher—have been refused invitation. Housman brought in the hangman in his Shropshire verses, but that in a grim, symbolic way, without reference to any technical matters. Miners came into verse, almost under protest, when the industrial age had had made coal and its by-products appear as inevitable to 19th century civilisation as the daily route to office. But there were unexplained gaps:—if miners, then why not porters, engine-drivers and electricians and factory hands? Poetry gave no reply. Sailors have always

been given royal welcome, and English poetry is saturated with navvies, ships, coal-tar, salt-water and sea-lore. Soldiers have paraded in verse, from Homeric times to these, but while their uniforms and horses have entered poetry, as well as their glittering swords and guns, little advance can be observed in the recounting of services undertaken by an army; the work of engineers, road-makers, field medical units and so on have yet failed to assert themselves. The new poets, particularly of the post-last-war period, did not introduce the rhythms of the machine age by merely mentioning the machine, or giving us their sound and fury but by creating a modern atmosphere in which new rhythms would appear inevitably in the context.

Firstly, they supplied circumstances, detailed circumstances, to generalised topics. Birth and death and love, earth and sky and sea, nature and human nature, these would form the primordial pattern of poetry, but the changing circumstances which surround human realities can no longer be ruled out of verse. The essential difference between traditional and modern poetry lies in the emphasis that the moderns put on environmental details, with the new courage of poetic faith. Kipling helped this process. Look at his sailors,—they do not merely add to the traditional saga of the sea, with touches of local colour, they belong to particular ships which are named, and they visit ports which can be traced on the map from Liverpool to Mandalay and further up or down on the sea-roads. Kipling's references are specific and particular, details of work and craft are mentioned, the machine-atmosphere blends with salt air, petrol, heavy cargo, wistful blue skies, and very modern passengers. And yet the whole picture does not suffer from this augmentation of details, it is

further enriched. Romance meets realism because of the specification and the rhythm of the age possesses you.

“ Romance; those first-class passengers they like  
 it very well,  
 Printed an' bound in little books; but why don't  
 poets tell?  
 I'm sick of all their quirks an' turns,—the loves  
 and doves they dream,  
 Lord! send a man like Robbie Burns to sing the  
 song o' steam.”

That is the cry, sing us  
 “ the song o' steam.”

Ships with sail and mast are vanishing, steam and electricity have come to stay, and yet poetry went on ignoring the new in a mere habitual love of the old. The ocean liner had long appeared on the sea, but the ocean of verse was bereft of them till the new poets, here led by Masfield, launched their modern ships. Railway trains had long been running on lines of steel, but on lines of verse they found no passage. Wordsworth cautiously mentions “ Steamboats, Viaducts and Railways ” but these appear only in the title of his sonnet, in the lines that follow they are described abstractly as “ Motions and Means—” it is evident that the appearance of a single ticket-collector or engine driver would dislocate his style. Robert Graves in his amusing book “ *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* ” gives a catalogue of bold initiatives which I would recommend to the inquisitive reader. Tennyson apparently thought that he had behaved desperately in writing, in *Lady Godiva*,—

“ I waited for the train at Coventry.”

We have to come to John Davidson, in the 'nineties, to find

“ A monster taught  
To come to hand  
Aman,  
As swift as thought  
Across the land  
The train.”

This is already in the tradition of the new style—the rhythm of the machine is there and it is part of the greater actuality, the movement of thought itself, thought identified with and suggested by the railway train.

Poetry, today, is more delicate and psychological in its rendering of the machine age; Kipling and Masefield would seem amateurish and strained in comparison. Symbolism has again come to its own, blending the mystic impulse with new and concrete imagination;—this is a phase which the early obvious process of adopting new rhythms could not reach. The extreme practitioners of the war-ridden age of 1914-18 and the years that immediately followed, stopped at the jazz stage of poetry, a new and vitalising if somewhat disturbing experiment, but the jazz in its turn has led up to a mystic modernism in music.

A remarkable example is Spender's *The Express*. Here is a poem on the railway train, a very much post-war production, in which the romance of our Industrial Age is given a detailed and at the same time a sublimated expression; it is mechanical and lyrical simultaneously and also powerfully evocative.

The train moves out of the station quietly, gliding like a queen, turning the page of death—the cemetery— which

lies outside the station; it passes the gas-works and the inevitable suburban slums.

“ After the first powerful plain manifesto  
The black statement of pistons, without more fuss  
But gliding like a queen, she leaves the station ”

And now the train plunges into the open countryside, she gathers the rhythmic poise of speed—

“ Beyond the town there lies open country  
Where, gathering speed, she acquires mystery,  
The luminous self-possession of ships on ocean.”

Then we are told of the song, the jazzy song of madness struck by the wheels; and the whistled song at the curves; a symphony of sound, not musical, but musically controlled by the poet, tells us about the deafening tunnels, brakes, and innumerable bolts. While, all the time, there is a coreal rhythm, the railway train's movement cadenced in “ the elate metre of her wheels.”

The music and passion of the modern age vibrate in these lines, and there is a magical breath of romance, almost spiritual in its essence. This new poetry demands and shapes for itself a powerful rhythmic beat which sways through an appropriate context of verse; Auden, and Day Lewis also have created a new path of beauty running right through factories, shops, ships, docks and soldiers' barracks; they have conscripted not merely soldiers and sailors but clerks, petty salesmen, officers and officials of all ranks into the service of a wide world's poetry. New rhythms have come with the glowing silver curves of the aeroplane, with the blue and white of cloud and sky moving at unwonted speed; the authentic swish of heavy tropical forests and the swaying giant palms have imparted a lyric

breath to modern verse. Drum-beats of primal civilizations heave through a new poetry which is humble enough to transcribe life, and proud to serve its destiny; remote coral atolls and lofty mountain crests seen with an enhanced sight have brought new tones and changing word colours, not known before. Poetry has extended its "dominion over palm and pine" not in Kipling's sense, but in a human creativeness unknown to imperialism. Startling variations in rhythm have been introduced; not merely shock-therapy, necessary sometimes for a jaded Muse, but the profound aliveness of a new age in life and in literature is indicated in modern verse.

The decadent 'nineties were bewailing in their ivory towers that poetry had gone from life; the moderns have walked into the market-place and found it there. They have also extended the domain of art in a wider universe.

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