

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_170754

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 821.91/s48T Accession No. 36108

Author Sergeant, H

Title Tradition in the making of
modern poetry. Vol. 1. 1957.

This book should be returned on or before the date
last marked below

TRADITION IN THE MAKING
OF MODERN POETRY

By the same author:

THE LEAVENING AIR. *Poems*. 1946.

THE HEADLANDS. *Poems*. 1952.

THE CUMBERLAND WORDSWORTH. *Criticism*. 1950.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE ALIVE. *Anthology of new poetry*. 1946.

AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY NORTHERN POETRY. 1947.

THESE YEARS. *Poetry anthology for schools*. 1950.

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

by
HOWARD SERGEANT

Volume I



BRITANNICVS LIBER LIMITED

3 Henrietta Street London W.C.2

First published 1951

All rights reserved

1969

Printed by
DRYDENS PRINTERS LIMITED
London N.W.10

CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
1 THE SENSE OF TRADITION	1
2 THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	9
3 POETS OF THE FIRST DECADE	29
4 THE GEORGIAN MOVEMENT	53
5 THE AMERICAN SCENE	73
6 IMAGISM: AN ANGLO-AMERICAN MOVEMENT	89
INDEX	117

The Sense of Tradition

ALTHOUGH the last fifty years have constituted a period of intensive experimentation in English poetry, it is a noticeable feature, if somewhat paradoxical, that the work usually considered to be the most revolutionary in achievement is that which, in certain respects, has been the most traditional. This is not so surprising as it may seem to readers who have accustomed themselves to think of modern poetry as a complete break-away from the standards of the past. For it might with justification be contended that nearly all the major changes in English poetry have been initiated by those poets who were most deeply conscious of English or European traditions. As Mr. T. S. Eliot has aptly remarked, "the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer, and within it the whole of the literature of his own country, has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal, and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional."

Eliot, whom we may accept as the outstanding innovator of our own age, has, of course, always insisted upon his allegiance to tradition. The validity of his attitude would have been appreciated much earlier had it not been for the prevalent misconception of tradition as an entirely static force and, in particular, for its identification with the work of the Victorian and Georgian poets. If it is true that every movement is, in origin, a reaction against the ideas and techniques of the preceding generation, it is also true that every new movement is a rediscovery of what has been lost, a re-emphasis upon what has temporarily been forgotten or neglected. And after every period of experimentation it is necessary to trace the various lines of development, to assimilate and interpret, and to assess the achievement in relation to the whole of literature.

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

The vast majority of the present-day reading public still regard modern poetry as being violently opposed to tradition. They tend to accept it, reject it or, more habitually, to treat it with supreme indifference, on what they assume to be its own inherent standards. On the one hand they place Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson (perhaps even Rupert Brooke); on the other the moderns, a group strictly apart—Eliot, Pound, Auden, Thomas, and Barker. To some extent the reading habits of the general public have been conditioned by the popular newspapers and other publications specially designed for mass-appeal. It is reported that Lord Northcliffe once instructed his staff to keep it in mind that the mental age of their readers was 14; and many of our films seem to be produced on the same basic principle. One cannot, therefore, expect any adequate critical response from a public nurtured on work so inconducive to the exercise of normal intelligence. In the case of the established masters, the critical study has already been done for us, and at school most of us learned if not always how to enjoy the poetry of earlier generations, at least to pay it lip-service. —

It is questionable whether or not the ordinary reader, as distinct from the genuine lover of poetry, will ever truly appreciate the poetry of his own age until these mechanical habits of reading have been corrected. Fortunately, there are teachers, in children's schools, adult institutes and other educational centres, who realize the urgency of training students to develop those habits of mind by which they will be enabled to determine precisely what their responses are. Mature reading is merely the co-ordination of such responses. Animated by this heightened awareness—what D. H. Lawrence called "the flexibility to know what he feels"—the individual will, consciously or unconsciously, endeavour to relate his reading both to his own experience and to the traditional values of the society in which he lives.

Nevertheless, contemporary critics must share the responsibility for the existing state of confusion in regard to poetry. Despite the efforts of Dr. F. R. Leavis and the Cambridge School, there is a tendency among critics to use terms loosely and inconsistently. The words "traditional" and "original" are two such terms. For one critic to describe a collection of poems as "traditional" might be to suggest that the work has merit solely because the author has chosen to apply established forms and rhyme-patterns, and has expressed himself in a simple, straightforward manner. Another critic, perhaps more

favourably disposed to verbal intricacies like those of W. S. Graham and E. E. Cummings, might use the same term in disparagement to imply that the poet in question had nothing of his own to communicate, having relied upon the ideas and techniques of earlier poets to disguise his mediocrity. Similarly, for a poet to be described as "original" might mean either that he has failed as a poet but possesses certain qualities of intellect with which he succeeds in dazzling his readers or, alternatively, that his poetry is of high standard. The precise sense intended is not always easy to determine. One can refer to the name of the writer of the article if one is familiar with the different attitudes of the various schools of critical thought and can identify the writer with a particular group: but not all readers are so well acquainted with the ideologies of the literary world. These remarks do not, of course, have any application to our best critics who, usually, are careful to define their terms or to indicate in the context the specific sense in which they are being used.

It should be obvious that no poet today can be completely original in the sense that his work owes nothing to the poetry of his own or any other time. The poet's originality consists in his creative power to extend, develop or change the tradition in some individual way as the result of his technical craftsmanship and/or his personal experience and understanding of life. Unless he *has* an individual mode of apprehension, whether it be of social problems, of natural phenomena, or perhaps of matters largely relating to the individual, he cannot become a poet of any real stature. The basic elements of poetry are language and the whole psychological experience of the poet. Those critics and writers who intermittently are discovering signs of a reversion to older forms and attitudes are therefore indulging in a little wishful thinking. The traditions are safely in the hands of the leading contemporary poets. If there is any evidence of a renewed preoccupation with lyrical poetry, the result will be a different type of lyricism from anything known before, if only for the reason that the poet must bring his psychological experience to his work, and his experience must, of necessity, be different from that of any earlier poet.

Our conception of the "stream of tradition" needs to be clarified. Sir George Rostrevor Hamilton's definition, in his book, *The Tell-Tale Article**, cannot be improved upon. "We shall get a more

* Published by Heinemann, 1949.

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

adequate picture," writes Sir George, "if we think of a great many currents, some of which flow into one another and divide again, forming in perspective an intricate maze. Numbers of them disappear for a time, flowing underground: seemingly lost, they may sooner or later re-emerge, and there will be unforeseen combinations, the poet discovering 'hitherto unapprehended relations.' But some currents are adverse to others, and not all of them can flow through the same creative mind, however unusual: they cannot merge into a single broad river, and at best we can discern here and there what is, for a longer or shorter period, the main stream. And the main stream will now be slow or rapid, now broad or narrow."

A study of the courses of direction during the last fifty years reveals that, in addition to the channels shaped by the new creative forces in operation, there has also been the re-emergence of certain powerful currents which were apparent in the 16th and 17th centuries (*i.e.* in the work of the Elizabethan dramatists and the later Metaphysical poets). Gerard Manley Hopkins's experiments with "Sprung Rhythm" were, one might say, the individual systemization of practices adopted by several poets, principally Langland, Skelton, and Milton (*Samson Agonistes*)*; and perhaps nowhere so clearly in evidence as in another rich sphere of tradition—the English nursery rhymes. And in their preoccupations with these currents of the tradition which had been "flowing underground", both Eliot and Hopkins have exerted a tremendous influence upon the poets of the period. This is not to imply that these innovating poets copied an established method or merely introduced a modernized version. Each has created a unique style by achieving a synthesis out of personal or local and traditional values:

*"Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating*

* Gerard Manley Hopkins died in 1889, but his poems were withheld from publication until 1918, so that, for the purposes of this volume, his work will be examined with that of the period on which it had most effect.

THE SENSE OF TRADITION

*In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate—but there is no competition—
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.”*
(From *Four Quartets* by T. S. Eliot)

The genuine poet, then, will not hesitate to take what he needs from the tradition for his purposes; yet he achieves something more than a mere imitation of what has been done by his predecessors—he restores and revivifies the tradition and extends its validity to his own time. “Each new venture” is, in fact, “a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate . . .” and this is true for every poet. What is borrowed from the past is invested in the new work of art, and the debt repaid with interest. In the quotation above, Eliot stresses the essential difficulties of the task—“There is only the fight to recover what has been lost and found and lost again and again”—but the fight is a different one for each poet because the battle must be carried into new areas and individual advance-posts established. It is not sufficient for the positions merely to be held, though the defenders may serve a useful function in maintaining what has already been won. For the poet must live in his own age and be aware of its problems and conflicts.

The growth of a nation’s culture—because it must be an organic growth if it is to be firmly rooted in the lives of the people—is normally a slow process taking place throughout centuries. There are exceptions, notably in the other countries of the Commonwealth. Perhaps in the British Isles we are disposed to take our rich and varied tradition a little too much for granted. One has only to contemplate the tremendous tasks imposed during the last hundred years upon the poets of such comparatively new societies as those of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, to appreciate the value of our cultural background. In these countries an indigenous culture had to be created out of the lives of a people completely fresh to their surroundings and without a cultural tradition other than that which

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

the emigrants took with them. It was natural that the earliest attempts to establish an authentic tradition should have been concentrated upon the landscape, immigration, settlement, and the strenuous life under the new conditions—conditions which must certainly have seemed “unpropitious”, to borrow Eliot’s term. It was equally natural that their early poems, though ostentatiously concerned with subjects of local interest, should have been modelled to British prototypes. To say that is in no way to disparage their efforts. The emigrants were, after all, transplanted from Britain and the only traditions they recognized at first were those of these islands. What is remarkable is that, in the difficult circumstances of founding a nation and sustaining themselves in an apparently hostile environment, they were able to maintain the standards of craftsmanship they did.

It should also be remembered that few nations have ever succeeded in developing a culture entirely from native elements; the English, whose literature has been enriched for centuries by European influences and invigorated by 20th century American writing, perhaps least of all. It would be quite impossible to estimate our national debt to the Latin and Greek, French, Italian, German and other European languages. The Bible alone has had an incalculable effect. In the culture of almost every civilized nation, then, two elements are clearly discernible—the indigenous, or, as I prefer to describe it, the regional, and the foreign or cosmopolitan. The former being concerned with environmental values and expressing the distinctive qualities of the nation’s outlook and manner of life, though adapted to the experience of the individual; the latter making its impact through translations and imported works of art. The two may be complementary to each other or in conflict at any particular time, but gradually merge into the historical tradition. That the indigenous element is compounded of various regional cultures, each contributing to the whole, is more apparent from an examination of the geographical diversities of a country like Canada than that of England, but the same principles are applicable. Each country has its own local diversities.

“Every nation that exists as a self-communing entity requires a mythology of some kind; when such a thing is not inherited, something must be done to create it,” wrote Mr. Brian Elliott, the Australian writer—a statement which one tends to accept as an academic generalization until its truth is forcibly driven home when one sees it at work in the actual growth of a country’s literature. It is this need for a

THE SENSE OF TRADITION

mythology capable of expressing the history, characteristics and potentialities of a people growing into a distinct nationhood, that has compelled the recent developments in the poetry of the Commonwealth countries. The poets of the Commonwealth are beginning to create their own cultural traditions.

Unfortunately, most English readers are completely unaware of the changes that have taken and are still taking place. Although the work of contemporary American and European poets is well known to our critics, Commonwealth books seldom seem to reach this country—if they do, then they have not been given the serious attention they deserve. Indeed, to judge by the few comments that are made concerning Commonwealth poetry, one might almost believe that there have been no poets at all since Adam Lindsay Gordon in Australia or Bliss Carman in Canada (who shared the distinction of having poems included in *The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* published in 1912). A. J. M. Smith, another Canadian, did succeed in securing a little notice by appearing in occasional English anthologies of the 'thirties. If Roy Campbell's nationality as a South African is mentioned it is but to deny the formative effects of his early life in South Africa. It is interesting to read what Campbell himself says on the point:

*"Far be the bookish Muses! Let them find
Poets more spruce, and with pale fingers wind
The bays in garlands for their northern kind.
My task demands a virgin muse to string
A lyre of savage thunder as I sing.
You who sit brooding on the crags alone,
Nourished on sunlight in a world of stone,
Muse of the Berg, muse of the sounding rocks
Where old Zambezi shakes his hoary locks,
And as they tremble to his awful nod,
Thunder proclaims the presence of a god!
You who have heard with me, when daylight drops,
Those gaunt muezzins of the mountain-tops,
The grey baboons, salute the rising moon
And watched with me the long horizons swoon
In twilight, when the lorn hyæna's strain
Reared to the clouds its lonely tower of pain.*

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

*Now while across the night with dismal hum
The hurricanes, your meistersingers, come,
Choose me some lonely hill-top in the range
To be my Helicon, and let me change
This too-frequented Hippocrene for one
That thunders flashing to my native sun
Or in the night hushes his waves to hear
How, armed and crested with a sable plume,
Like a dark cloud, clashing a ghostly spear,
The shade of Tchaka strides across the gloom."*
(*The Flaming Terrapin*)

In the 900-odd pages of Mr. Richard Aldington's *Poetry of the English Speaking World** (purporting to cover the whole field up to the moderns), despite the ambitious title there are but 14 lines by Roy Campbell and one poem by the Canadian Wilson Macdonald, to represent the whole of the Commonwealth outside the British Isles. This Mr. Aldington refers to as a "token" representation, defending his omissions on the ground that it is inadvisable to place either modern or "dominions" poetry beside that of the great masters. His scruples do not, however, dissuade him from including the poems of several contemporary English and American poets.

It is, in fact, *only* by setting Commonwealth poetry for contrast and comparison beside that of the best of the past and present (English or American) that its real value can be assessed. "The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new work of art among them," observed Mr. T. S. Eliot. If the present rate of development in the other countries of the Commonwealth is continued, it may not be long before the poetry of these young nations is having a direct influence upon our own. What in the past appeared to be placid backwaters may be transformed into powerful new tributaries to the main stream. That is a peculiar characteristic of the English tradition. Whether or not such work will be significant enough to disturb the "whole existing order" and "readjust the values of each work of art toward the whole" yet remains to be seen.

* Published by Heinemann, 1947.

The Nineteenth Century

ONE of the primary objects of this volume is to trace the developments in English poetry during the last fifty years, but it will be necessary to go beyond the opening of the century for an appropriate starting-point. The previous chapter should have made it clear that no indelible line of demarcation can be drawn between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The main stream of tradition flows continuously, changing and being changed. To discern the strongest currents at any specified time one need only select a convenient place of observation; to determine the source of those currents one may have to proceed further upstream. Quite apart from the fact that poets like Thomas Hardy and W. B. Yeats, who lived and wrote in both centuries, cannot be assigned exclusively to either one period or the other, it would be unwise to attempt to isolate in time any phase of English literature as though it had no organic relationship with the preceding phases. It may be customary for critics to treat literature as a series of detached or loosely-connected trends extending over an approximate number of years, but it is merely an expedient adopted for the purpose of clarification. Otherwise the picture would be so crammed with detail and the canvas so vast that it would present only a huge blur of colour.

Perhaps it would be as well, at this stage, to add a brief note of warning. In the chapters that follow it may also be necessary to examine the ideas common to particular coteries of poets, and though I shall endeavour to indicate the distinctive qualities of each poet within the group, I should stress the danger of considering poets in this manner rather than as individuals, for, ultimately, it is in their individual capacities that their work will stand or fall. In any case, it will usually be found that poets group themselves in order to emphasize certain aspects of poetry which they consider to be unduly neglected, or to denounce the attitudes and mannerisms of the

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

preceding generation. Within a few years such groups invariably disperse and the poets pursue their individual ways.

The eighteen-nineties have so often been identified with the ideas and activities of the "Decadents"—the group of poets gathered around Oscar Wilde and subscribing to Gautier's doctrine of "Art for Art's sake"—that there is a tendency for us to forget that modern poetry had its roots in this period. In his essay, *The Autumn of the Body* (1898), Yeats remarked: ". . . the poetry which found its expression in the poems of writers like Browning and Tennyson, and even of writers who are seldom classed with them, like Swinburne, and like Shelley in his earlier years, pushed its limits as far as possible, and tried to absorb into itself the science and politics, the philosophy and morality of its time; but a new poetry, which is always contracting its limits, has grown up under the shadow of the old . . . I see, indeed, in the arts of every country those faint lights and faint colours and faint outlines and faint energies which many call 'the decadence', and which I, because I believe that the arts lie dreaming of things to come, prefer to call the autumn of the body. . . . The arts are, I believe, about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of the priests, and to lead us back upon our journey by filling our thoughts with the essences of things, and not with things."

What Yeats discerned when he spoke of poetry trying to absorb into itself the "science and politics, the philosophy and morality" of the age of Browning and Tennyson was the lack of integration in the work of these and other Victorian poets. The main driving force of the Romantic impulse, so evident in the poetry of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was the belief in a world of reality underlying the superficial aspects of existence, and in the power of the creative imagination to establish contact with that intangible world.

*"Forgive me if I say that I, who long
Had harboured reverentially a thought
That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
Have each for his peculiar dower, a sense
By which he is enabled to perceive
Something unseen before; forgive me, Friend,*

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

*If I, the meanest of this Band, had hope
That unto me had also been vouchsafed
An influx, that in some sort I possessed
A privilege, and that a work of mine,
Proceeding from the depths of untaught things,
Enduring and creative, might become
A power like one of Nature's."*

(Wordsworth: *The Prelude*, Book XII, 1805 version)

Man, both as a material and spiritual being, could be located in relation to his environment and its social conditions. It was, intrinsically, a religious impetus.

The Victorian Age, which coincided with the period of rapid industrial expansion, permitted no such feeling of inner harmony. Social habits and circumstances were changing swiftly as the population increased and economic pressure forced the country-dwellers into the already overcrowded towns to live in the utmost misery and squalor among the industrial slums. If it was an era of international peace and security, this served only to accentuate the intolerable conditions and insecurity of the vast majority of the people. The prevalent *laissez-faire* philosophy added incentive to the growing class-antagonisms. Riots and disturbances broke out in various parts of the country. At the same time there was an awakening of the national conscience, stimulated by the efforts of zealous reformers, and a whole series of Acts were passed belatedly by Parliament to mitigate the evils of the social system. The change was no less marked in intellectual circles upon which the discoveries of science and the Darwinian theories "on the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection" made their greatest impact. Not only Christianity but religion itself was called in question, especially during the controversies of 1860-80. As the mechanistic and materialistic explanations of life and the universe gained more and more weight, romantic and religious conceptions became incompatible with the new intellectual beliefs.

To fully understand the poetry of this age—indeed, of any age—it must be studied against the background of social and intellectual environment. "Schizophrenia," contends Mr. F. W. Bateson, "was the occupational disease of the period."* That is, perhaps, to oversimplify the case. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that most of

* *English Poetry* (Longmans, Green, 1950).

the Victorian poets experienced acute inner conflicts. They were driven back upon themselves into a nightmare world of fantasy, or evaded all religious and social problems by a retreat into mediaevalism and aesthetic theory, or aimed at some kind of compromise between personal and public values.

Thomas Lovell Beddoes and Thomas Hood, two of the first poetic casualties of the nineteenth century dilemma, provide good examples of the poets who, unable to face the realities of the situation, turned inwards to the contemplation of the macabre. It is not irrelevant to mention that the former committed suicide by taking poison in somewhat distressing circumstances, for he was obsessed with the subject of death. A year or two earlier he had attempted to end his life by severing an artery and, as a result of his refractory moods whilst undergoing medical treatment, had suffered the amputation of his leg. Neither of these poets could adjust himself to the external world. It is a curious phenomenon, though explicable in psychological terms, that the creative imagination, whenever it is repressed by the conscious mind, tends to thrust up strange and often primordial symbols in dreams and fantasies. This tendency can be recognized in the novels of Walpole, Monk Lewis and others who, at the beginning of the Romantic revolt against eighteenth century reason and rationalism, were preoccupied with pseudo-Gothic horrors and monstrosities. It can be seen again in the work of poets like Darley, Beddoes and Hood when the scientific materialism of the industrial age was in the ascendant. Even Hood's humorous verse leaves one with the impression that it was, with all its facile word-play, its too-obvious punning and apparently heartless treatment of human suffering and frustration, a means of evading the real issues involved. That may account for its popularity with the middle-class Victorians. It enabled both poet and audience to avoid any sense of responsibility and protected them from having to think too seriously about the conditions from which the material was drawn. That Hood was a humanitarian by instinct is shown in the few poems like *The Song of the Shirt* where, his defence-mechanism temporarily out of action, he wrote directly from his emotions.

On the other hand, the group of young writers and artists known to us as the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood reverted to European art-forms of the past (that is, of the age before Raphael, the Italian artist), in a deliberate effort to withstand the encroachments of Victorian Philis-

tinism about the middle of the century. Among them were Millais, Holman Hunt, D. G. Rossetti, W. M. Rossetti, Burne-Jones and William Morris. In addition to their concern with mediaeval subjects and their desire to re-create the atmosphere of the Middle Ages, the pre-Raphaelite poets directed their attention to nature and to accuracy in its description. It is hardly surprising that their work appears to some extent to be artificial. Aiming at precision, they were inclined to overload their poems with so much elaborate detail that the subject itself was frequently lost or obscured within the verbiage. Nor were they successful in making the worlds and landscapes of their imaginations habitable for more than dream-figures. If they found themselves out of harmony with the predominant ideas of their own age, it was quite impossible for them, with a different knowledge and sense of values, to recapture the outlook of earlier generations. This is not to suggest that all their poetry was insignificant. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, one of the leaders of the movement, attained a rare purity of vision in some of the sonnets comprising *The House of Life*, and his pursuit of "Beauty" induced him to explore strange areas of sensuous experience, as in *Nuptial Sleep*:

*"Sleep sank them lower than the tide of dreams,
And their dreams watched them sink, and slid away.
Slowly their souls swam up again, through gleams
Of watered light and dull drowned waifs of day;
Till from some wonder of new woods and streams
He woke, and wondered more: for there she lay."*

The pre-Raphaelite attitude, unlike that of their immediate predecessors the Romantics, was one of escape from contemporary conditions rather than a revolt against them. It is true that William Morris was a socialist reformer. Almost alone among the group in this respect, he was acutely conscious of the disadvantages of mass-production methods and their effect upon the lives of the men and women engaged in manufacture. Yet even in this sphere of action, he was incapable of appreciating the inevitable complexity of the existing social and economic problems, or of discerning with any clarity the operative factors. What he advocated was the superimposition of a mediaeval system of guild craftsmanship upon the industrial structure, and a rejection of the machine. In his poetry his

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

escapist inclinations were, in fact, more pronounced than those of his contemporaries.

There can be little doubt that neither Tennyson nor Arnold was insensitive to the *malaise* of the Victorian Era, but if Arnold was honest enough to give it recognition and to maintain a precarious front against the rising Philistinism, Tennyson consciously and persistently withstood any hint of its intrusion into his work. Both these poets, together with Robert Browning, sensed a need for poetry which would inspire mankind. Referring to his poem, *The Scholar Gipsy*, Arnold remarked: "But what does it *do* to you? Homer *animates*—Shakespeare *animates*—in its poor way I think *Sohrab and Rustem* animates—the Gipsy Scholar at best awakens a pleasing melancholy. But this is not what we want. 'The complaining millions of men/Darken in labour and pain—'. What they want is something to animate and ennoble them—not merely to add zest to their melancholy or grace to their dreams." Though Arnold seems to have had a glimpse of the potentialities of such poetry, he never succeeded in overcoming his own limitations and consequently failed to achieve his object as a poet:

*"Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride;
I come to shed them at their side."*

Tennyson and Browning, however, conceived the poet's function to be that of proclaiming a "message" of inspiration, and each aimed in his own manner at providing a philosophy acceptable to the cultivated middle-class public for whom his work was intended. The result, in both cases, was a superficial and unintegrated insistence upon hope and faith in human progress: superficial because it ignored the conditions out of which, presumably, the advances towards enlightenment were to be made; unintegrated because, in spite of their determination to be positive, they involuntarily revealed their own fears and lack of assurance. In defence of Tennyson it has been stated that "his compromise was an attempt to combine the best of the old and new".* Perhaps as Poet Laureate he felt it incumbent

* Hugh I'Anson Fausset: *Poets and Pundits* (Cape, 1947).

upon him to undertake some kind of reconciliation between the new scientific knowledge and his alleged belief in the

*"one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."*

But it does not explain why he suppressed his inner feelings in order to convey more emphatically his message of faith. The truth is, surely, that by such evasions, and by adopting for his poetry what might be described as an historical perspective, he found it easier to present those pictures which the Victorians, troubled by their uncertainties, most urgently wanted to see. "It is with this world as starting point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves," wrote Browning, but there is little in his work to indicate that he fully apprehended the truth of this statement. Admittedly he was less susceptible than Tennyson to attacks of social conscience; indeed, he seems almost to have been unaware that any social problems existed. The world he painted was bright with hope—far too highly-coloured for it to be related to the period in which he lived—and his attitude was that of a cheerful and vigorous prophet leading his people to the brighter land ahead. But he accepted the superficial standards of Mid-Victorian England. He expounded at considerable length not so much Christian values as the sentimental and conventional ideas of his readers. It is for this reason that, for all his interest in moral and theological matters, it is chiefly in the religious aspects of his poetry that his personal doubts and contradictions were externalized.

In the second half of the century the controversy between the scientists and the defenders of religion raged with greater intensity. If scientific theories were undermining the religious convictions of the intellectuals, there was a counter-movement in favour of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches (especially the latter which could, unconditionally, claim divine authority for its dogma). These Churches, by concentrating their forces against the new, though tangible, enemy and offering complete assurance to those tormented by religious doubts, gained adherents. For some it was merely another and safer way of escape; for others it was a valid solution, providing a means by which the imagination, strengthened by ancient tradition, was revitalized to explore the "Mysteries of the Faith". Gerard Manley Hopkins, who was converted to the Roman Catholic faith and

who became a Jesuit priest, explained to Robert Bridges: "You do not mean by mystery what a Catholic does. You mean an interesting uncertainty; the uncertainty ceasing, the interest ceases also. This happens in some things; to you in religion. But a Catholic by mystery means an incomprehensible certainty; without certainty, without formulation, there is no interest . . . the clearer the formulation, the greater the interest." The Roman Catholic Church, with its traditional background, its rich source of evocative imagery, its symbolism and colour, and, above all, its mystery or "incomprehensible certainty", held a peculiar attraction for the artist and the poet. The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, followed by the Oxford Movement and the activities of another convert, John Henry Newman, had already prepared the way for a revival of confidence in Catholic dogma. Only the stimulus of an effective challenge from scientific and materialistic quarters was necessary to set in motion a new wave of enthusiasm for the Roman Catholic Church. In some respects, it proved to be of immense value to those who could accept such an inflexible system of thought. However restricting the system, it did ensure the poet an organized relationship between imaginative concept and intellectual belief in an important area of human experience, and allowed him to develop his own spiritual resources. This may explain why some of the best poetry of this period was written by the Roman Catholic poets, Coventry Patmore and Gerard Manley Hopkins. In the work of both these poets one finds a unity of form and subject-matter noticeably absent in the work of their contemporaries. They were both technical innovators, too, though Hopkins has exercised by far the greater influence upon the poetry of our own age. This Catholic revival brought with it a renewal of interest in the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, and parallels can be drawn between their work and that of Patmore and Hopkins.

Christina Rossetti is frequently classified as a pre-Raphaelite poet but, unlike her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, she was a devout Anglican, and can more appropriately be regarded as the Anglican counterpart to Patmore in that the Christian doctrine was at the centre of her thought and feeling. It will be remembered that the Oxford Movement, earlier in the century, had divided itself into two distinct groups—those who with Newman became Roman Catholics and those who with Pusey and Keble remained in the Anglican Church. Though Christina Rossetti's poems exhibit some of the pre-Raphaelite

characteristics, her religious disposition added an intensity and a significance lacking in most of the pre-Raphaelite dream-world poetry. So much is this the case that occasionally she introduced a kind of Christian allegory and symbolism almost without being aware of it; as in *Goblin Market*, for instance, where the atmosphere, with its goblin merchants trading in the fruits of evil and their dealings with two sisters, is typical of the fairy-tale, but the latent content of the poem portrays the nature of human sin and the necessity of an atonement. Fundamentally she was a religious poet, and it is as such that her real achievements can be assessed, and favourably compared, not only with those of her contemporaries, but also with those of the religious poets of other ages.

The Aesthetic movement of the 'nineties was a continuation of the pre-Raphaelite tradition, influenced to some extent by the French Symbolists, but by this time the tradition had completely lost touch with reality. Where Rossetti and Morris had sought their inspiration in the past, while retaining a moral code of their own, Oscar Wilde and his fellow Decadents, such as Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson and Arthur Symonds, resorted to an aesthetic appreciation devoid of moral standards. They owned allegiance to the doctrine enunciated by Pater in his conclusion to *The Renaissance*: "Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake." Yet their attitude was far from being a natural response to the conditions imposed by an industrialized society. Nor did they genuinely try, as their predecessors had done (though ineffectually), to assert whatever personal values they held in opposition to the impersonal values of a rationalism which denied the existence of anything that could not be resolved in terms of scientific logic. If the tendencies towards religion or aesthetic mysticism of the preceding period were characteristic defence measures of those poets who found it imperative to work within the romantic tradition, the aestheticism or the *fin-de-siècle* of the 'nineties was romanticism at its lowest ebb. The Aesthetes were more concerned with ostentatiously flaunting their bohemianism and making an impression upon the public—largely by shocking the staid Victorian minds—than with communicating the truths perceptible only through the imagination. Their poetry, in general, reflects both their lack of balance and their poverty of thought.

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

It is possible, at this distance, to see that all their theatrical postures, their dandyism and preoccupation with "the music hall, the harlot's house, the artificial paradise of drugs and drink"* merely betrayed how very conscious they were of the bourgeois standards of their time. Despite their reaction to the insincerities and the moralizing of poets like Tennyson, they were equally insincere in their extravagant poses; and their studied perversities, no less than their repentances and conversions, served to emphasize the respect they felt for Victorian notions of morality.

After what has been said of the weakened romanticism of the Aesthetic movement, it may seem paradoxical to insist that contemporary poetry had its real origin in the 'nineties. Not that the arts, in this country, at least, were exactly dreaming "of things to come", as Yeats conceived it. New potentialities, some of which were exploited in a way that could not have been anticipated, were already at work beneath the surface, and gradually introducing fresh elements to be integrated with and to widen the narrowed stream of tradition. New ideas were being assimilated. For the Aesthetes, although perhaps drawing most attention, were not alone in the poetic field. As will be seen, there were several other poets outside their circles pursuing both incompatible and complementary lines of development. It was inevitable that out of the conflict between these various elements and the existing cultural order there should, sooner or later, emerge new forms of expression. The Aesthetic poets played an incidental part through their interest in the Symbolism of France, a movement which presented certain aspects in keeping with English Aestheticism. The influence of Baudelaire and Verlaine upon Dowson, Symons and the others was, it is true, confined mainly to the choice of subject, but it was Symons who, by means of his translations and criticism, brought the Symbolist doctrines to the notice of the English poets. W. B. Yeats was one of the first to succumb to the French theories and to put them into practice in English poetry with any degree of success. He was, as Symons remarked, "the chief representative of that movement in our country."

Yeats met the Aesthetic poets when his family moved to London in 1887 and established even closer contact through the Rhymers Club which they formed four years later. Among the Rhymers were Ernest Dowson, Richard Le Gallienne, Lionel Johnson, Aubrey Beardsley,

* Introduction to *An Anthology of 'Nineties' Verse*: A. J. R. Symons.

John Davidson, Arthur Symons and Ernest Rhys, most of whom were contributors to *The Yellow Book*, the *fin-de-siècle* review of the day. Yeats was already well acquainted with pre-Raphaelite poetry and his own early work had been influenced by Rossetti and Morris. Coming from the west of Ireland with an entirely different background and outlook from that of the English poets, but possessing a natural aesthetic temperament himself, he was immediately attracted by their ideas and their meticulous attention to technique—

“*Poets with whom I learned my trade,
Companions of the Cheshire Cheese . . .*”

In Ireland he had been associated with John O'Leary, the Irish Nationalist, and the young men and women surrounding him. Like them he had been fired with the ambition to create a national literature, founded not on the “personages and stories and metaphors that have come to us through Greece and Rome, Wales and Brittany, through the Middle Ages”, but on Irish history, folk-lore and tradition. In his first book, *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889), he drew heavily upon Gaelic mythology for his material and upon the pre-Raphaelites for his style. His religious education had been a curious one. “I am very religious,” he remarked in his *Autobiographies*, “and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall . . . of the single-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians.” But the loss of faith did not propound quite the same questions to Yeats as it had propounded to so many English intellectuals of the nineteenth century. From adolescence onwards he had been in revolt against the rationalism of his father and, because he found it impossible to fall back upon what appeared to him to be anachronistic and exploded tenets of orthodox Christianity, he felt compelled to search for a comprehensive philosophy with which he could relate his own vague conceptions of a new ritualistic Order. This, primarily, was the motive for his interest in occultism, psychical research, astrology, the mysticism of Blake, Böhme and Swedenborg, and for his experiments with such theosophical systems as Madame Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*. It encouraged in him an

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

intellectual ardour and a curiosity towards all unusual manifestations of existence, both of which were alien to the Aesthetes. "I well remember," he wrote in 1892, "the irritated silence that fell upon a noted gathering of the younger English imaginative writers once, when I tried to explain a philosophy of poetry in which I was profoundly interested, and to show the dependence, as I conceived it, of all great art and literature upon conviction and upon heroic life. To them literature had ceased to be the handmaiden of humanity, and become instead a terrible queen, in whose silence the stars rose and set, and for whose pleasure life stumbles along in the darkness."

If life for them was stumbling along in the darkness, it may equally be said that Yeats was himself groping his way through a quasi-mystical half-light in the hope of finding a system of symbols adequate to his purpose of creating a personal mythology; a mythology which, while communicating his own aesthetic experience, would at the same time satisfy the needs of an authentic Irish literature. This was another attribute which distinguished his work from that of the English poets. He earnestly desired to be identified with the Irish Literary Revival, aptly described (especially as far as Yeats was concerned) as the Celtic Twilight, and kept in touch with enthusiastic young nationalists in Ireland. In his poem *To Ireland in the Coming Times* (from a volume entitled *The Rose*, published in 1893) he directly stated his attitude:

*"Know, that I would accounted be
True brother of a company
That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song;
Nor be I any less of them,
Because the red-rose-bordered hem
Of her, whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan,
Trails all about the written page.*

.

*Nor may I less be counted one
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
Because, to him who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell*

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

*Of things discovered in the deep,
Where only body's laid asleep.
For the elemental creatures go
About my table to and fro,
That hurry from unmeasured mind
To rant and rage in flood and wind."*

The general objects of Symbolism, then, were by no means unknown to him before he met Symons. Indeed, he deployed the symbols in *The Wanderings of Oisín* with remarkable ingenuity and, referring to the poem in a letter to Katherine Tynan, admitted that under the disguise of Symbolism he had expressed several things to which only he had the key. Where the poem failed was in the unreality of its dream-world atmosphere, a defect common to most of the pre-Raphaelite poetry with which the poem had affinities. Dissatisfied with the results, he was beginning to realize that, if he wished to interpret the tenuous world of his imagination, his symbols must have a valid meaning for his readers also. Many years later he observed—

*"O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?"*
(*Among School Children*)

The French metaphysic, formulated by Mallarmé and translated by Symons, assisted Yeats to crystallize his own ideas, but he did not hesitate to take what he needed from Mallarmé and adapt it to his own peculiar requirements. Above all, he saw the possibilities of Symbolism in the development of English poetry. It would constitute, he pronounced in one of his essays on the subject, "a return to the way of our fathers, a casting out of descriptions of nature for the sake of nature, of the moral law for the sake of the moral law, a casting out of all anecdotes and of brooding over scientific opinion that so often extinguished the central flame in Tennyson, and of that vehemence that would make us do or not do certain things. . . ." "With this change of substance," he continued, "this return to imagination, this understanding that the laws of art, which are the hidden laws of the world, can alone bind the imagination, would come a change of style, and we would cast out of serious poetry those

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

energetic rhythms, as of a man running, which are the invention of the will . . . and we would seek out those wavering, meditative, organic rhythms, which are the embodiment of the imagination."

Almost alone of his generation, W. B. Yeats sensed the general direction which the "change of style" in the twentieth century would take. It may explain why he was able to adapt his poetry to the changing values and conditions of his lifetime. *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) shows the first impact of the Symbolist doctrine upon his method. In this volume the Celtic legends and folk-lore had become integral to the poetry instead of a mythological framework to his thought and nostalgia, so that, though the atmosphere created by the poems is still a remote one, a strange power is exercised upon the mind of the reader. This may partly be due to the fact that, in the love poems which comprise the major portion of the collection, the poet was expressing a significant but unhappy experience of his own. It was, nevertheless, a valid experience and it charged his poems with a new intensity.

Although Lionel Johnson and some of the other Decadents were, or later became, Catholics, the Catholic tradition was more strictly maintained during the 'nineties by Alice Meynell and Francis Thompson, two poets utterly unlike each other in manner, outlook and temperament. Against the delicacy and restraint of the former, Francis Thompson appears to be singularly ostentatious. While Alice Meynell, realizing her limitations but making the most of her genuine talent, was content to work in the narrow field she had chosen for herself, and to perfect her individual style with equanimity and quiet assurance, Thompson undertook far more than he had either the capacity or the skill to accomplish. His best known and, perhaps, most convincing poem, *The Hound of Heaven*, succeeds despite the elaborate decoration and the defects in the use of language. In his religious odes he was very obviously influenced by Coventry Patmore, but throughout his poetry one discovers stray examples of undigested Crashaw, Coleridge, Shelley and others. The work of both these poets reveals affinities with the seventeenth century metaphysical poetry, but in the case of Francis Thompson it is largely owing to the general treatment rather than in the intellectual control of his material.

In sharp contrast to the Decadents there were, about the same period, a number of poets devoting their attention to more exuberant

themes of patriotism, adventure, or life in the open air, and poems of action. These poets cannot be classified as a group in any precise meaning of the term, yet in varying degrees they were all opposed to the languorous affectations of aestheticism. One extreme often engenders the other. Rudyard Kipling, for instance, achieved an easy popularity with his *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892) by appealing to the imperialistic spirit which was emerging among all classes of the English people. Born in India, he had travelled widely and his experience as a professional journalist had made him familiar with all the accessories of a commercial and mechanized civilization. Indeed some of his verse can be seen in clearer perspective as poetic journalism, and, as such, eminently successful. To a people suddenly becoming conscious of its cosmopolitan ramifications, its national prestige and ambitions, and of the increasing competition of other nations, Kipling introduced his idea of "The Law"—a kind of divine appointment ("Beneath whose awful Hand we hold/ Dominion over palm and pine") by which the British nation assumed responsibility for administering the affairs of the backward races of the world—whether the backward races liked the arrangement or not. It was a moral responsibility in that it entailed a keen sense of duty and self-discipline and an impeccable code of honour, yet it was, inherently, founded upon the same racial arrogance and contempt for the "lesser breeds" which, in the twentieth century, were manifested in totalitarianism.

During and after the Boer War, imperialism, and with it Kipling's poetry, rapidly declined in popularity. Whether one can wholeheartedly approve of Kipling's aspirations for the British Empire or not, it would be unjust to allow either his despotic ideas or his insensitivity to prejudice one against recognizing the genuine nature of his accomplishment, and the effects of his experiments upon the writing of his contemporaries. At a time when the language of poetry had lost its impulsion and poetic themes were being confined to a narrow range of subjects, he introduced vitality, humour (however crude we may consider it to be), and an entirely fresh element of realism, all of which were sadly needed, and assisted in widening the immediate scope of poetry. Moreover, by his use of a colloquial idiom, by his concentration upon the lives of the ordinary men and women who were building his Empire—the soldier, the sailor, the engineer and the settler—and his emphasis upon adventure, he reached

the new literate public. For him there was no question of ignoring the actual circumstances in which his heroes lived; he included them all in his verse, the smells, the sweat and the dirt as well as the courage and high purpose. Unfortunately, neither his craftsmanship nor his vigorous language is sufficient to compensate for his lack of imaginative vision. His feeling for the English tradition is shown at its most impressive in the regional poems about Sussex, where he settled on his return to England from America.

Sir Henry Newbolt's patriotic verse is somewhat akin to Kipling's, but it does not possess the same unifying force: instead of the latter's belief in British law and discipline, he expresses a refined and rather archaic attitude towards "the brotherhood that binds the brave of all the earth". Of the boisterous "open-air" poets Stevenson and Henley may be instanced, though Stevenson had moods of restraint like those informing his *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885); while Wilfred Scawen Blunt voiced a direct antagonism against the existing order of society.

Probably the poets least affected by the disintegration of values so apparent in the later nineteenth century were those who could afford to shelter behind a cloistered tradition of classical scholarship, poets such as Robert Bridges, Laurence Binyon and, more romantically inclined and more rhetorical, Sir William Watson. Apart from the brief phase he spent as a doctor at Bart's, Bridges virtually lived the life of a recluse and his poems reflect the tranquillity and calm philosophy of the leisured countryman. Nothing seems to have disturbed the cool serenity of his existence or betrayed him into the merest gesture of defiance, if one is to judge by his work. Even his love poems, skilfully wrought as they are, express little emotional intensity. One feels that he remained superbly detached from the world of experience known to his contemporaries, and he was content that it should be so. Landscape—especially that of Southern England—proved a valuable source of material suitable to his contemplative nature. "What led me to poetry," said Bridges, "was the inexhaustible satisfaction of form, the magic of speech, lying as it seemed to me in the masterly control of the material", and throughout his life he continued to apply himself to the study of form and rhythm, not without effect upon his Georgian successors. His experiments with assonance and internal rhyming, demonstrated in *April* 1885:

*"Wanton with long delay the gay Spring leaping cometh;
The blackthorn starreth now his bough on the eve of May:
All day in the sweet box-tree the bee for pleasure hummeth:
The cuckoo sends afloat his note on the air all day.*

*Now dewy nights again and rain in gentle shower
At root of tree and flower have quenched the winter's drouth:
On high the hot sun smiles, and banks of cloud uptower
In bulging heads that crowd for miles the dazzling south."*

despite the archaic language, furnish points of comparison with the methods adopted by several later poets, but it is not easy to determine just how much he owes, in this direction, to the example of his friend, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

It has already been remarked that the creative life of Thomas Hardy extended over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though Hardy was born in 1840, his first collection of poems, *Wessex Poems* (1898), was not published before he had earned a considerable reputation as a novelist, but this book contained much of the verse he had written so early as the 'sixties, and he continued to produce volume after volume until his death in 1928. That, however, is not the sole reason why his poetry cannot be attributed exclusively to either century. In spirit he belongs to both. While possessing an inflexibly Victorian outlook, he yet had qualities more in harmony with modern susceptibilities. In a recent critical study, *The Darkling Plain**, Mr. Heath Stubbs rightly describes Hardy as a poet "at once profoundly influenced by the regionalist and folk tradition", for it is in this light that his poetry can most perspicaciously be studied. One might go even further and assert that he carried forward the regionalist tradition, which has always imbued and enriched English literature and which had previously been represented by the work of William Wordsworth, John Clare, Robert Stephen Hawker and William Barnes to our own time.

It was his deep and enduring affection for his native Dorset, idealized as the Anglo-Saxon province of Wessex, and his reverence for the customs, the village crafts and the simple way of life of its peasantry, which inspired both his prose and his poetry, and endowed him with the countryman's natural stoicism and courage to face the

* Published by Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950.

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

grim truths which Science appeared to be revealing. "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst." From childhood onwards he had steeped himself in the superstitions and folk-lore of Dorset and had been affected, both in his style and his ideas, by his old friend, the dialect poet, William Barnes, with whom he had a great deal in common. In one of his earliest poems he expressed the bleak philosophy which was to dominate his life:

*"Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain
And dicing time for gladness calls a moan . . .
These purblind Doomsters had as readily thrown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain."*

Hardy has frequently been arraigned for his almost morbid obsession with human suffering and helplessness at the caprice of a blind and indifferent Fate. It must be admitted that he saw man as a victim of ironic circumstance, a human fly struggling in vain to escape from the giant web woven around him from birth to death—"as flies to wanton boys are men to Gods". His "purblind Doomsters" were less indifferent than malign. But if he persisted in outstaring "the Worst" and finding little evidence of "the Better", he was, at least, true to himself and to his chosen media. Pessimism was firmly rooted in him and his honesty compelled him to communicate his experience without prevarication. It is rather curious that his attitude should be so diametrically opposed to that of Browning, for if the work of any poet can be said to have exerted a major technical influence upon Hardy, it was indisputably Browning's.

"Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion . . . which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting," he wrote in his diary; but, in fact, he uttered and clarified the unspoken thoughts of many of his readers, who would possibly have felt far more comfortable if he had left those ideas unformulated. Despite his rejection of Christianity as a faith, Hardy occasionally gives the impression that he ardently wished to believe in the Christian doctrine yet was unable to reconcile such a belief with the facts of existence as he knew them. This is the burden of his Christmas Eve poem, *Oxen*:

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

*"If someone said on Christmas Eve,
'Come; see the oxen kneel*

*In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,'
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so."*

His outlook was, of course, conditioned by the peculiar circumstances of his life. Living close to the soil as he did, in direct contact with the Dorset peasants, he was more conscious than other poets of the changing economic conditions brought about by the industrial revolution and their disastrous effect upon the countryman's traditional mode of being, so that his fatalism was more pronounced than it might otherwise have been. The world he revered was being swept away beyond all hope of recovery. Rural England with its ancient order of society, its village crafts and customs, its folk-song and balladry, was rapidly giving place to democratic and suburbanized England. The serious decline of English agriculture, from 1875 onwards, induced many thousands of farm labourers, who were not reluctant to go where they might secure higher wages, to desert the villages for the industrial and commercial towns. Others migrated to the United States or the Colonies. Unlike Matthew Arnold, Hardy was not content to wander between two worlds, the old and the new; he created a world of his own in which the spirit of the past merges with the spirit of the future. The publication of *Wessex Poems* marked the end of one era and the beginning of the next in more than a purely chronological aspect. Even the language Hardy used to depict the Wessex of his imagination is a strange mixture, catching odd and often unattractive rhythms, yet communicating something of those coexistent states of flux and permanence, of organic growth and decay, and, at the same time, the interplay of tensions between them, to be discerned both in Nature and in the structure of society. In his poetry archaisms, distorted sentences, and queer mannerisms of speech rub shoulder with ingenious rhymes and local phraseology; nor was he averse to inventing new words when he thought the occasion warranted it. Banal versified anecdotes enervate the body of his work and frequently the irony is carried to excess. Yet for all his obvious

defects, and they are many, he anticipated the modern age and, in doing so, wrote a number of outstanding poems.

Superficially, there are resemblances between the work of Thomas Hardy and that of A. E. Housman. A casual reading of both poets might persuade one to believe that, allied in temperament, they were stimulated to write it in the same tradition. In Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), *Last Poems* (1922), and *More Poems* (1936), the pessimistic acceptance of things as they are—

*"Now, and I muse for why and never find the reason,
I pace the earth, and drink the air, and feel the sun.
Be still, be still, my soul; it is but for a season:
Let us endure an hour and see injustice done."*

is the dominating element. In place of Hardy's attachment to Wessex, there is the concern with Shropshire and its "lads", leaving barn and stack and tree to die for the Queen, betrayed or disillusioned in love, or strung up on the gallows for unmentioned crimes; instead of the Dorset place-names there are Ludlow fair, Bredon bells, Wenlock Edge, Shrewsbury jail, Wrekin, Terne, and "the wild green hills of Wyre". But there the similarity ends. Housman's cynicism is rooted in a personal discontent with life and his outlook seems a shallow one compared with that of Hardy's. The regionalist aspects of his work are purely artificial and seldom strike a true note; this is not surprising when one remembers that he adopted Shropshire as his native county—he never lived in Shropshire and there is considerable doubt that he ever paid it the honour of more than a very occasional visit as a child. A classical scholar, Housman deliberately selected his simple pastoral forms to convey a mood of private disappointment and the result is that his Salopian atmosphere is almost as unreal as the mediaeval atmosphere recalled by the pre-Raphaelites. There is, however, an epigrammatic quality about his poems which, combined with the assiduity towards a flawless technique, appealed to the Georgians in their reaction against the idiosyncrasies of the Decadents.

Poets of the First Decade

ENOUGH has now been said of the poets of the nineteenth century and, in particular, of those of the concluding phase to show that, perhaps contrary to popular belief, they bequeathed to their successors far more than an aesthetic reaction to Victorian standards and the industrial order of society. It has not been my purpose to enter upon a comprehensive survey of this foregoing period—otherwise it would have been necessary to consider Emily Brontë, Swinburne, Meredith and others, and to examine in greater detail the work of those poets already mentioned—but to indicate both the general directions of thought and technique, and the various undercurrents moving beneath the surface. The opening of a new century held promise of significant changes, not only in the content and treatment of poetry, but also in philosophical outlook. If the first decade or so produced no developments of a revolutionary nature it was partly because the process of assimilation had not been completed. There was a vague recognition that a fresh approach to the social, economic and political problems of an age of transition was essential, if poetry was to recover its vitality, but it was left to later poets to achieve a reorientation. The Edwardians and Georgians alike were more inclined to follow than to lead. John Masefield, whose first book was published in 1902, and the older poets, Bridges and Doughty, were responsible for the few experiments undertaken during this period; the former striving for a realistic approach and the latter two confining their attention to metre and diction. Of the poets whose work has already been discussed, Yeats, Kipling, Hardy, Newbolt, Bridges, Housman, Thompson, Binyon and Alice Meynell were still writing.

The effect of the Education Act of 1870, which ensured at least the rudiments of an education for all children born after that date, was beginning to manifest itself and a new potential public was gradually emerging. If Kipling had been one of the first poets to make an impression upon these new readers, it was John Masefield who

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

deliberately set himself the task of acting as spokesman for the common man:

*"Not the ruler for me, but the ranker, the tramp of the road,
The slave with the sack on his shoulders pricked on with the goad,
The man with too weighty a burden, too weary a load.*

*The sailor, the stoker of steamers, the man with the clout,
The chantyman bent at the halliards putting a tune to the shout,
The drowsy man at the wheel and the tired look-out.*

*Others may sing of the wine and the wealth and the mirth,
The portly presence of potentates goodly in girth;—
Mine be the dirt and the dross, the dust and scum of the earth!"*
(*A Consecration*)

Masefield was admirably equipped for his self-appointed mission, having spent his earlier years following a variety of pursuits—as a seaman, as a hobo in America doing odd jobs on the road, as a potboy, a millhand, an agricultural labourer, or engaged in other occupations of a similar strenuous nature. His sympathies lay with the misfits and the lame dogs, the persecuted and the oppressed of society. If his experience had taught him to value the courage and perseverance of "the men with the broken heads and the blood running into their eyes", his instincts impelled him to portray his characters against a realistic background, a background with which he was not unfamiliar. His first collection of poems, *Salt Water Ballads* (which included the much-anthologized *Sea Fever*), was followed by *Ballads* (1903), short stories, plays, novels, essays, and *Ballads and Poems* (1910), but none of these volumes attained the popularity of Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads*, which to a large extent was the model for Masefield's earliest poems. The outlook or style of Yeats, J. M. Synge, R. L. Stevenson and Arthur Symons can also be detected in his work. In his ballads and versified descriptions of incidents in the lives of seafaring men, his Bills, Dicks and Harrys, with their adamant skippers and mates, Masefield's diction was lively enough and his rhythms, reminiscent of the old sea-shanties, carried along even his most inconsequential themes; but there was no unifying conception, such as that which permeated the colourful tales of Kipling, to bind them together. He

POETS OF THE FIRST DECADE

followed Kipling in his use of common idiom, in this case the colloquial language of "sailormen", and liberally sprinkled his verse with seafaring terms. Inevitably there were times when he lapsed into bathos. It is rather disconcerting, for instance, to encounter such phrases as "It's *hard*, my son, that's what it is, for us poor sailormen", uttered by his hardliving, rough-spoken characters, or comments like "It's cruel when a fo'c's'le gets the fever" in the midst of these Cape Horn hazards, deaths and burials at sea. Nor is there much distinction between any one of his characters and the next, except that the deckhands invariably have more humane feelings than their officers. And when Masfield ventured on the land for subjects he too easily assumed the poetic attitude which was to become the approved manner of the Georgian poets:

*"So carry me up the lonely hill and lay me in the grave,
And cover me in with cleanly mould and old and lichened stones,
In a place where ever the cry of the wind shall thrill my sleepy
bones."*

It is a noticeable feature in English poetry that, at irregular intervals, and particularly when there has been a period during which the language of poets has grown artificial and stilted, attempts are made to bring poetry back to natural speech. As Dr. F. R. Leavis has said, "every age . . . has its preconceptions and assumptions . . . these are the essentially poetical subjects, these the poetical materials, these the poetical modes." When there occurs a fundamental change in the conditions and the recognized values of society, the preconceptions and assumptions of the previous decade lose their relevance, and what was once the accepted poetic diction seems to be too inflexible and lifeless to meet the needs of the new age. Just as Wordsworth, in reaction against the artificial phraseology of the later eighteenth century poets, chose "incidents and situations from common life" for his subjects and endeavoured, not always happily, to describe them in a "selection of language really used by men", so Masfield turned away from the conventional modes of the 'nineties to the more vigorous elements of life which characterized *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911).

To judge solely by the response, this long narrative poem was an immediate success and it reached a remarkably wide public. The

issue of the *English Review* in which it first appeared went out of print within a few days, and the poem rapidly became the subject of animated discussion—not, let it be admitted, for its quality or evangelistic flavour, but for the novelty of its execution. With its coarse and apparently foul language, its brutality and raw emotion, it was quite unlike anything seen before. The Decadents had tried to shock the public with their dark obsessions, but their work was always carefully polished and inoffensive in treatment; *The Everlasting Mercy* was a new type of audacity. Moreover, it had the advantage of a high moral purpose. Written in the first person, it comprises a somewhat naïve account of the spiritual conversion of the poacher and black-guard, Saul Kane. There is no subtlety and little psychological insight in the delineation of the principal character and we are left in no doubt as to the wickedness of the unregenerate Kane and his urgent need of salvation from the depravity to which he has fallen, and Masfield spares us nothing for the mere sake of propriety. All the sordid details are graphically presented—"the place where I begun poor Nell upon the woman's road to Hell", "the painted whore at half a crown", and the corrupting atmosphere of the "Lion"—often very crudely, with the narrator occasionally interrupting his story to utter pious asides to the reader. Masfield, regardless of technical proficiency, was even less discriminating than Wordsworth in his selection of language really used by the men and women of whom he wrote, and some of the passages intended to convey the tragic circumstances surrounding the lives of these people are almost ludicrous in the impression they make. Nor is the conversion itself very convincing, largely because the incident which provokes it, the encounter with the Quaker, Miss Bourn, fails to support such a revolution in Kane's outlook, despite his underlying sentimentality. But when all the obvious flaws of the poem have been classified, the qualities which earned the respect of its first admirers, its earthiness, vitality, human interest and cumulative force, still remain. The narrative poems which followed, *The Widow in the Bye Street* (1912), *Dauber* (1913), and *Daffodil Fields* (1913), can be placed in the same category and, in varying degrees, suffer from sentimentality and weaknesses in diction and characterization, without the redeeming features of *The Everlasting Mercy*. *Dauber*, however, is far superior to the others, the theme naturally lending itself both to the idealistic treatment most suited to the poet's temperament—for all his attention to realistic

POETS OF THE FIRST DECADE

background Masfield has always been essentially an idealist—and to his specialized knowledge and experience of the sea. The descriptions of natural phenomena, too, are more closely related to the action of the poem and assist the unfolding of its narrative.

With *Lollington Downs* (1917) Masfield temporarily abandoned the long poem for a sequence of short poems, mainly sonnets, on the central theme of Beauty—

“ . . . *this grace, this spring, this given bread,
This life, this dawn, this waking from the dead.*”

and though the sequence contains some evocative lines the thoughts communicated are nostalgic and much too imprecise for any cogent philosophy to emerge. After this experiment Masfield reverted to the narrative in octosyllabic couplets, and in *Reynard the Fox* (1919) discovered the subject which was to serve him for the most impressive poem of his career—the hunting of a fox. It is true that the protagonists of his earlier work, Saul Kane, the Widow's son and Dauber, were each, in his peculiar way, a type of fox, a victim pursued by fate; but by focusing his attention upon Reynard and making the animal an indirect symbol for all such victims at the same time as he was recounting the event, the poet avoided the sentimentality to which he was so susceptible when dealing with a human being as his principal character. The influence is clearly that of Chaucer and the poem opens with a prologue in which the huntsmen and the people gathered for the meet are sketched in the authentic Chaucerian mode. Perhaps there are too many of these descriptions, for Part I unnecessarily delays the action of the poem; but with Part II the hunt is in progress, and the excitement gradually rises to the peaks of suspense when the fox reaches its earths only to find that they have been stopped:

“*Within, as he reached that soft green turf,
The wind, blowing lonely, moaned like surf.
Desolate ramparts rose up steep
On either side, for the ghosts to keep.
He raced the trench, passed the rabbit warren,
Close-grown with moss which the wind made barren;
He passed the spring where the rushes spread,*

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

*And there in the stones was his earth ahead.
One last short burst upon failing feet—
There life lay waiting, so sweet, so sweet,
Rest in a darkness, balm for aches.*

The earth was stopped. It was barred with stakes."

Finally Reynard's life is saved at the last moment by what seems to be a fortuitous circumstance, though it may be attributed to the animal's instinct for self-preservation; his scent is crossed with that of another fox which is killed in his stead, and the poem moves swiftly to its conclusion in a few stanzas which fittingly recapture the peaceful atmosphere of the English countryside. Apart from one or two minor faults, it is excellently told and the action, once begun, is sustained throughout the narrative. The poet restrains any impulse to moralize; what implications there are arise organically from the manipulation of his material. In the years that followed Masfield tried to repeat his success with, among others, *Right Royal* (1920); *Midsummer Night* (1928), in which he turned to the Arthurian legends; *The Wanderer* (1930), containing some imaginative sea-pieces such as *Posted*; and *Wonderings* (1934); but without the same result. His latest volume, *On the Hill* (1950), is a collection of long and short poems of varying quality, but his intellectual weakness is re-emphasized in the title poem purporting to be a religious allegory.

During the first few years of the new century the work of Alfred Noyes, whose first book, *The Loom of Years*, was published in the same year as *Salt Water Ballads*, caught the attention of the critics. From this distance it seems rather strange that his verse should have been disparaged as it was by the Georgian poets, for their own negative qualities can, with legitimate cause, be regarded in much the same light as those of Noyes—except that, in general, they deliberately sought to modernize their language. Few of the Georgians possessed such a unity of purpose as that which links most of Noyes's lyrics, ballads and epics from *The Loom of Years* to *The Torch-Bearers*. With our present knowledge it is difficult for us to share his conception of the universe moving "by great rhythmical laws" towards some ultimate state where "truth and beauty are reunited", or to discern, as he discerns, scientific discoveries gradually revealing these hidden laws for the benefit and spiritual enlightenment of mankind. It is too

redolent of Tennyson's belief in the "one far-off divine event." Noyes was, of course, attracted more by the ideas and techniques of the Victorians than by those of his contemporaries, which accounts for the attitude of the Georgians towards him. To Swinburne can be traced the musical rhythms of his many lyrics; to Tennyson the hope in human progress, though in fairness it should be granted that Noyes has developed it into a faith which is, for him at least, substantiated by history; and in his retreat to the realms of faery—his Old Japan, the *Forests of Wild Thyme* (1905) and the legendary country of Prester John in *Forty Singing Seamen* (1907) are all variations—he is closely akin in outlook to the pre-Raphaelites. These fairyland verses are not, he tells us, to be read "merely as fairy tales, but as *an attempt to follow* the careless and happy feet of childhood back into the Kingdom of those dreams which are the sole reality worth living and dying for . . ." (the italics are mine). That is precisely why they are so facile and immature, and why his recurrent *Shadow-of-a-Leaf*, the Mad Moonshee, the Weirdrians, Creeping Sin and the rest of his figures are seldom anything more than whimsical figments. They are not the outcome of re-created childhood experiences or of a childlike intuition, but the self-conscious inventions of an adult mind.

His trilogy in blank verse, *The Torch-Bearers* (1930), claims some respect for its conception and performance. If Noyes's visualization of man's scientific progress as the torch of truth which has been passed on "from hand to hand through the centuries" appears now to be a naïve and implausible account of the way in which science directs us to "that one Power which guides the world", and if his failure to command a vehicle adequate either to the potentialities of his subject or to the experience of his own age seriously detracts from the structural unity of the work, there is, nevertheless, much of value to be derived from it. Indeed it is quite unnecessary for us to acquiesce in the poet's basic conclusions that the astronomers, geologists, botanists and scientists, whose "great moments" of discovery he recalls and correlates, are the instruments of a divine wisdom unconsciously leading us through the extension of knowledge to God, to recognize the pattern independently taking shape within the poem itself. The poetical style may be too pedestrian and the feeling too diffuse for the poem, as a whole, to make a vital impact upon the imagination, yet some of the separate episodes, such as that featuring Galileo or the British Association meeting of 1860, have a dramatic strength

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

which raises them high above the general level. Noyes's picture of Darwin shows not only how his mind was persistently drawn to the problems which had confronted many of the later Victorian poets, but also how he essayed to reconcile the facts proved by scientific methods with truths revealed by intuition:

*"He groped into the orchestral universe
As one who strives to trace a symphony
Back to its cause, and with laborious care
Feels with his hand the wood of the violins,
And bids you mark—O good, bleak, honest soul,
So fearful of false hopes!—that all is hollow.
He tells you on what tree the wood was grown.
He plucks the catgut, tells you whence it came.
Gives you the name and pedigree of the cat;
Nay, even affirms a mystery, and will talk
Of sundry dark vibrations that affect
The fleshy instrument of the human ear;
And so, with a world-excluding accuracy—
O, never doubt that every step was true!—
Melts the great music into less than air
And misses everything."*

Almost with his initial volume, *Songs of Childhood* (1902), Walter De la Mare succeeded in doing what Noyes so conspicuously failed to do in his poems of faery. For De la Mare, however, there was no question of a deliberate attempt to evoke the moods and nuances of childhood; he seems never to have lost a childlike faculty of thinking and seeing. Even in his later and maturer work, despite the faint suggestion of his apprehensiveness of the unknown (which in its transmission bears a distinct resemblance to the child's uneasiness when alone in the dark), there is all the innocence and incongruity of childhood, as if he were seeing the commonplace objects around him for the first time only and investing them with a mysterious significance. At first glance his *Songs of Childhood* appears to be restricted to the same creative sphere as Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, but a closer examination proves the similarity to be a purely superficial one. There is, for instance, a curious depth to most of De la Mare's poetry, an awareness of a region beyond the normal range of the senses—

POETS OF THE FIRST DECADE

"*Speak not—whisper not;
Here bloweth thyme and bergamot . . .
Perchance upon its darkening air,
The unseen ghosts of children fare,
Faintly swinging, sway and sweep,
Like lovely sea-flowers in the deep . . .*"
(*The Sunken Garden*)

—that is wholly absent from *A Child's Garden of Verses*. Stevenson's memories of his early life were sufficiently vivid to enable him to hold the child's interest with his ideas and reminiscences, but De la Mare relives and crystallizes the child's own experience. It is this quality, this apparent freedom of entry into a nursery-rhyme world of elves and witches, of fairylike birds and birdlike children, where anything can happen without breaking the spell, which makes it so difficult to place him in relation either to his predecessors or to his contemporaries. Among the poets who have been cited by authoritative critics as his influences are Yeats, Coleridge, De Quincey, Blake, Christina Rossetti, Poe, Hardy and Herrick, and though elements of his poetry can indeed be isolated for comparison with the work of each of these, such an analysis does not take us very far in determining how De la Mare obtains his richest effects. Nor does it elucidate how the various components—the dreamlike atmosphere, the lyrical tenderness, the subtle music, the visionary innocence, and other equally noticeable attributes—are blended in the single poem in the typical 'delamarian' manner. What he has learned from earlier poets has been absorbed so thoroughly that it is inseparable from the main body of his poetry.

In *Songs of Childhood* the emphasis is upon the lighter aspects of life as perceived by the child, and the volume includes a small proportion of nonsense rhymes which are dependent on the fantasy element or the delicate rhythms skilfully employed to preserve the illusion. *Poems* (1906) marks the first stage in the poet's development. While the delightful irrelevances have largely been expunged, the intuitive vision is directed, more penetratingly, towards spiritual realities and their bearing upon personal existence. There is a pervading sense of exile and of loss, a regret for the passing of youth, and with it a growing consciousness of all the implications of man's mortal nature:—

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

" *All the world's woods, tree o'er tree,
Come to nought,
Birds, flowers, beasts, how transient they,
Angels of a flying day.
Love is quenched; dreams drown in sleep,
Ruin nods along the deep:
Only thou immortally
Hauntest on
This poor earth in Time's flux caught;
Hauntest on, pursued, unwon,
Phantom child of memory,
Beauteous one!"*
(*The Phantom*)

Above all, in recording the advances made by the poet in his exploration of that region the existence of which is no more than insinuated in *Songs of Childhood*, these poems anticipate what was to become one of the salient features of his poetic faith, the belief in and the reaching-out to another dimension. The preoccupation with the intangible is not, as is too often assumed, actuated solely by a wish to escape from the world of events to an artificial but comfortable world of his own invention. His refusal to come to terms with modern theories of science and psychology is quite evident in his poetry—though in one poem he endeavours to reconcile the poet's approach with that of the scientist—and such pieces as *In the Dock* (from *The Veil*) demonstrate his incapacity to handle the more sordid materials of daily life. Nevertheless, far from desiring to withdraw into an unreal world, he conceives his object to be one of establishing some communion, however tenuous, with the real world of the spirit. If under the compulsion to do so he leads us into a strange landscape of deserted houses, darkling forests and haunted waters, a country illuminated by moonlight and inhabited by ghostly strangers whose presence is felt rather than observed, it must be conceded that, for the duration of the poem at least, it is real to the reader also. One surmises that this effect is due equally as much to his rare skill in the disposition of words and musical phrases as to the creative power of his imagination. In *Poems* one can see the origin of the masterly technique which De la Mare brought near to perfection in some of the lyrics contained in his later volumes, *The Listeners* (1912),

POETS OF THE FIRST DECADE

Peacock Pie (1913), *The Sunken Garden* (1917), *The Burning Glass* (1945), and which is responsible alike for the delicacy of his well-known epitaph, "Here lies a most beautiful lady", and the poignant tone of *Fare Well*:—

*"Look thy last on all things lovely,
Every hour. Let no night
Seal thy sense in deathly slumber
Till to delight
Thou have paid thy utmost blessing;
Since that all things thou wouldst praise
Beauty took from those who loved them
In other days."*

Analysis reveals that, in his best work, each word is so scrupulously chosen and allocated its special place in the structure of the poem that the utmost advantage is derived from both sound and associations; alliteration, assonances and internal echoes sustain the rarefied atmosphere, once evoked, from one line or stanza to the next; and by their unexpectedness sudden pauses—"a sort of catch in the breath"*—and variations in poems of ostensibly uniform metre enhance the potency. It looks so very simple and ingenuous that we do not appreciate quite what happened, nor how our scepticism has been allayed, until we dissect the individual poems and discover for ourselves the craftsmanship which has been employed. The pessimism reflected in many of the poems suggests an affinity with Thomas Hardy, but compared with the ethereal De la Mare, Hardy is earth-bound, his roots firmly implanted like an ancient yew in the Dorset soil. Like Hardy, De la Mare makes frequent use of an archaic diction, and he does not hesitate to invert his sentences to secure an easy rhyme. But it is only when he has been unsuccessful in conveying the mood that these defects become obtrusive and the poem loses in immediacy.

"Time in our waking state . . . is supervised by the world at large, and kept in order by a clock that obeys the sun. When consciousness, in whatever degree, either in quantity or quality, withdraws from that clock's, that heavenly sun's exacting sway, other conditions no less mysterious and more private immediately supervene," remarked De la

* H. C. Duffin: *Walter De la Mare* (Sidgwick and Jackson).

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

Mare in the introduction to his anthology, *Behold, This Dreamer*. It is in keeping with his propensity for speculation upon elusive states of being that he should be intrigued by the conditions which prevail when the conscious mind is no longer in full control. Hallucinations, day- and night-dreams, and the peculiar nature of sleep have exercised his curiosity far more than objects and occurrences of the waking experience. Most of his poems, and not least those involving the commonplace, have a dreamlike constitution. He moves "Out of the dream of Wake/Into the dream of Sleep." But he will have no traffic with the Freudian and other psychologists and their rational interpretation of dreams—

" . . . can
The least of his actions by human skill
Be measured as so much Sex, Want, Will?—
Fables so dull would the sweeter be
With extract of humour for company!"
(*Dreams*)

The psychologists, in confining their investigations to human instincts and motives, have, he feels, overlooked the probability that dreams may not only be "meaningful communings between self and self" but also "revelations of the spirit within". (It is interesting to observe that, while refuting, in the poem above, the absolute claims of Science as opposed to those of the imagination, he uses the same argument as Noyes does in his section on Darwin in *The Torch-Bearers*, and adduces one of the same items of evidence—the intricate pattern of a butterfly's wing.) The Stranger, in the poem of that title, whose name is Dream, holds in one hand "the fruit that makes men wise". It is the manifest content of dreams, "the enchanted foothills far away", that satisfies De la Mare's sense of the preternatural and starts him posing unanswerable questions. Do human beings possess astral bodies? What happens to man's spirit when his body is stilled in sleep? Such questions are implicit in several of his poems. It may be, he suggests, that conscious life as we know it is merely a dream from which we shall awaken at what we now call death to the realities glimpsed in our dream states. There is, of course, nothing new in conjectures of this kind, but De la Mare brings to his speculations a sensitivity which is exceptional today. Another aspect of this enigma

POETS OF THE FIRST DECADE

is the immobility of the physical body during the process of sleep. One poem describes *The Sleeper* as "Still as the dust of one that's dead/Whose spirit waits the entering in"; another, with the same title, the impressions of a child on entering the house on a summer's day to find her mother resting:—

*"Even her hands upon her lap
Seemed saturate with sleep.
And as Ann peeped, a cloudlike dread
Stole over her, and then,
On stealthy, mouselike feet she trod,
And tiptoed out again."*

In many of these poems in which he pursues his dream-self to the borders of the forbidden region, De la Mare reminds us of his subject in *The Listeners*:

*"'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest's ferny floor."*

Although he receives no answer or sign of welcome from the inhabitants he is somehow aware—and makes us aware, too—of their presence, and feels "in his heart their strangeness, their stillness answering his cry." Like the traveller he must return disconsolately from whence he has come.

*"Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
When the plunging hoofs were gone."*

The Veil (1921) contains a number of pieces which are quite outside his normal compass. It is as if he had suddenly become conscious of his remoteness from actuality and was striving to bring himself back to earth by concentrating upon social problems he had been disposed to avoid in his earlier poetry. In this volume he moves in the opposite direction to that in which he had already found his true medium, and writes of the criminal dragged from his poisonous slum, the suicide, the drug-addict with "unsated mouth ajar", a wrecked ship rotting on the sands, and a hospital, to whose Ancient

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

Tapster—"one silent of foot, hooded, and hollow of visage"—all keys must eventually be resigned. Some of these poems come as a distinct shock after what has preceded them, not merely because of the subjects involved or their treatment, but because the craftsmanship to which one has grown accustomed is demonstrably lacking. *In the Dock*, for instance, loads the dice so heavily that one gains the impression that the poet is more than legitimately exploiting the reader's emotions. "The World's grimed thumb . . . hooked securely in his matted hair" has brought the criminal to trial. "Justice for carrion pants." The criminal himself is "pallid, mis-shapen" and, as his "bloodless hands entalon" the rails of the dock, he "gloats in beast-like trance." So it continues, image after image, phrase after harrowing phrase. There are only fourteen lines, but before one reaches the final couplet, which might have been effective had the picture not been so luridly painted—

*"Sudden like wolf he cries; and sweats to see
When howls man's soul, it howls inaudibly."*

one has thrown aside any sympathy one had and the poem has lost every vestige of reality. There is deep feeling in this small group of poems, but not the discipline and restraint to be expected in a poet of De la Mare's standing.

The long philosophical poem, *The Traveller* (1946), is meritoriously conceived. Like his namesake in the earlier poem the traveller is exploring another world, yet of infinitely greater extent than anything De la Mare has imagined before. Allegorically, it can be related to man's spiritual journey through life, though it is rather vague for the parallel to be drawn very closely. The landscape is symbolical of Earth's eye and comprises three zones which are analogous to the features of the human eye, that is, the sclerotic, the iris and the pupil. From this conception one is led to assume that, for the purposes of the poem, De la Mare is postulating that man may be the subject of another's dream, as Alice was dreamt by the king in *Through the Looking Glass*:

*"'He's dreaming now,' said Tweedledee: 'and what do you think
he's dreaming about?'"*

Alice said, 'Nobody can guess that!'"

POETS OF THE FIRST DECADE

'Why about you!' Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. 'And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?'"

The poem is too long and the territory too vast for the poet to sustain his usual mysterious atmosphere, and because its philosophical bearing on our own disillusioned age cannot be educed with any degree of assurance, it leaves the reader in an indeterminate stage of emotion.

The Burning Glass, *Inward Companion* (1950), and *Winged Chariot* (1951), confirm the belief arising from a study of his previous volumes of poetry that, in his own fields, De la Mare can scarcely be challenged by any other poet of the last half-century; but those fields are strictly limited to the re-creation of childhood experience and the communication of rare states of mind such as those salvaged from dream-memory or fleetingly known when the stimulus of conscious activity has been withdrawn.

W. H. Davies attracted a great deal of notice with *The Soul's Destroyer* (1904), which he followed up with *The Autobiography of a Super Tramp*. Reading his work now, one suspects that the critics who praised it so highly then were guided by the knowledge of Davies' precarious circumstances and their desire to assist him, commendable as it was, rather than by the outstanding nature of his poems. It is remarkable that a man of little education, who had been a vagrant most of his life and was at that time living as a pedlar in a London "dosshouse", should write poetry of even a publishable standard. And his finer pastorals, and some of the lyrics in which he conveys his delight in scenes common to both the English town and countryside, are certainly more worthy of note than that; they possess a sweetness and a spontaneity which make an immediate appeal. Davies was a poet of few moods. If in the simplicity of his poems he sometimes bears a slight resemblance to Wordsworth, he had no share in the Wordsworthian vision and was seldom able to see beyond the external appearance of his subjects. Nor can it be urged that his powers of observation were particularly keen. The mere sight of a bird, a butterfly, or a flower was sufficient excuse for him to register his impressions in rhyme. His *Collected Poems* of 1916 and 1928, and *Poems* of 1934 and 1940, provide many examples of this versifying habit. Occasionally, he was stirred to comment upon social injustices, but such moments seem to have been inspired by personal frustration.

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson and Lascelles Abercrombie followed Mase-

field in the growing trend towards naturalism, the former by means of his simple narratives of ordinary people, the latter by his efforts to co-ordinate metre with contemporary diction. Gibson's three earliest books, including *The Golden Helm* (1903), were written under the marked influence of Tennyson; with *The Nets of Love* (1905) he suddenly switched over to realism and a Wordsworthian interest in "the incidents and situations from common life". The regional aspect manifests itself in his poems about Northumberland miners, furnacemen, railway-workers, and manual labourers, and the hazards they have daily to face in their occupations, but it is not regionalism at its highest level. There is too much of Wordsworth's flatness and too little of his imagination. Yet by fixing his attention upon the conditions in which they lived and toiled, the squalor and the poverty, the disasters in the mines, the heat and blaze of the furnaces, and all the paraphernalia of industrial civilization, as he does in the dialogue poems of *Daily Bread* (1910), rather than trying to communicate the emotions of these people, he usually escaped the banal sentimentality to which Masfield so often fell a victim. In some ways Wilfrid Gibson serves as a link between the Edwardian poets and those who, in opposition to the Georgians, emerged afterwards. For instance, his method of recording factual details of the industrial background to many of his poems furnishes a parallel with that of the "pylon" school of the 'thirties. The narrative poems of *Fires* (1912), more polished and wider in scope, show a definite improvement on anything he had written before. With *Thoroughfares* (1914) and *Livelihood* (1917) a stronger lyrical note became evident and this, together with a growing capacity for dealing with emotional situations, has distinguished the best of his subsequent work. During the 'twenties he wrote several plays which, whatever merits of characterization they possess, are hardly suitable for presentation on the stage.* In poems such as *All Souls* and *Bridal Night*:—

"Her sea-green eyes now shone as cold
As beryl-stones
In moonshine, by a ghostly spell
Rapt from him, evermore to dwell
Upon a rackle of dead bones:

* It should be pointed out that Wilfrid Gibson states in an introductory note that *Krindlesyke* "was not conceived with a view to stage-production".

POETS OF THE FIRST DECADE

*And with bewildered heart he felt
His life was done,
Since in the night her love had died,
And they, estranged, lay side by side,
Divided by a skeleton."*

(Bridal Night)

he chooses what is for him an unusual subject, if one that arouses his imagination—the malign influence of the dead upon the living—but he is essentially a poet of narrative.

The prevalent need for a poetic diction closer to ordinary speech rhythms was also felt by Lascelles Abercrombie. As a general rule he essayed to combine such a diction with traditional forms, and after his experiments with dramatic monologue in *Interludes and Poems* (1908) he turned to dramatic poetry. It was Abercrombie's ambition to revive the vitality of the Shakespearian and seventeenth century stage, utilizing a realistic language which would appeal to his own generation. He had a wide range of subjects but was at his most eloquent when his speculative habits of mind could be freely indulged. *Sale of St. Thomas* (1911) is based on a legend and presents the conflict of St. Thomas, torn between his longing to devote himself wholeheartedly to the cause of Christianity and a human regard for personal safety:

*"But prudence, prudence is the deadly sin,
And one that groweth deep into a life
With hardening roots that clutch about the breast."*

It is a theme which, carefully handled, might well have served his purpose. Unfortunately, Abercrombie had little sense of theatre and in *Sale of St. Thomas* philosophical dissertations hold up the movement and reduce the central character to a mere mouthpiece of the author. The same defect can be found in his other dramas. Having impressively built up the tension, he destroys it again by his own prolixity. Odd subjects taken from history, folk-lore and mythology, had a curious fascination for him; and not infrequently his ideas are too abstract for transmission through this medium. As dramatic narrative much of his work has considerable vigour and an intellectual element

uncommon for the time. *Emblems of Love Designed in Several Discourses* (1912) is typical of his liking for metaphysical inquiry within the bounds of a given situation imaginatively reproduced—in this case that of a woman in love, treated from the point of view of various classical figures.

Another poet of this period who applied himself to the stage, but with more intimate knowledge of its requirements, was Gordon Bottomley. *Poems at White Nights* (1899), *The Gate of Smaragdus* (1904) and *Chambers of Imagery* (1907) all betrayed him as a somewhat belated disciple of pre-Raphaelitism. Rossetti and Morris were his masters and his earliest poems, skilfully contrived and smooth-flowing, seldom depart from the languorous atmosphere cultivated by the pre-Raphaelites. A new vigour was imparted to his style when he began to write poetic drama. It is probable that he learned a great deal by studying the methods of Stephen Phillips, a much lesser poet whose collected poems appeared in the 'nineties and whose *Paolo and Francesca*, produced in 1902, raised a storm of extravagant praise. It is difficult, now, to understand why *Paolo and Francesca* was accounted such a tremendous success, unless it was by contrast with the output of the Victorian poets who had failed so dismally in this field, and the result of over-enthusiasm on the part of critics who envisaged the beginning of a new English dramatic phase. Be that as it may, Phillips' success with the audience of this period was due, not to a singular poetic talent, but to his experience of stage technique, gained during the years he spent acting with a Shakespearian Company of players. Gordon Bottomley also realized that poetic drama was something more than a combination of poetry and drama, and, following Phillips' example, became thoroughly conversant with the principles of stagecraft. Like Abercrombie, he looked back to the glories of the Shakespearian age for his inspiration, but because his plays were intended to be acted rather than read, they have a keener dramatic effect. *King Lear's Wife* (1915), conceived as a prelude to Shakespeare's famous play, and *Gruach and Britain's Daughter* (1921), are the best of his dramas. Of his miscellaneous poems, the hymns of *Imagination, Form and Touch*, from *Poems of Thirty Years* (1925), and a number of short lyrics, demonstrate how much he has derived from the study of poetic drama.

G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, both Catholics, offered a minor diversion in the way of humorous and satirical verse. The

POETS OF THE FIRST DECADE

pre-Raphaelite influence can be discerned in Chesterton's preference for mediaeval legend as a source of material for his ballads, yet his religious ideals led him in a different path from that taken by either Rossetti or Morris, and his boisterous manner suggests a close affinity with Kipling. Rhetoric and cheeriness abound in his galloping rhythms and proclaim his love for England. However genuine his emotion—and Chesterton's sincerity cannot be questioned—one feels that it is slightly overdone. His hearty poetic slaps on the reader's back have a discouraging effect. The denunciations of capitalistic materialism and the insistence upon the liberation of the English people from modern "slavery" amount to nothing more exciting than an appeal for a revival of the past; a replacement of industrial civilization by a highly-glamorized version of the feudal system, supported by an early-mediaeval religious faith. Much of his satire was dissipated upon trivialities, too. His less ambitious poems, such as *The Donkey*, and the drinking-songs of *Wine, Water and Song* (1915), together with *The Ballad of the White Horse* (1911), stand out among a conglomeration of inferior verse. More controlled, but forceful when occasion allowed, Hilaire Belloc was the finer craftsman. Poems like *Tarantella* have a lightness of touch of which Chesterton was incapable. Apart from a few attractive lyrics, however, Belloc makes a deeper impression with his caustic but very enjoyable humour, exemplified in *Cautionary Tales for Children* (1908). Lord Alfred Douglas, also a Catholic and a writer of lyrical and satirical verse, is, perhaps, better known for his exhaustive treatment of the Petrarchan sonnet.

Throughout the period under review the scholastic tradition was upheld by Laurence Binyon, Thomas Sturge Moore and Sir William Watson, while Sir Henry Newbolt continued unflaggingly to celebrate the virtues of patriotism and the public school spirit in the naval ballads of his *Songs of the Sea* (1904) and *Songs of the Fleet* (1910). Refined sensitivity is the distinguishing feature of Laurence Binyon's work, a sensitivity more in tone with the aspirations of the nineteenth rather than the early twentieth century; but of these four poets, all of whom were writing in the previous decade, only Binyon gave the slightest indication of an adjustment to the demands and potentialities of the new age. That he was aware of the need for such a change in outlook, yet uncertain as to the means of accomplishing it, is confirmed by a comparison of his *London Visions*, published in the 'nineties, with

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

his subsequent poetry. His lyrical spontaneity gives place to narrative and a mood of heavy deliberation. The grandiloquent manner, apparent in even the surest of these poems, is altogether too reminiscent of Matthew Arnold for the individual voice of the poet himself to break through. Binyon was pursuing what was for him a natural line of development and it enabled him to penetrate the imbrications of verbosity and conventionally poetic diction in *The Syrens* (1925), an ode dealing with the spiritual problems of man in conflict with his own environment. If this long poem does not entirely fulfil its promise, it does at least supply evidence of Binyon's willingness to wrestle with modern angels. The discipline involved in his later translations from Dante endowed his poems with a keener edge, a more sharply defined outline, which proved extremely apt for his *Mediterranean Verses*:

*"In the last light a column glows
Where once the white perfection rose
Imperfectly divined
By the rebuilding mind*

*Which treasures up a shape, a thought,
From footprint or from echo caught,
Hard gleanings that attest
Oblivion has the best."*

Binyon's last collection, *The Burning of the Leaves* (1944), which appeared after his death, is imbued by the same devotion to craftsmanship, and strengthened still further by his resolution to look beyond the immediate prospect of a world again at war.

The philosophical demeanour of the old parents, Damon and Cydilla, at the conclusion of Sturge Moore's *Sycilian Idyll* (1911)—

*"We must be doing something, for I feel
We both shall drown our hearts with time to spare."*

seems to typify the whole of its author's copious output. And in all his searching among biblical stories and the classical Greek legends for "something to do", he was never quite able to shake off the Victorian habits of thought and oration. The pre-Raphaelite influence

was strongly marked in *The Vinedressers* (1899); and if Sturge Moore succeeded in casting it aside, it was only to develop a pedestrian and tortuous style of his own. At times he can be both eloquent and profound, but these times are so rare and the compensating passages are so entangled in page after page of dull narrative that the reader's powers of endurance are heavily taxed in their discovery. It is not that there are any major technical lapses—a few glaring faults might have broken the monotony—but that his material bears little or no relation to ordinary life. Sturge Moore is the scholar's poet, dry, academic, and sometimes pedantically accurate to the point of tedium; his themes have already been worked to exhaustion and are either too remote or too obvious even to have much consequence as allegory. His dramas, too, have no stage reality.

Meanwhile Thomas Hardy was slowly adding to his achievement with the publication of *Poems of the Past and Present* (1902), *Time's Laughing Stocks* (1909), *Satires of Circumstance* (1914) and *Moments of Vision* (1917), although for several years the critics were loth to recognize his growing stature as a poet. There was a certain amount of justification for this lack of response to his poetry. Quite apart from the fact that Hardy had long been classified as a novelist, and one does not normally expect a novelist to turn poet at the age of sixty, all these volumes contained a substantial proportion of indifferent verse. The truth is, of course, as Hardy afterwards explained, that he started to write poetry before "novel-writing had been thought of as a pursuit". What is inexcusable on the part of the critics is that they overlooked both the poetic impulsion of the novels and the essential unity of his prose and poetry.

"Unadjusted impressions have their value," wrote Hardy, "and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change." The whole of his literary career can be summarized as a persistent effort to correlate his various experiences, his unadjusted impressions and moments of vision, in order to attain a coherent philosophy. However depressing the conclusions he reached, however sombre the pattern of life as he understood it, once he had established what appeared to be the truth, he would allow no compromise or sentiment to deflect him from the purpose of recording his convictions:—

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

*"Why, O starving bird, when I
One day's joy would justify,
And put misery out of view,
Do you make me notice you?"*
(*The Reminder*)

Nor did his profound feeling of pity for man enmeshed in the "complicated web of melancholy mirth" persuade him to indulge in futile gestures of defiance. Rejecting the idea of a personal God, at once all-loving and omnipotent yet oblivious of human misery and suffering, Hardy sought through Schopenhauer's theory of the Immanent Will for an affirmation of his private conception of "evolutionary meliorism"—

*"That the rages
Of the ages
Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that were,
Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair!"*
(*The Dynasts*)

—but it was never a very firmly-rooted belief. Towards the end of his life, if one can base an opinion on the poem *He Resolves to Say No More*, it would appear that he had renounced even that meagre hope and resigned himself to an acceptance of the knowledge of man's inevitable doom, on which for some obscure reason he declined to elaborate—"What I have learned no man shall know."

The Dynasts, "an Epic-Drama of the war with Napoleon, in three parts, nineteen acts, and one hundred and thirty scenes" (1904-8), was intended to crystallize his ideas concerning the operation of the Immanent Will, which is revealed partly through the dramatic action itself and partly through the introduction of supernatural Intelligences, described as the Spirits of the Years, the Spirits Sinister and Ironic, the Spirits of the Pities, etc., who comprise the choruses. Set against the huge background of Napoleon's military adventures during the period from 1805 to his final defeat in 1815, a period which had employed Hardy's imagination at intervals since childhood, this panoramic view of European history with its battles and retreats, its re-creation of legendary incidents and its treatment of episodes involving numerous major characters, provided ample scope for Hardy's

POETS OF THE FIRST DECADE

sense of architectural design. Yet with the abundant material at his disposal and so many important figures to engage his ingenuity, he still managed to show the incidence of these international events upon the lives of the soldiers and officers, peasants and servants, and all the thousands of anonymous men and women who played such an involuntary part in the "eternal artistries in circumstance". It is cinematographic in the manner that it sweeps over the vast landscapes and crowded battle scenes to focus upon this or that individual or group—the soldiers left behind with Napoleon, the girl seeing her lover off to the war, the men from opposing armies drinking at a brook during the battle of Talavera, or Napoleon contemplating his defeat at Waterloo—incidents which in themselves may or may not be significant to the dramatic movement, but which assist in preserving the unity of the whole as the poetic camera swings from tragedy to light relief and back again to catastrophe. There is remarkable variety in the language, too, with its prose dialogue and "stage directions", the lyrical and elegiac power of its choruses, the curious remoteness of the Intelligences, the songs and ballads, and always the quiet unrhetorical strength of the blank verse which links them together and regulates the changing tempo of the drama. In his very conception of *The Dynasts*, as well as in his method of presentation, however, Thomas Hardy evinced the tendency prevalent among the poets of his age to hark back to the traditions of the past rather than dwell upon the realities of the present.

This can scarcely be said of Charles Montagu Doughty, in spite of his eccentricities of style and his archaic diction. In going back to the beginning of British and European history for the basic material of his epic poem, *The Dawn in Britain* (1906) and, more conspicuously, in his attempts to revive the language of Langland, Chaucer and Spenser, in all its freshness and vigour, Doughty not only broke completely free from the pressure of nineteenth century poetic conventions, but also carried forward and renewed a comparatively neglected tradition. The first experiments he conducted towards this end were in the field of prose. His *Arabia Deserta* is a vivid account of his travels in Arabia, and though it was published in 1888, when Doughty was already aged forty-five years, it is possible to establish a definite connection between the interest in primitive cultures displayed throughout this volume and the primitivist foundation to the poetical work which began to appear nearly twenty years afterwards.

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

Doughty has often been likened to the pre-Raphaelites, but the comparison is far from being an apt one; he is much closer to Bridges and Hopkins in his linguistic approach to poetry. Indeed one might contend that he was too sedulously occupied with problems of syntax and vocabulary for his work to have the imaginative force it might have possessed. There is a diffuseness about *The Dawn of Britain*, *The Titans* (1916) and *Mansoul* (1920), which robs these poems of their vital impact. *The Cliffs* (1909) and *The Clouds* (1912), recounting an imaginary invasion of England from the air, have a truly prophetic note out of common with the days in which they were written. Doughty's poems have not, so far, received the attention they deserve. It may well prove that poets of a succeeding generation will turn to Doughty in order to extend still further the tradition he wished to see restored.

The Georgian Movement

DURING the early days of its inception, and, in certain quarters, for many years afterwards, the Georgian movement was regarded as a poetic "rebellion". No doubt the prefatory note to the first anthology of *Georgian Poetry* contributed by the Editor, Edward (later Sir Edward) Marsh, gave currency to that illusion. "This volume," it was announced, "is issued in the belief that English poetry is now once again putting on a new strength and beauty . . . may if it is fortunate help the lovers of poetry to realize that we are at the beginning of another 'Georgian period' which may take rank in due time with the several great poetic ages of the past. . . . Two years ago some of the writers represented had published nothing: and only a very few of the others were known except to the eagerest 'watchers of the skies'." A number of literary commentators, including some who were antagonistic to the new movement, were equally convinced of its rebellious nature. Their criticisms sound amusingly like those applied by the Georgians, in their turn, to the 'modernist' poetry which followed—" . . . fitful lack of dignity . . .", "cleverness is, indeed, the pitfall of the new poetry", " . . . it has its origin in a freakish desire to shock", " . . . recurrent tendency to neglect the claims of form and structure" and "writing in defiance of metrical tradition". Practically all these or identical phrases have been, and are still being, used in the disparagement of contemporary poetry. Scrutinizing the five volumes of *Georgian Poetry* issued during the years 1912-22, the modern reader may well be curious as to precisely what it was that either puzzled or surprised the critics of those days.

The truth is that the movement, as such, was nothing more than an organized reaction against the lingering Victorian standards, and those of the 'nineties in particular, which, as has been shown, cast an oppressive shadow upon the poetry of the first decade of the present century. As has also been shown, a number of poets were already taking some measures of resistance. Of itself, therefore, the movement

had little of a positive character to offer, though a few of its supporters had considerable talent. Nor does quite a substantial proportion of the total output of those associated with the group (and there were forty in all) necessarily conform to the accepted Georgian principles. For his anthologies Edward Marsh seems to have aimed at finding the common factor in their poems, which to a large extent accounts for both the "corporate flavour" of Georgian poetry, noted by Mr. Middleton Murry*, and its peculiar lack of tension. There was, in fact, a great diversity in the work of these poets which the Georgian anthologies do not fully bring out. The first volume, for instance, contained poems by John Masefield, Walter De la Mare, W. H. Davies, Wilfrid Gibson, Lascelles Abercrombie, Gordon Bottomley, G. K. Chesterton, T. Sturge Moore, Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater, James Elroy Flecker, D. H. Lawrence, Harold Monro, Ronald Ross, Edmund Beale Sargent, James Stephens, and R. C. Trevelyan. Five of these, including Chesterton and Sturge Moore, were dropped with the second volume because "they belong to an earlier poetic generation". Presumably this was the reason for the exclusion of Belloc, Yeats, Hardy and Binyon, but the younger and more experimental poets, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Herbert Read and the Sitwells, were also unrepresented. The most surprising choice was that of D. H. Lawrence, who appears strangely out of place in this company.

If the Georgians were determined to break away from Victorian conventions of style and idiom they tended to fall back upon the early Romantic tradition for support in their attitude to life; but it was an attitude far simpler than that of either Blake or Wordsworth, two of their principal influences, and it constituted a mental retreat from the contemporary scene. There was an implied ban (not always strictly observed) on the employment of archaic words, phrases and grammatical constructions. The grand majestic manner and the prophetic strain of the nineteenth century were equally in disfavour. Patriotism was admissible if it found expression through the appreciation of local landscapes and a mild form of regionalism (Bridges and Housman provided the patterns), rather than through the blatant imperialism of Kipling or the Old-School mentality of Newbolt. Humanitarian ideals and affection for animals inspired some of their best and some of their most deplorable efforts, but whatever subjects were chosen they had to be treated with the utmost decorum—Masefield's *The Ever-*

* *Aspects of Literature* (Cape).

THE GEORGIAN MOVEMENT

lasting Mercy and *The Widow in the Bye Street* were both ridiculed in parody by J. C. (afterwards Sir John) Squire, one of the later spokesmen of the group. Finally, they emphasized the values of country life as opposed to those of the modern age of machines and urbanized society. It is this aspect of their poetry which provoked the criticism that they were merely "week-end cottagers", because many of them were, so obviously, town-dwellers self-consciously adopting the recognized group-mannerisms and writing on a subject with which they were insufficiently acquainted. In a few of them, however—such as Edward Thomas and W. H. Davies—the love and knowledge of the English countryside were genuine, and it was these poets who kept alive the authentic pastoral tradition within the Georgian movement; a tradition which has subsequently been continued by Edmund Blunden and Victoria Sackville-West.

This is to generalize, of course, and exceptions to the foregoing statements will readily spring to hand. One of the chief difficulties in defining the exact scope of the movement is that several of its adherents published work which goes beyond the normal Georgian range. These poets had only one foot in the camp, as it were. Others drifted away or fell into heresy. Nor was the first World War without its effect upon them, though Squire would tolerate no innovations which to him savoured of realism—" . . . it is a production of the School of Real Human Emotions," he wrote, "that is leading a return to Life and Religion and Natural Action and away from the refined aestheticisms of so many of our modern poets." If it is borne in mind that the term Georgian denotes a particular type of poetry rather than the entire output of the poets usually identified with the movement, and if attention is given primarily to the anthologies in which that type of poetry has been gathered together, Georgianism, with all its virtues and limitations, can be seen for what it is. Nevertheless, there is danger that the distinctive qualities of the poets, with which we should be most concerned, may be obscured by undue insistence upon the application of the group label.

The work of Masfield, Gibson, De la Mare and others has been discussed in the previous chapter, and a study of their contributions to the Georgian anthologies will add nothing to what has already been said. Indeed a more comprehensive grasp is obtained by treating them as Edwardians who paved the way and prepared the reading public for the reaction against Victorian conventions. Among those

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

who aided Edward Marsh in launching the new movement which rapidly gained prestige were Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater and Harold Monro. It is unfortunate that Rupert Brooke's reputation owed so much to the few sonnets he wrote on the outbreak of hostilities in Europe. His early death (due to blood-poisoning) in April, 1915, while on active service, was instrumental to the creation around him of a kind of myth which, though it increased the demand for his work, bore no relation to his achievement or to his potentiality as a poet. After two world wars and many years of unrest in international affairs, accompanied by a growing sense of guilt and personal responsibility on the part of the individual, the myth—and with it, Brooke's reputation—has faded. Had he lived long enough to experience the actual conditions, if not to apprehend the wider implications, of modern warfare, it is almost certain that his outlook would have undergone a radical change from that of the guileless young man who could write—

*"Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping"*

—to express the feelings aroused in him by the call to action. Before the war he had, in fact, gone further towards the realistic interpretation of life than most of his contemporaries. But realism, for Rupert Brooke, meant recording the various aspects, pleasant and unpleasant, of a conventional situation or theme, and not the use of colloquial idiom in the manner of John Masefield. His picture of Wagner with "his pendulous stomach . . . a-shaking", the "gummy-eyed and impotent" Helen in old age, the sweating German passengers in *Dawn*, and the seasick lover of *A Channel Passage*, are all examples. What has been called his cynicism was the result of a genuine desire to present the truth, even if this occasionally entailed overstepping the bounds of good taste. In his approach there is an originality for which he is seldom given credit. Not that his method was particularly adventurous, but it was unusual in the cultural circles to which he was accustomed, and there is a possibility that he would have developed it to a more significant purpose. "There are common and sordid things—situations or details—that may suddenly bring all tragedy, or at

least the brutality of actual emotions, to you," he observed in vindication of *A Channel Passage*. "I rather grasp relievedly at them, after I've beaten vain hands in the rosy mists of poets' experiences."

His earliest poems betray both his aesthetic susceptibilities and his sensuous response to life; and though he was able to modify the former, he could never quite reconcile the latter with the intellectual side of his nature, despite the experiments with "common or sordid detail". Thus a conflict was set up which he never entirely resolved. It appears over and over again. Brooke's choice of theme was limited, yet his general craftsmanship reached a high level and this, combined with an easy flow of language, conferred upon his work a natural elegance. But it is in the South Seas cycle of poems that his talent is most convincingly demonstrated; and *The Great Lover*, however evocative it may be in its appeal, is not among the best of them. There is, for instance, a refreshing humour about the fishes' *Heaven*, and some satirical thrusts which can hardly have gone unnoticed at the time:

*"Fish say, they have their Stream and Pond;
But is there anything Beyond?*

.

*One may not doubt that, somehow, Good
Shall come of Water and of Mud;*

.

*But somewhere, beyond Space and Time,
Is wetter water, slimier slime!
And there (they trust) there swimmeth One
Who swam ere rivers were begun,
Immense, of fishy form and mind,
Squamous, omnipotent, and kind;
And under that Almighty Fin,
The littlest fish may enter in."*

Retrospect, *Hauntings* and *Tiare Tahiti*, perhaps more clearly than the others in this group of poems, suggest the powers he might have exercised if he had survived to fulfil the promise of his South Seas phase.

John Drinkwater's first volume was published in 1903, but it was not until Edward Marsh and his associates had aroused public interest

in "modern English poetry", as they termed it, that he obtained any recognition. His work is essentially Georgian in tone and treatment and, if his range is wider than that of Rupert Brooke, it rarely transcends the accepted limits of the movement. Technically competent as a rule—he could sink to extraordinary depths of insipid versification, at times—Drinkwater had little personal vision and, apart from one or two effective lyrics, his poems lack edge and often fail to make any vital impression on the reader. This may, with equal truth, also be said of the work of Edward Shanks, W. J. Turner (until he moved out of the Georgian orbit), J. C. Squire, John Freeman and many of the lesser figures. In their pastorals all these poets were capable of inaccuracies in description and vague appeals to sentimentality, largely because they were conforming to the predominant fashion and simulating the correct poetic emotions, instead of writing from their own experience. It would be a mistake to imply that they were all failures. Some excellent pieces, such as *The Pigeons* by John Freeman, were composed in accordance with the Georgian prescription, but it will be noticed that such poems have an individual note and an unusual intensity, from which one may infer that the poet concerned was, on occasion, sufficiently moved by his own impulsion to overcome the new restrictive conventions of the time.

The Georgian anthologies were published from The Poetry Bookshop opened by Harold Monro, who was responsible for the publication of separate volumes by unestablished poets, and for organizing at the Devonshire street premises the readings which helped to make Georgian poetry so popular. One of the active founders of the movement, Harold Monro was also one of its most interesting poets. In the introduction to Monro's *Collected Poems* (issued posthumously in 1933), Mr. F. S. Flint depicts him as a romantic idealist whose integrity forced him to accept the logical conclusions of his experience and, unlike most of his fellows, to give them recognition in his creative work, losing his romanticism in the process. Indisputably his poems in the early stages of his career were as vapid as any of his contemporaries. There are the usual loose statements and poetic attitudes—moreover, they are couched in a diction which includes words so archaic that they often infringe the Georgian conception of modern language. There is a poem on goldfish:

THE GEORGIAN MOVEMENT

"They are the angels of that watery world,"

another to his dog:

"Out in the garden your head is already low.

(Can you smell the rose? Ah, no).

But your limbs can draw

Life from the earth through the touch of your padded paw."

and the conventional pastoral touches. Yet even at this phase the realistic note would sometimes rise to the surface—perhaps not always so insistently as in *The Swamp*—to be diverted into the orthodox channels. It is this aspect of his work which leads one to believe that Monro was unconsciously suppressing his personal feelings in order to conform to the Georgian notions of poetry. His gradual dissociation from the movement to which he was partly committed, in itself a proof of his artistic integrity, left him free to develop his individual talent. It was not, as Mr. Flint suggests, a question of shedding his romanticism—one does not have to look very far to discover the underlying romanticism of his later work, though it is tempered by a vision which will admit no self-deception—but of fulfilling himself as a poet, as he did in such mature poems as *Bitter Sanctuary* and *Midnight Lamentation*:

*"I cannot find a way
Through love and through;
I cannot reach beyond
Body, to you.*

*When you or I must go
Down evermore,
There'll be no more to say
—But a locked door."*

(Midnight Lamentation)

Nor should it be forgotten that he played an important part in the development of contemporary poetry in general. In spite of his own limitations and his early connection with the Georgian movement, he was not unduly exclusive in the type of book he chose to publish.

He encouraged experimental work of all kinds. The philosopher and theorist of the Imagist group, T. E. Hulme, was invited to give one of his lectures at the Poetry Bookshop. When Ezra Pound compiled *Des Imagistes*, an anthology which he hoped "would serve as a counterblast to Harold Monro's *Georgian Poetry*", it was Monro himself who published the London edition, to the annoyance of his fellow Georgians. The Poetry Bookshop, oddly enough, became as much a centre for the Imagists as it was for the Georgians. Among other books published by Monro were *Antwerp* (1915) by Ford Madox Ford, *Images, Old and New* (1915) by Richard Aldington, and *The Farmer's Bride* (1916) by Charlotte Mew. In 1922 he published Osbert Sitwell's derisive attack on the Squirearchy (as Squire's intimate circle became known) under the title *The Jolly Old Squire, or Way Down Georgia*, but by that time Monro could hardly be numbered among thorough-going Georgians.

Almost as much out of his element in the Georgian atmosphere as D. H. Lawrence, though in a very different way, was James Elroy Flecker. One wonders how he gained admittance to the fold. It may have been due to the good offices of his friend, Rupert Brooke, who was with him at Cambridge; for apart from the few vacations or sick leaves spent in England he was abroad the whole five years preceding his death in 1915, and could not have been in close touch with the rest of the group. It is doubtful that his exotic poetry, whatever its merits, would otherwise have been acceptable to Edward Marsh. Yet, having been included, his work had exemplary force in the shaping of Georgian policy, especially in the avoidance of strong personal emotion and anything in the nature of a "message". "It is not the poet's business to save man's soul, but to make it worth saving," Flecker declared. His earliest verse was composed under the influence of Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, and Francis Thompson, and has affinities with both pre-Raphaelite and Decadent poetry: but while translating Catullus, Propertius and other classics he acquired a keen sense of discipline which improved his style and bestowed a new structural firmness upon his lines. Like the Decadents before him he was drawn to French poetry, but to that of the Parnassians rather than that of the Symbolists; in particular, to the work of Leconte de Lisle, Hérédia, Samain and de Régnier, which he also translated. "The Parnassian School," he wrote in the preface to *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* (1913), "was a classical reaction against the perfervid

sentimentality and extravagance of some French Romantics. The Romantics in France, as in England, had done their powerful work and infinitely widened the scope and enriched the language of poetry. It remained for the Parnassians to raise the technique of their art to a height which should enable them to express the subtlest ideas in powerful and simple verse."

Flecker, then, set himself the task of achieving similar results in English. *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* is, in consequence, superior in many respects to his previous volume, *Forty-Two Poems* (1911). If he afterwards repudiated the Parnassian label he had attached to himself, he continued to apply the Parnassian doctrine, as he interpreted it, to his work; and, one might add, with salutary effect. The influence of Hérédia and de Rénier can be traced to his poems. Fundamentally, he was a Romantic, as his early allegiances suggest, so that his preoccupation with form and technique served as a valuable corrective. Thus he provides a curious example of a Romantic poet trying to write to classical models. Not that he was always careful to discriminate between the Parnassian and Symbolist theories. His extensive reading of French literature and his translations from Jean Moréas and Baudelaire, both prominent in the Symbolist movement (Baudelaire, had, of course, previously been associated with the Parnassians), led him to confuse the subtler issues between them and there is a persistent strain of Symbolism in his poetry. This, combined with the Eastern settings and the deliberate exclusion of personal sentiment, establishes a definite relationship between Flecker and the Imagists.

His romantic inclinations found an outlet through his interest in Oriental culture and ways of life, and his experience in the Consular Service granted him the opportunity to indulge them. Hence the background to poems such as *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*, *Yasmin*, *War Song of the Saracens*, and *The Gates of Damascus*, where his love of rich colour and his exotic taste are freely displayed, yet at the same time kept under adequate control. His poetic drama, *Hassan* (1913), is lively and well-constructed, but it is too reminiscent of the *Arabian Nights* pattern for its dramatic qualities to be properly brought out. Flecker had, in fact, read and enjoyed a French version of the *Arabian Nights* immediately before writing the play, which he originally intended as a comedy. The farcical elements have not entirely been eliminated in the revision. Although *Hassan* contains

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

some fine symbolism, much of it loses the significance it might have possessed simply because it is presented in an artificial manner. The scenes of sadistic cruelty, the torture and executions, the Procession of Protracted Death, the courage and suffering of the lovers, Pervaneh and Rafi, are all remote from us and do not compel any real feeling. This artificiality is apparent in most of Flecker's poetry. His efforts towards objective precision seem to have been unaccompanied by an awareness of the tensions of his age. His visions were of another world:

*"I have done foolishly to tread
The footway of false moonbeams,
To light my lamp and call the dead
And read their long black printed dreams."*

Like Brooke, however, he had not reached his full maturity when he died at the age of thirty-one.

With J. C. Squire's rise to prominence a minor purge took place within the Georgian ranks. Until then it had been possible for poets of such differing techniques as Flecker, Lawrence, Sturge Moore, and Masfield to meet on the common ground between them. Squire evidently thought that a clarification of the aims and methods of the Georgian movement was essential and began to exert what pressure he could. As literary editor of *The New Statesman*, critic for several other periodicals, and, after the 1914-18 War, founder-editor of *The London Mercury*, he was excellently situated not only to give direction and impetus to the movement, but, further, to act as general arbiter so far as poetry was concerned. His entertaining parodies in *Tricks of the Trade* (1917) were directly aimed at the styles of poets older than himself, some of whom had been represented in the first anthology compiled by Edward Marsh. Georgian poetry took on a recognizable tone and water-colour. If it was more consistent than it had been before, it was, indubitably, confined to narrower channels. Squire's own poetry was surprisingly uneven for one who was supposed to be dictating the trend. Despite his suspicion of emotional displays—the real motive for his attacks upon Masfield's work—he often slipped into a kind of emotional understatement peculiar to himself which barely conceals the sentimentality in which it is rooted. *To a Bull-Dog*, written during the war, is an example:

THE GEORGIAN MOVEMENT

*"And though you run expectant as you always do
To the uniforms we meet,
You'll never find Willy among all the soldiers
In even the longest street."*

Rivers, usually quoted as one of his best poems, is, with its catalogue of rivers from Thames to Amazon, largely a poetic exercise in geographical data and trickles to its conclusion in a feeble imitation of De la Mare. *The Birds*, more finished, is nevertheless yet another effort to exhaust the subject within the bounds of a single poem, going back in this case "a million years before Atlantis was" to establish the antiquity of his rooks, wood-pigeons and blackbirds, and lacks any real concentration of ideas or emotion. There is, again, the inevitable list—containing thirty or more species of birds, as if the poet had taken it for granted that the mere enunciation of their names would of itself call forth the desired response to the mystery of Nature, "lovely and sweet and touching unto tears". The impact is weakened by elaboration upon the actuating line of thought. Squire's ode, *The Moon* (1920), closely follows the pattern in nocturnal pastorals already laid down for his "Country Boys". One feels that in all these poems the recipe has been over-diligently applied. *Lily of Malud* rises above this level in introducing the aesthetic element, but it is some of the shorter lyrics, less ambitious and therefore less mechanically contrived, that possess the simple dignity and reflective temper in which Squire is seen to advantage. His humorous verse has considerable merit, too, and should surely have been represented in his *Selected Poems* (1948).

To the Georgian compassion for animals can be ascribed a few pleasing and many sentimental poems. Monro's *Milk for the Cat*, James Stephens's *The Snare*, and Ralph Hodgson's indignant *The Bells of Heaven* are among the most convincing of these, though unrestrained emotions are involved in the last two. For his dramatic force of statement Hodgson stands out among the group; he has, however, published little since that time. In *The Bull*, his most penetrating creation, he took a completely fresh approach in portraying the relationship between the herd and its ageing leader, and the gradual diminution of the old bull's power, in a manner which has subsequently been revived by Wilfrid Gibson in such poems as *The*

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

Old Seal. His narrative, *Song of Honour* (1913), was included in the second Georgian collection.

If J. D. C. Pellow's *The Temple*, ostensibly concerned with "fair sacramental trees", supported the alignment of its author with the Georgian pastoralists, it also gave clear signs of his religious propensities. Almost all his later poems are imbued by his Christian outlook, and in 1937 his religious mystery play, *World's End*, was broadcast by the B.B.C. It is interesting to observe how his work has been strengthened by the influence of T. S. Eliot:

*"There is the Land; there is Utopia. Forward,
Down to the ford, and across, and up
Into the Land, to possess it.
But when you go up (as I shall not;
In Moab must I die) do not forget
The dust you came from, the dry desert
Where once blossomed roses, where no rain falls now,
Where no corn grows and there is no pasture for cattle,
Where olive and vine have withered for want
of the grace of heaven.
Do not forget the wilderness, the rubble of dead cities,
The sun-bleached ribs lying along the track,
Crumbling again to dust."*
(*Moses on Pisgah*)

There is a religious aspect to *In the Cool of the Evening* and *The Lonely God*, by James Stephens, the Irish poet. In both poems Stephens treats of spiritual values, the former depicting Adam and Eve in Eden after the Fall, and the latter, a poem of epic proportions, his conception of God in His dealings with the exile, man.

Among the poets who appeared in the Georgian anthologies in addition to those already referred to, the following should also be mentioned: Martin Armstrong, Edmund Blunden, Robert Graves, Francis Ledwidge, Thomas Moulton, Robert Nichols, Peter Quennell, Victoria Sackville-West, and Fredegond Shove.

It is convenient, at this juncture, to consider the work of Edward Thomas. For at least twenty years Thomas restricted his writing to prose and it was not until 1914 when the discerning American poet, Robert Frost, suggested that he should impart what he had to say in

THE GEORGIAN MOVEMENT

"verse form" that he directed his authentic poetic talent towards its proper channels. Even then he was so diffident about the venture into this new field that he published his *Poems* (1917) under the pseudonym of Edward Eastaway. Although he has previously been mentioned in connection with the Georgian pastoralists, his work is not in any strict sense of the term Georgian; nor, oddly enough, was it included in the anthologies produced by Edward Marsh. But at certain points, notably in his feeling for the English countryside, he appears to have been covering the same ground as many of the Georgians. The appearance, however, is misleading, as an assiduous study of his work will bring to light. In his most outstanding poems there is a somewhat indefinable awareness of subtle and hidden relations existing between man and environment, of significances just beyond the perceptibility of touch, sight or sound:

"Not a word she says;
And I can only wonder how much hereafter
She will remember, with that bitter scent,
Of garden rows, and ancient damson trees
Topping a hedge, a bent path to a door,
A low thick bush beside the door, and me
Forbidding her to pick.

As for myself,
Where first I met the bitter scent is lost.
I, too, often shrivel the grey shreds,
Sniff them and think and sniff again and try
Once more to think what it is I am remembering,
Always in vain. I cannot like the scent,
Yet I would rather give up others more sweet,
With no meaning, than this bitter one.

I have mislaid the key. I sniff the spray,
And think of nothing: I see and I hear nothing;
Yet seem, too, to be listening, lying in wait
For what I should, yet never can, remember:
No garden appears, no path, no hoar-green bush
Of Lad's-love, or Old Man, no child beside,
Neither father nor mother, nor any playmate;
Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end."

(Old Man)

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

Little effort is made to draw a parallel or to extort a moral from what he has intuitively recognized. There is no straining after effect. The words he chooses—or, as he preferred to see it, the words that choose him—

*“ Out of us all
That make rhymes,
Will you choose
Sometimes—
As the winds use
A crack in a wall
Or a drain
Their joy or their pain
To whistle through—
Choose me,
You English words? ”*
(Words)

express, with the maximum economy, those subtleties of thought and feeling he wished to communicate. The poet is wholly absorbed in conveying only so much as has been revealed to him, no more and no less, and though he may be conscious of the charged symbols everywhere around him, he is too scrupulous to exploit them or utilize them in other than that which he apprehends to be their legitimate context. This is why some of his poems seem to be inconclusive, on the verge of a discovery which is never announced. For Thomas was always on the verge of discovery, always in pursuit of his essential self—as he describes his experience in *The Other*—

*“ And now I dare not follow after
Too close. I try to keep in sight,
Dreading his frown and worse his laughter.
I steal out of the wood to light;
I see the swift shoot from the rafter
By the inn door; ere I alight
I wait and hear the starlings wheeze
And nibble like ducks; I wait his flight.
He goes: I follow: no release
Until he ceases. Then I also shall cease.”*

THE GEORGIAN MOVEMENT

but on that quest, he painstakingly details the landscape and leaves behind him clear signs as to the paths he has taken. Unlike most of the Georgians, he did not turn to the country as a means of escape from either the conditions of modern civilization or his own emotions. Nor, on the other hand, did he become an inherent part of the landscape, accepting without question and being accepted, in the habit of one born to that sense of unity which country life engenders in its true natives. In this he was separated from Robert Frost, his only real influence. A genuine lover of nature in all its devious forms, Edward Thomas was also the trained observer, meticulously noting the "tall reeds like criss-cross bayonets", "the great diamonds of rain on the grass blades", "the white and gold and purple of curled fronds unsunned", "the green elm with its one great bough of gold", the goose feathers at the edge of the forest, or the relative ages of church, farm and yew tree; and adding his personal comment in a pregnant phrase:

"I cannot bite the day to the core."

*"But I learned how the wind would sound
After these things should be."*

*". . . Or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain."*

His descriptions of natural scenes are accurate and to the point, each detail being etched in with due sense of proportion. If he did not write as an indigenous countryman himself, he acknowledged the countryman's scale of values and embodied it in his poetry; and, impelled by his heightened sensibility, he strove consistently to capture the essence of things in his quiet, conversational idiom. A bird-note from the undergrowth, a wild rose scent "that is like memory", or merely the

*"Odours that rise
When the spade wounds the root of tree,
Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,
Rhubarb or celery:"*

(Digging)

were the portents which induced him to lie in wait for an unfolding of the mystery. Far more often than otherwise there was no annuncia-

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

tion, and then he had to remain content with the little that had been granted; yet he refused to embellish the experience or augment it in any way. "Anything, however small, may make a poem," he insisted. "Nothing, however great, is certain to. Concentration, intensity of mood, is the one necessary condition in the poet and in the poem. By this concentration something is detached from the confused immensity of life and receives individuality." It is this unique depth of feeling, combined with the economical and apparently effortless language, which lifts his work out of the general rut of week-end cottage verse so typical of the period.

During the last forty years American poets have exerted an increasing influence upon poets of this country. Edward Thomas, in assimilating the colloquial diction of Robert Frost, the New Englander, and making it so organically his own, was one of the first British poets of this century to benefit from what might be termed a poetic blood-transfusion. He was killed during the 1914-18 war, and in the three years that he was writing his poems he not only developed a highly individual style, but also introduced a new textural element into English poetry.

Edmund Blunden is more of a natural countryman, if also more literary in his approach. Although he is conscious of "half-ideas, verges of shadows and misty brightness", he is usually concerned with the substance rather than the shadow, with the varied appearances of the countryside in which he is so completely absorbed rather than with groping for the intangibilities beyond them, with cultivating the habit of quiet reflection and reminiscence rather than that of intuitive enquiry. One discerns this even in his far from unrealistic poems of the first World War, despite his recognition of "Death's malkins dangling in the wire/for the moon's interpretation" where he had previously glimpsed trenches "allayed with lulling moonlight" (*Illusions*). It would seem that this enduring faith in the goodness and sanity of English country life sustained him throughout his war-time service which he might otherwise have found unbearable. It was a safeguard against the horrors and obscenities of war, a mental retreat from experiences he could not assimilate, a redeeming contrast to everything that threatened to destroy his peace of mind. There is a striking illustration of this in *Third Ypres*, from *Undertones of War* (1928), where he recalls a particularly harrowing incident and his own

hysterical reactions. In the middle of a gory passage one encounters the following lines:

" Doctor, talk, talk! If dead
Or stunned I know not; the stinking powdered concrete,
The lyddite turns me sick—my hair's all full
Of this smashed concrete. O I'll drag you, friends,
Out of the sepulchre into the light of day,
For this is day, the pure and sacred day,
And while I squeak and gibber over you,
Look, from the wreck a score of field-mice nimble,
And tame and curious look about them; (these
Calmed me, on these depended my salvation)."

It is doubtful that Blunden has ever been able to reconcile his experience of war with his own dispassionate outlook on life; yet, as though he were fully aware of this state of conflict and trying to resolve it in his poetry, he persistently reverts to the subject of war, not in its general aspects, but to particular episodes in the hostilities of 1914-18. Hence in *Poems 1930-40*, published after the outbreak of the second World War, there is a section devoted to *Echoes from the Great War* which contains *Near Richebourg St. Vaast, 1916*; *The Camp in the Wood* (Somme battle, 1916); *Near Albert-sur-Ancre, 1916*; *Company Commander, 1917*; and others of a similar category. "It is not a case of morbidly wishing to go back that road or of want of anxious interest in current events," he explains in the Preface, "but those who saw that tremendous time will know that it does not easily give up its hold." These belated war poems convey nothing of the violence and brutality of *Undertones of War*. One feels that he has been compelled to call back the experience in order to eradicate what he cannot remember with tranquillity. The dock, henbane and nettle in "one of those corners behind a great war" have finally triumphed; the war, "for all its cunning", has "missed this orchard brook"; the desperate wood has "found green grace again". While he is mentally retracing his steps in this fashion, his pastoralism is, we may surmise, exorcizing the ghosts which have haunted him for many years. Even so, he is far from being at ease and these poems are not to be compared, either in craftsmanship or imaginative perception, with those in which he has been free to express his appreciation of nature without recourse to

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

distressing memories. For instance, it is not often that he perpetrates such a sentence as that which, referring to the guns, occurs in the fourth stanza of *The Camp in the Woods*: "... still their big mouths send/Horrible hate to Huns."

When dealing with contemporary events, Blunden is entirely out of his depth. Only the most naive of poets could have written

*"How things most complex, coiled and twined, simplicity
may best unbind
Is no new secret; but till now it never showed so fountain
clear.
The meeting of four men as friends unhorses all the ancient
fiends;
Believing still the best will ever yield the best, as now it ends
One swollen and final fear."*

(*Exorcized*)

to celebrate the historical meeting of Hitler, Mussolini, Daladier and Chamberlain in September, 1938, when the fate of Czechoslovakia was settled, whatever may be said in defence of that decision. It is necessary to review these aspects of his work, not for any intrinsic importance they may have, but to understand both his limitations and his achievement. Away from his rural haunts and his study he is at a considerable disadvantage.

Blunden's earliest poetry, *Pastorals* (1916), *The Waggoner* (1920) and *The Shepherd* (1922), unequivocally affirms his allegiance to John Clare and the eighteenth century, though from an academic viewpoint. This is in no way an affectation; the manner is almost as natural to the poet as if he had lived at the time of Clare. Like Edward Thomas he is precise in describing exactly what he sees before him but does not possess Thomas's gift for laconic statement. In his middle period he was inclined to overcrowd his landscapes with too much insignificant detail; every barn, stream, and broken fence (I speak metaphorically) had to be painted into the scene. Perhaps he was still troubled by his personal conflicts. With his recent books, *Shells by a Stream* (1944) and *After the Bombing* (1949), there has been fresh development, unusual at this stage of a poet's career. Not only has Blunden regained the original intensity of mood, but owing to the stronger influences of Thomas Hardy and Robert Browning in the use of colloquial diction, new power has been added to his poetry. He may

THE GEORGIAN MOVEMENT

now be regarded as one of the leading exponents of the pastoral tradition in the present age.

The eighteenth century style is again to be found in the elegance and charm of Victoria Sackville-West's poetry:—

*“The country habit has me by the heart,
For he's bewitched forever who has seen,
Not with his eyes but with his vision, Spring
Flow down the woods and stipple leaves with sun,
As each man knows the life that fits him best,
The shape it makes in his soul, the tune, the tone,
And after ranging on a tentative flight
Stoops like the merlin to the constant lure.”*

The Land (1926), from which the above extract is taken, is a modern version of the Georgic, in which the ordered life of the countryside at various seasons of the year is described with the quiet relish so typical of this poet. It is probably Victoria Sackville-West's most accomplished poem and suitably demonstrates her artistry in the fields in which she has chosen to confine her poetic activities, and chosen not unwisely. Not many contemporary poets have been so consistent or so alert to their own qualifications. Her *Selected Poems* (1941) contains a few lyrics which can be ranked with *The Land*, but most of the poems in this volume reflect the underlying serenity which constitutes her main source of inspiration. Nowhere is this attribute of mind so assuredly in evidence as in *Evening* with its evocative picture of the fishing fleet in harbour:

*“—Then, and then only, have I thought how sweet
Old age might sink upon a windy youth,
Quiet beneath the riding-light of truth,
Weathered through storms, and gracious in retreat.”*

There is little of the Georgian sentimentality towards the ways of nature and those who must earn a living from the soil; her vision is practical enough for her to see “only the battle between man and earth”. Implicit in her later work is an awareness of the troubled world beyond her rural domain, and in *The Garden* (1946)—a sequel to *The Land*—though she has withdrawn to a more secluded retreat, the outside world seems to be pressing heavily upon her, disturbing the even tenor of her thoughts.

The American Scene

AMERICAN poetry*—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, the work of certain American poets—has affected English poetry to a considerable extent since the first World War, and at some points of contact the rapidly developing American traditions have almost merged with those of the British Isles. In the near future it may be that these traditions will draw even closer together, rooted as they are in the same distant past.

The two most obvious influences have, of course, been those of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, both of whom left their native country early in this century, the latter subsequently adopting British nationality. At the opening of the twentieth century there were no poets of any major stature in America. William Vaughan Moody and Edwin Arlington Robinson were both writing, it is true, but Moody died before he reached full maturity and Robinson had just begun his poetic career. Of the second half of the nineteenth century only three names stand out: Edgar Allan Poe (actually Poe died in 1849), Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. The poems of Emily Dickinson were published posthumously in 1890 and did not become widely known for some years. The delayed influence of Poe provides an interesting example of the interblending of various national cultures. For sixty or seventy years after his death his work, though appreciated, made little impression upon the poets of his own country. Yet in France it was eagerly assimilated by Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé and Laforgue, who regarded the American as a major poet, and Poe's ideas were modified and incorporated in the French Symbolist theories. Thus symbolism owes something to Poe. His influence spread throughout Europe and even reached South America. It was not until it returned indirectly through the poetry of T. S. Eliot, via

* For the purpose of this volume, the term "American poetry" refers to that of the United States as distinct from that of the countries of South America.

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

Eliot's studies of Baudelaire and Laforgue, that Poe's work had any real impact upon American poetry.

For many years the American tradition was synonymous with the Whitman tradition. "To most people, native or foreign," comments Mr. Oscar Williams in the introduction to his anthology, *A Little Treasury of American Poetry*,* "Whitman is the archetype of American poets. And rightly so, for in his work may be found certain fundamental characteristics of American poetry which appear again and again in the work of others who, on the surface, may seem to have little in common with him. To Whitman, love was a mingling with all mankind, a concern for the mass of man and democratic institutions. His subject was the social scene, his nature had the vastness of a continent always active with the nomadic flow of humanity at work." Like the English poets of the first decade, the American poets were struggling against the lifeless conventions of the previous century. Moreover, they were dominated by the Whitman ideal of encompassing every aspect of American life:—

*"not merely a nation but a teeming Nation of nations,
Here the doings of men correspond with the broadcast doings
of the day and night,
Here is what moves in magnificent masses careless of particulars,
Here are the roughs, beards, friendliness, combativeness the soul
loves,
Here the flowing trains, here the crowds, equality, diversity the
soul loves."*

Accordingly their work was derivative, if not of Whitman, then of English models in a vain effort to repudiate any allegiance to him. What vitality and strength the originals may have possessed were largely absent. Whitman's personal vision of the New World—

*"In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barleycorn
less . . ."*

*"I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy.
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their
counterpart of on the same terms . . ."*

* Published by Scribner, New York (1948).

—however adequate for the America of his prime, was, in any case, far too broad in its sweep, too robust in its approach, and too general in its affirmations, for the new industrial and capitalistic society which had emerged in the meantime and assumed control.

In this setting Edwin Arlington Robinson took upon himself a part similar to that played by Thomas Hardy on the other side of the Atlantic; and, if fundamentally he belonged to the nineteenth century, he served as a forerunner of the modern poets in his own country. In his philosophical outlook, too, he resembled Hardy, but, as is to be expected, his views were qualified by what he had absorbed from American literature. Emerson's transcendentalism, for instance, gave some direction to his thought; and his assimilation of the subtleties of Henry James (another expatriate) and William Dean Howells impelled him towards the psychological study of character, a feature of his poetry which established a distant relationship between him and Robert Browning. So that, although he professed to be unable to distinguish any vital purpose in human behaviour and existence, his fatalism was not so harshly pronounced as Hardy's and he clung, almost desperately, to an irrational faith in a kind of superhuman power which would in some indeterminate manner add meaning to the future. Above all, he was honest with himself and with his poetry. While most of his fellows optimistically accepted the idea of the inevitability of human progress (no doubt confusing this with material progress) and were platitudinizing glibly about America's place in the evolutionary scheme, Robinson took the then unpopular line of writing about life as he had experienced it in the streets of Gardiner and New York. In this he followed Whitman, except that where Whitman was content to generalize and to rely upon all-inclusive catalogues in his appetite to embrace the various elements of American society, Robinson preferred to study life at closer quarters. He was intrigued by the problem of individual maladjustment and many of the characters he invented—Bewick Finzer, Miniver Cheevy, Captain Craig, Clavering, Richard Cory, etc.—exemplify some type of frustration. They provided him with the opportunities to employ his gift of irony to the fullest extent. If he dwelt unduly upon human failure, courage was the one virtue he esteemed before all others—"The saddest thing in life/Is that the best thing in it should be courage." Yet there is no sentimentality in his work; for him it was

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

"A dreary, cold, unwholesome day,
Racked overhead,
As if the world were turning the wrong way,
And the sun dead."

and that is exactly what he described.

Robinson's importance lies not in his philosophical beliefs or non-beliefs so much as in his reaction to the circumstances of his life and time. Judged by his long psychological poems, he may even be regarded as a near-failure; though it is to the shorter poems of *The Town down the River* (1910) and *The Man against the Sky* (1916) we must go in order to see him at his best. Quite apart from his actual achievement, however, Robinson has an historical significance. Not only did he continue the poetic tradition of New England, to be extended by Robert Frost, but by his determination to present the truth in the colours he recognized, he assisted in making possible the developments which followed shortly afterwards. He was too bound up in the nineteenth century to carry any experiments through to a successful conclusion himself; indeed his very conception of form was so obviously unsuited to the material at his disposal that his own poems emphasized the need for a medium of expression capable of lending itself more readily to modern colloquial idiom.

About the same period as that in which the Georgian movement was being organized in England a poetic renaissance was starting in America which was to have far-reaching results. One of its first signs was the appearance of the new magazine, *Poetry*, founded by Harriet Monroe in 1912 and published from Chicago. Another and a clearer indication was the emergence of regional cultures within the American pattern. It has already been remarked that the culture of every people usually comprises two distinct elements, the regional and the cosmopolitan; and that, in the course of time, these elements blend to constitute the national tradition. This process can be seen in operation, sometimes in the work of a single poet, in the development of contemporary American poetry. Virtually the only regional tradition which had existed in America prior to the present century was that of New England. Within the space of a few years Carl Sandburg with his *Chicago Poems*, Vachel Lindsay with *General William Booth Enters into Heaven* and *The Congo*, and Edgar Lee Masters with his *Spoon River Anthology*, had asserted the place of the Middle-West on the

poetic map. They were followed in the 'twenties by an even more integrated group of poets, the Fugitives of the South, whose principal spokesmen were John Crowe Ransome and Allen Tate. Robinson Jeffers began to write of the Californian scene, and poets were becoming known in other parts of the country. Meanwhile, in New England, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, and, later, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Elinor Wylie, upheld the local tradition.

T. S. Eliot has attained such a world-wide reputation during the last twenty years, and so much attention has been given, and rightly given, to his erudition that it is seldom appreciated to what extent his work has been conditioned by his experience as a child and youth. Eliot comes of a distinguished New England family which can trace its ancestry back to the seventeenth century emigrants from East Coker, in Somerset, England. His early life was spent partly in Massachusetts and partly in St. Louis, and he was educated at Harvard before going on to Oxford and the Sorbonne. Hence we find throughout his poems continual reference to the sea and the rocks of the New England coastline (particularly in *The Dry Salvages* and *Ash Wednesday*), or to the river—the Mississippi of his St. Louis days. Similarly his earliest poems convey his reaction to the social environment of Boston, the fashionable drawing-rooms and concert rooms, the tea parties with their futile conversations and shallow relationships, the music and the voices with a “dying fall”, as well as the “lonely men in shirt sleeves, leaning out of windows”, “the damp souls of housemaids sprouting despondently at area gates” and “sawdust restaurants with oystershells”. In Boston, too, he discovered the characters he has since made famous, Sweeney, Miss Helen Slingsby, J. Alfred Prufrock (*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* was first published in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*) and others. At a deeper level we can trace back to his adolescence the satirical attitudes, the anglo-catholic propensities, and the indictments of modern civilization. It is true that these characteristics have far wider connotations, but their origin lies in Eliot's response to the surroundings of his early life. In his poetry the regional and international elements meet and imperceptibly mingle.

If, during the second decade of this century, the newly-awakened public interest in poetry in England, with its longer and more complicated cultural history, stimulated the growth of the Georgian move-

ment, flaunting as it did the loose strands of several traditions, in America the main emphasis was placed on realism. No doubt the reception given to Masfield's *The Everlasting Mercy*, published in 1911, encouraged the tendency to describe common experiences in normal speech rhythms. Nor should it be forgotten that Rudyard Kipling lived in Vermont for some years and had a strong following in Boston. But the American poets, naturally enough, were being faithful to the Whitman line of development, except that where Whitman had generalized they essayed to apply his ideas in greater detail to their own local environments. Although not himself a disciple of Whitman in the sense that Sandburg and Lindsay were, Robert Frost is easily the most important of these writers; one might go so far as to rank him as one of America's finest living poets and perhaps as the leading contemporary exponent of the colloquial style in the English language. As if to prognosticate a closer inter-relationship between the English and American traditions in the future, his first book, *A Boy's Will* (1913), was published in England while he was living here for a few years. I have already remarked his influence upon Edward Thomas; it can also be detected in the poems of Andrew Young and, indirectly—it may be through Thomas and Young—in the work of several later poets. Frost is, in fact, a not insignificant link in the English chain. And since 1913 there has been an increasing exchange of publications, to say nothing of poets, between England and America.

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco, but his family were New Englanders for generations back, and when he was ten years old he returned with his family to the native region. He might well have lived there his whole life, for he exhibits all the distinguishing features of the typical New Englander, and his poems are almost always concerned with local characters and occasions, or with the New England scene, against which and through which he succeeds in illustrating broader principles and values. "Only by affirming what is most real in regional, local and communal life, will mankind be able to meet the challenge of the planetary, when every country will be within a few hours reach of each other," remarked Mr. Philip Mairet some years ago. No poet is more aware of this than Robert Frost. The local atmosphere is there, bestowing a reality upon every poem he undertakes. This is not to suggest that his work is in any way

parochial; even in what seem to be purely descriptive pieces there is an underlying significance which relates them to the world outside. It is his regional outlook and feeling which makes him so indubitably a poet of the universal.

I should like to emphasize this point because in recent years there has been so much confusion as to what regionalism is and precisely how it operates within the cultural framework. There are still many people under the misapprehension that it is a form of provincialism chiefly connected with the adulation of local scenery and the preservation of rural dialects and customs. For instance, in his otherwise excellent chapter on Robert Frost, Professor James G. Southworth writes*: "He does not select his details because they are typically and solely New England, but because they are important in themselves, and would be anywhere. He writes about what he knows, and few persons know their own district as well as Mr. Frost knows his New Hampshire and Vermont. *I stress this to avoid Mr. Frost being considered a regional poet.* Nothing . . . is farther from fact. He has used regional details to bolster and illumine general universal truths." Now while I am in complete agreement with what Professor Southworth says of Frost's poetry, I must register a strong protest against the conclusion he reaches in the passage quoted above and insist that the qualities he puts forward as evidence that Frost is not a regionalist are those very qualities which make him a regional poet of a remarkably fine order. Moreover, they are the attributes shown by the most outstanding regional poets, no matter what districts they represent. Professor Southworth has, regrettably, confused regionalism with provincialism.

Far from being a redirection to an obsolete past or a narrow-minded preoccupation with affairs of the local parish, as seems to be the general impression among those who advocate "cosmopolitan culture", true regionalism is a movement towards a future in which an organic pattern of everyday life in each community is the source of human dignity and mutual respect. Usually it arises from a natural affection for or an attachment, conscious or unconscious, to a particular environment; but alternatively it may assert itself in the form of a reaction against the existing social or economic conditions (for example the satirical attitude expressed in Eliot's earliest poems was initially provoked by the social strata of Boston, though it also has

* *Some Modern American Poets* (Basil Blackwell, 1950).

its universal applications). It finds an outlet through the language, traditional culture and manner of life of the people belonging to the region (usually, even long after they have left the area), always modified, of course, by the intellectual and emotional experience of the individual. To secure and maintain such a balanced state of society, in which each region makes its own contribution to the whole culture of the nation or comity of nations, it follows logically that all the complexities of economic, industrial and international relationships must be taken into consideration. The poet or artist who in his creative activities fails to do so may easily find himself isolated in a mental backwater, at best a local-colourist, at worst a sentimentalist relying solely upon his conception of a past that has never actually existed. For, as Mr. Cleanth Brooks has pointed out, there can be no proper apprehension of the past without an immediate knowledge of the present. In this sense one is justified in regarding internationalism as a coextension of the regional principle, depending, as it must do, upon the integration of a diversity of cultures.

It should be evident that the regional attributes in poetry will vary according to the peculiar environment and experience of the individual poet and will be stimulated and enriched by his emotional impulsion. The most striking characteristic of Robert Frost's poetry is his use of speech rhythms, by which he was able to free himself from the conventions of the nineteenth century and to express so casually those truths having a peculiar relevance for the present age. Wordsworth, for all his endeavours to describe the situations of ordinary life "in a selection of language really used by men", was never so completely successful as Frost has been in this respect. Nor has Frost made the same banal mistakes. Perhaps that is due to the fact that Wordsworth chose "humble and rustic life" to furnish him with examples of the type of language he needed for his task, whereas Frost has earned a living directly from the earth and, as a small-scale upland farmer himself for many years, taken a vital interest in rural life. The language of his poetry and the ideas communicated through it are intrinsically his own, as are the dry sense of humour and the flatness of pitch; yet not only his own, but of New England also. It is as though he is giving utterance to the unvoiced thoughts, the barely-crystallized imaginings and the restrained emotions of the community to which he is bound by invisible ties, and in doing so throwing strong light upon human situations known to us all:—

THE AMERICAN SCENE

*"One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
So was I once myself a swinger of birches."*

(Birches)

Like a considerable number of his poems, *Birches* can be enjoyed at several levels. Frost seldom moralizes, but his philosophy is implicit in all his work; and the more artless and unassuming his poems seem to be, the more effectively do they fulfil their real purpose. No sensational imagery is pressed into service, nor do isolated lines assault the mind with their brilliant organization. Yet slowly and subtly the full implications are elicited, frequently without being so much as hinted at by the poet. The reader is compelled to equate the poem with his own experience, to interpret it in his own idiom, at times almost to participate in the creative act. In this manner Frost can write of the boy swinging on his father's birch-trees, an old farm labourer returning home—"something you somehow haven't to deserve"—to spend his last hours, two neighbours repairing a common boundary wall together, a wood-pile or a patch of blueberries, a brook that has been trapped beneath the newly-built city, mowing or fetching water or any of the countless apparently trivial tasks to be done about a farm, and yet succeed in communicating far more than the bare meaning of the actual words he utilizes. To some extent all poets, in their individual ways, aim at achieving the same result, but Frost can do it with the simplest and most ordinary words, giving them a new value and currency. No nature-mysticism is called in to enhance the impression. Frost makes no attempt to identify himself with vague mysterious forces outside his control or catch the "ghostly language of the

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

ancient earth". His world is a solid one, where trees are trees and mountains unmistakably mountains—

*"It doesn't seem so much to climb a mountain
You've worked around the foot of all your life.
What would I do? Go in my overalls,
With a big stick, the same as when the cows
Haven't come down to the bars at milking time?
Or with a shotgun for a stray black bear?
'Twouldn't seem real to climb for climbing it."*

(The Mountain)

The tragic and commonplace are depicted in their true proportions, and shown in their relations both to one another and to the background of everyday life. And, as so often happens in everyday life, the tragic and the trivial are inseparable elements. Frost recognizes, too, that

*"Most of the change we think we see in life
Is due to truths being in and out of favour."*

(The Black Cottage)

If single lines do not detach themselves in the reader's memory, it is not due to the poet's lack of technical skill. On the contrary, the words are so carefully selected and placed, and the development of the theme so artistically controlled, as to obtain the maximum effect for each poem as a complete entity. And if Frost's language and his rhythms are those of ordinary conversation, with much of the diffuseness which it entails, he invariably maintains a lyrical note. The method is allegorical in most of his work, though Frost's allegories are not so obvious as those of, say, Swift or Bunyan. He does not, for instance, describe the adventures of a Gulliver or a representative Christian in an imaginary country or set of circumstances in order to emphasize familiar truths. Nor, on the other hand, does he reverse the process and portray the familiar in an unusual light in the manner of Kafka. There are exceptions, of course, such as *The Witch of Coös*, in which one of the characters relates how a skeleton climbed up the stairs from the cellar to the attic, where it was quickly nailed in—"The attic was less to us than the cellar." There seems to be some-

THE AMERICAN SCENE

thing of both Kafka and Bunyan in his psychological make-up. As a general rule Frost takes the common scene or incident for his subject and writes as if he were talking about it to a number of personal friends; and, no doubt because principles remain the same however diverse the customs and ideas of different communities of people, what he writes has a definite relevance for us all. Moreover, because he appears to be weaving a simple story around his New England characters, the allegorical element may not at first be recognized for what it is, but the effect is secured even when the reader is not fully aware how it has been obtained. Frost's practical knowledge of the countryside and his capacity for accurate observation assist in creating a realistic atmosphere.

The disadvantage of this method becomes immediately apparent when he is not at his surest: then the impact of the poem is deadened by the prevailing diffuseness and flatness of tone, a weakness that is accentuated perhaps by the absence of compact or forceful metaphors. Examples can be found in Frost's earlier volumes, *A Boy's Will* (1913), *North of Boston* (1914), *Mountain Interval* (1916), *New Hampshire* (1923) and *West-Running Brook* (1928). Fortunately, the poet has been discriminating enough to discard the less successful pieces and his *Selected Poems* (1936) contains the most important of his early work. Nevertheless the consistent standard of his poetry from the beginning is in itself remarkable, and he has always avoided the "modern parlour game" with fashionable diction and imagery. The odd characters he has created, Baptiste, the Hired Man, Meserve, the owner of the Black Cottage, the Gum-Gatherer, and the Witch of Coös and others, spring directly from the soil of his own experience and are conditioned by his climatic environment. Throughout his life there has been gradual development in technique and a crystallization of the humanitarian ideas with which he seemed to be wrestling in his first book.

His present stature can be appreciated by a comparison of *A Masque of Reason* (1948), a collection of forty or so lyrics and two masques, with the most outstanding work published during the last ten years. These poems, as a whole, exhibit all the qualities which have been remarked here and which make Frost so distinctive a poet. Written in his typical style, the shorter pieces are more concentrated and have a more intellectual basis than those of previous books without losing anything of the colloquial touch. The long dialogue poems in

blank verse, *The Masque of Reason* and *The Masque of Mercy*, are concerned with a problem which has long exercised his powers of imagination and logical argument—God's justice (or injustice) and mercy in his dealings with man, symbolized by Job in the former and by Jonah in the latter. To describe them as theological discussions in poetry would be to say the very least about them. In these two poems Frost expresses the natural philosophy it has taken him a lifetime to acquire and many poems to formulate so comprehensively. They represent the height of his achievement in technical proficiency and in the communication of ideas drawn from practical experience, in a language that is both vigorous and informed by his usual salty humour. One feels that "the Keeper" is a mouthpiece for Frost himself when he says:

*"I'm too much afraid of God to claim
I have been fighting on the angels' side.
That is for Him and not for me to say . . .
And I can see that the uncertainty
In which we act is a severity,
A cruelty, amounting to injustice
That nothing but God's mercy can arrange."*

The poets of the Middle-West, Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters, began where Whitman had left off, but none of them had the requisite vision or the capacity to extend the tradition much further. Their main functions appear to have been those of interpreting the Whitman ideal in their own locality and, in doing so, of laying the foundations of a new regional culture. Masters, for example, in his *Spoon River Anthology* chose to concentrate upon the people of the Spoon River district, obtaining a perspective and an historical background by presenting, in a series of epitaphs, what he conceived would be the views of the recent dead if they were invoked to talk of their loves and hates, their aspirations and futilities, in the after-knowledge of the grave. The same method of presentation was adopted by Sidney Keyes in 1942 for his *The Foreign Gate* in which the dead soldiers of various battles of the past are called upon to "remember too the way/Of speaking without lips", though his object was a different one. Keyes was engrossed in his cogitations upon death and war, and sought only to act as a medium for the dead, whom he

THE AMERICAN SCENE

did not individualize or identify. While they intensify the poem they remain ghostly voices speaking from the darkness beyond:—

*"These are the voices:
Here between fire and ice
Between the frost's pale foliage and the bright
Leaves of the fire, they call continually
Without expecting answer . . ."*

Masters, on the other hand, was interested not in death but in the innumerable facets of life, and in war only so far as it had directly impinged upon the lives of the people about whom he was writing. His picture of Spoon River was intended to symbolize all human society and to indicate the values which may be said to have a universal application. In this, whatever his merits or demerits as a poet, Masters was a true regionalist, recognizing the affinities between local and national culture. All his epitaphs are minute character sketches, complete in themselves, of the ordinary men and women of the vicinity; of Elmer, Herman, Bert, Mag, Lizzie and Edith:—

*"One passed in a fever,
One was burned in a mine,
One was killed in a brawl,
One died in a jail,
One fell from a bridge toiling for children and wife—
All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill."
(The Hill)*

The collection, therefore, aptly demonstrates not only how the diverse elements in the life of any community react upon one another, but also how they combine to make up the social pattern of the region as a whole, which in its turn becomes a vital part of the all-embracing national pattern. Nor does Masters hesitate to portray the social evils; the greed, frustration and warped outlook of individuals; the private tragedies as well as the major catastrophes with which they had to contend; the trivialities and the friendships which bound their lives together.

Vachel Lindsay roamed further afield, reading his poems to mixed gatherings throughout the West in a serious attempt to reach a wider audience. For a time he was successful, too. More emotional than

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

Edgar Lee Masters and, for that reason, more inclined to trust in rhetoric to carry his poems—which may partly account for his popularity—he was stirred to anger against all manifestations of social injustice, and regarded himself as the champion of the poor and the inarticulate:—

*“Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly;
Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap;
Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve;
Not that they die, but that they die like sheep.”*

(The Leaden Eyed)

Lindsay took Whitman's cloak upon his shoulders. As he tramped about the country declaiming his verses, he picked up the language and the popular tunes of the people he moved among, to memorize and incorporate them in his work at a later date. He made good use of them all, the folk-songs, the working chants, the revival hymns, the jazz-tunes and local ditties, as his basic rhythms. Consequently there is a rich strain of vulgarity running through much of his poetry, a vulgarity that had an instantaneous appeal for his listeners. They found his poems exciting precisely because he had caught the everyday rhythms of their lives and allied them to their own simple language. It was not so much what he said that mattered, but the tuneful manner he had of saying it. In *Congo* it is the sound values, the insistent rhythmical beat so suggestive of ancient Africa, which, rather than the actual words, sustain the piece. His most anthologized poem, *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven*, is largely dependent on similar effects, despite its unusual conception:—

*“Booth led boldly with his big bass drum.
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
The Saints smiled gravely and they said: “He’s come.”
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
Walking lepers following, rank on rank,
Lurching bravos from the ditches dank,
Drabs from the alleyways and drug fiends pale—
Minds still passion-ridden, soul-powers frail:”*

It is easy to understand why his poems, so stimulating to the ear

and flattering to the memory, attracted the attention of the public at the time. They required little mental effort and could be enjoyed by the simplest of folk. Nevertheless, there is no real depth in his work. Inheriting Whitman's notions of democracy, Lindsay also indulged in Whitman's habit of generalization without sharing the corresponding quality of vision. He was not large enough to "contain multitudes". In the sociological sphere he was too willing to allow broad political sentiments to do duty for discriminating thought or even poetic insight, so that he failed to appreciate the intricate nature of the problems besetting American society. That is why, for all his altruism and obvious sincerity, poems such as his "Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan", the "Candidate for president who sketched a silver Zion", seldom achieve anything more than a hit-or-miss rhetoric.

The same lack of intensity can be discerned in the early, and in some of the later, poems of Carl Sandburg; but of the Middle-West poets, Sandburg is the only one who has displayed any sign of development in his own particular field, or who has been able to adjust himself to the realities of the modern age. Of the three again he is the most intellectually mature. Feeling strongly for his fellow-countrymen of all types, and recognizing their growing responsibilities as a nation, often sentimental in his approach, and sporadically moved to outbursts of indignation or softened to tenderness, he has made an adequate response to the changing conditions of the twentieth century. His closeness to Whitman is openly shown in his addiction to loosely constructed verse and in his method of delivery—his poems are addressed to the crowd rather than to the individual. The impact upon his listeners is, and must of necessity be, direct. The result is that the concentration of thought and imagery to which we are accustomed in modern poetry is almost entirely absent. To achieve simplicity of style and yet to present a thoroughly integrated view of contemporary affairs, is one of the most difficult of the poet's tasks, and Sandburg has not escaped the danger of superficiality. But metaphysical and psycho-analytical complexities would be lost in his work. If we are to admit a place for what has been described as poetry of public speech, then the vehicle of communication he has chosen is congruent with the thoughts and emotions he is called upon to express, and suitable for the audience he wishes to reach. It may not be as compact as that of many of his younger contemporaries, it may not lend itself to profundities, but it has enabled him to exploit

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

the conversational idiom and the living speech rhythms of America. In this his scope goes far beyond that of either Lindsay or Masters, as his poem commemorating John Brown and his *The People, Yes* prove beyond any doubt. He is assisting in the creation of an American myth.

In recent years he has found a natural outlet for his peculiar talent through the radio. Here he is provided with the vast, heterogeneous public that his medium, with its immediacy, its categorical symbolism, and its language drawn from common experience, demands; and, in some degree, it has tightened up his writing. The emotional appeal is becoming even more direct. In *The Man with the Broken Fingers*, broadcast in 1942, he records the experience of those men and women who suffered torture at the hand of the Nazis rather than betray their country by giving away vital information:—

“Better to die one by one than to say yes yes yes
When the answer is no no no and death is welcome
and death comes soon
And death is a quiet step into a sweet clean midnight.”

The People, Yes, which is informed by Sandburg's belief in the American nation, has also been adapted for broadcasting.

Imagism : An Anglo-American Movement

IF the poetic revival in America had its regional aspect, chiefly in the poetry of Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay, its cosmopolitan aspect was presented by the Imagist movement. At first it appeared as though the Imagists might have something of value to contribute to the poetic traditions of the English language. For whatever action the regionalists took in the revolt against the anachronistic and devitalized idiom of the preceding generation, it must be admitted that—apart from Frost, who was working a rich seam of his own—they were more concerned with repudiating nineteenth century criteria than with replacing them by criteria which could with equal discrimination be related to the poetry of both the past and the present, and which would stand the test of changing values and ideologies. In this respect they were as negative in their achievement as the Georgians in England. The Imagists, on the other hand, insisted not only upon the need for new rhythms and accuracy in expression, but also upon their allegiance to the classical tradition.

It is interesting and pertinent to any survey of contemporary poetry, to note that the Imagist movement, although inaugurated in London, was of joint English and American origin. Within a few years of its inception adherents on both sides of the Atlantic were disseminating its theories. The English philosopher, T. E. Hulme, was responsible for formulating the concepts on which these theories were based, and F. S. Flint and the American Amy Lowell for interpreting and applying them in greater detail to poetic practice. Among the earliest exponents were Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) and William Carlos Williams. Hulme was killed in the 1914-18 war, but *Speculations*, edited by Herbert Read and published seven years after his death in 1917, contains his numerous essays and writings. Briefly, he refuted what

was generally acknowledged to be the humanistic belief in the individuality and perfectibility of man, which he ascribed to the romantic attitude to life, and claimed as a primary condition the existence of a system of absolute standards founded upon religious values—"I hold the religious conception of ultimate values to be right, the humanist wrong. . . . That man is in no sense perfect, but a wretched creature, who can yet apprehend perfection." The humanistic ideal, which was an outcome of the Renaissance, had, he maintained, by its magnification of human potentialities succeeded only in disrupting the organic structure of society, and in setting up personal conflicts between intellectual and spiritual motives, between faith and rational thought. We must, therefore, seek a reorientation by reviving for our own age the mediaeval conception of man as "an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal", subject to an external and spiritual authority. These ideas, of course, were by no means revolutionary. Similar criticisms have been raised almost from the time that humanistic notions were first propounded. Moreover, it can be objected that Hulme centred his attack upon the latter kind, upon what Maritain has since distinguished between two kinds of humanism, theocentric and anthropocentric—"The first kind . . . recognizes that the centre for man is God; it implies the Christian conception of man as at once a sinner and redeemed, and the Christian conception of grace and freedom. . . . The second kind . . . believes that man is his own centre, and therefore the centre of all things. It implies a naturalistic conception of man and freedom."* It is important to remember that Hulme centred his attack upon the latter kind, upon what Maritain defines as anthropocentric humanism.

In the sphere of poetry these theories were aired in support of a neo-classicism, a rejection of the vagueness and imprecision into which romanticism had generated. "I object to the sloppiness which doesn't consider that a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or other . . ." wrote Hulme. "The thing has got so bad now that a poem which is dry and hard, a properly classical poem, would not be considered poetry at all. . . . Verse to them always means a bringing in of some of the emotions grouped round the word infinite. . . . But the particular verse we are going to get will be cheerful, dry and sophisticated. . . ." If the new poetry was to be rooted in the classical and religious tradition, it was nonetheless

* *True Humanism* (Geoffrey Bles).

intended to reflect modern sensibilities as accurately as was compatible with man's natural state of imperfection.

In so far as human beings are imperfect and finite in their powers of apprehension, it is impossible for them to recognize more than is made known to them through the senses: the poet, therefore, to be true to his actual experience, should attempt to express only what has been definitely perceived. All vague and intuitive generalities as well as "emotions grouped round the word infinite" should be eradicated in favour of clear unambiguous statement, not necessarily in plain speech, which is "essentially inaccurate", but in a new metaphorical language. Hulme's definition of poetry as "a delicate and difficult art, that of evoking an image, of fitting the rhythm to the idea" incorporates what were in fact two of the chief characteristics of the movement—a preoccupation with concrete images and an abundant use of free verse.

Hulme and Flint founded the small society known as the School of Images in 1909. They were joined shortly afterwards by Ezra Pound, who had left America in the previous year, and it was Pound who, in the preface to his *Ripostes* (1912), referred to the tenets of the movement as *Imagisme* for the first time. The main aims at this stage were (1) direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective; (2) to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation; and (3) as regards rhythm, to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome. In *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste*, Pound further urged "the candidate" to pay the utmost attention to craftsmanship and to make himself familiar with the finest cadences he could discover, especially in foreign languages. Translation and the study of Sappho, Catullus, Villon, Heine and Gautier were advised, while Chaucer was set up as an example for those unable to read other languages. *Des Imagistes*, the first Imagist anthology, was published in 1914 and contained the work of eleven poets, English and American. The next three annual collections were produced by Amy Lowell, who had in her enthusiastic manner assumed control of the group's activities, but by then Ezra Pound had severed his connection with the movement, as such, because it had, he complained, developed into "Amygism"—an allusion to Amy Lowell's businesslike methods of publicizing Imagist ideas rather than to her poetic talents. The objects of

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

Imagism were finally enunciated in the preface to the 1915 anthology as follows:—

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word.
2. To create new rhythms—as the expressions of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms which merely echo old moods. We do not insist on ‘free verse’ as the only method of writing poetry. . . . We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms. In poetry a new cadence means a new idea.
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. . . .
4. To present an image. We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly, and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is the very essence of poetry.

It will be observed that the Imagists, unlike either the English Georgians or the American regionalists, were not content merely to throw off the poetic conventions of their immediate predecessors; they had definite aims and tried to work to a positive programme which they somewhat optimistically hoped would raise the general standards of poetry. As they were the first to admit, there was nothing new in their ideas. From time to time in the history of English literature efforts have been made to restore common speech as the basic element of poetry. Incidentally, the emphasis upon

IMAGISM: AN ANGLO-AMERICAN MOVEMENT

common speech in the manifesto quoted above seems to have been a deviation from the original theories put forward by Hulme, and was strangely at variance with the actual methods of the group. For examples of free verse one need go no further back than Milton or even Arnold; and the American poets had their own forerunner in Whitman. Similar precedents can be cited for each of the remaining points of the programme.

Imagism failed as a movement because it set too many restrictions upon the scope of poetry and confined its disciples to such a limited field of endeavour. Implicit in its doctrine were the seeds of its own disintegration, and it was not long before its ablest practitioners themselves discovered its grave defects in the use both of language and of subject-material. By the end of the first world war most of them were following their individual bents and the movement broke up, though a belated *Imagist Anthology* was published in 1930.

At the same time as one is remarking the inherent weaknesses of Imagism, however, one should acknowledge the achievement of its experimenters in supplying a greatly needed corrective to the woolly-minded sentimentalism, vague abstractions and bonelessness of much that was passing as poetry at the beginning of their revolt, and for their opportune insistence upon technique. Their influence spread far beyond their own immediate circles, and particularly in America. Marianne Moore, Archibald MacLeish, Herbert Read, D. H. Lawrence and T. S. Eliot, among many others, all owed something to their study and practice. And if their interest in free verse and in "fitting the rhythm to the idea" did not produce any outstanding specifically "Imagist" verse, it did help to promote a better understanding of organic rhythm. Perhaps their most notable contribution to the period and, in consequence, to the period which followed, was the introduction and adaptation of metrical forms and techniques culled from the original sources in a diversity of foreign literatures (as well as the revival of Anglo-Saxon measures), ranging from those of ancient China and Japan, classical Greece and Rome, to those of mediaeval Italy, the Provence of the Troubadours and nineteenth century France. It was to recognize the value of the cosmopolitan tradition in its highest manifestations. By these means new modes of feeling were instilled into English poetry, forgotten mediums were restored.

Among the Imagists—and even after he left the official movement—

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

Ezra Pound showed by far the greatest initiative and talent; not merely in translating from other languages, but, while doing so, in re-creating the original atmosphere and mental climate of past civilizations and bringing them, as it were, into aesthetic relationship with his own age. It can truly be said that he has always been more at ease when he is evoking these worlds of the past than when he is writing of the world in which he lives. There have been many translations from the Chinese during the present century, but Pound was the first to catch the intrinsic nature of Chinese poetry and to convert it into its English equivalent without losing the quality of the poetry in the process. His *Cathay* (1915), which includes some of his finest poems, exemplifies his unique capacity for embodying in his poetry the quintessence of another nation's poetic culture. Of his work in other languages T. S. Eliot has written: "He has grasped certain things in Provence and Italy which are permanent in human nature. . . ."

Another American poet who became connected with the group, John Gould Fletcher, claims to have directed Pound's attention to certain characteristics in the poetry of the French Symbolists (though there can be little doubt that Pound was already fairly conversant with Symbolism), and to have lent him the books so that he could study them in the light of the new doctrines. Fletcher, working from French models on his own before he came into contact with the Imagists, was attempting some kind of synthesis of the elements to be found in music, painting and poetry, an experiment he attributed to the triple influence of Debussy, Gauguin and Mallarmé.

On a cursory examination there appears to be an antithesis between Symbolism as it was practised by the French poets and the Imagist demand for poetry "that is hard and clear, never blurred or indefinite." For the Symbolist movement in France was nothing less than a revolt against the classical tradition as represented by the nineteenth century Parnassians and other poets whose sense of mystery and religion had, like that of their English counterparts, been undermined by the inexorable logic of Science. Its principal exponents, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Verlaine, believed in and deliberately pursued an ideal beauty beyond the evidence of the senses; and because they wished to communicate what was essentially a mystical experience their language was often far from definite. "To intimate things," maintains Edmund Wilson, "rather than to state them plainly was thus one of

the primary aims of the Symbolists."* If Baudelaire chose recognizable religious symbols, he certainly used them outside the conventional field of reference; and Mallarmé, urged by the desire to create a poetry akin to music in its evocativeness and power to transcend all verbal limitations, was even more arbitrary in his exploitation of symbols.

Ezra Pound, however, was not the man to be confined to a narrow poetic system, as his work testifies; and, ultimately, it is to him that we must turn in order to understand Imagism and its effects upon contemporary poetry. To any poet with so sensitive an ear as his, Mallarmé's conception of poetry as a sort of verbal music would have distinct attractions, although he might be fully cognizant of its impracticability. Pound was alert to the possibility of a closer alliance between the two arts and was afterwards to conduct his own experiments in that direction (his *Cantos*, when finished, he confided in Yeats, will "display a structure like that of a Bach Fugue"). It will be recalled, too, that "to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase" was one of the original aims of the Imagists. And since both symbol and image (though, in the case of the symbol, not always) derive from the same source, the subconscious strata of the mind, there would be something to learn from the Symbolist method of presenting the image with its privately associated images in train, rather than in a purely decorative or functional context. As Coleridge expressed it: "Images . . . become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion." Pound absorbed the art, if not the mysticism behind it, thereby anticipating the attitude of later poets. But if he was interested in the musical potentialities, he was equally interested in the "conversational-ironic" elements of Symbolism exemplified by the poetry of Laforgue and Corbière. It should also be made clear that he was even more engrossed in the technical craftsmanship of the Parnassians, with whom he had a great deal in common.

Although Imagism influenced the work of several English poets at a formative stage in their careers, as a movement it made far greater progress in American literary circles, due in no small measure to the enterprise of Amy Lowell. Of the English poets, Richard Aldington

* *Axel's Castle: a Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (Scribner, New York).

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

has shown most fidelity to the Imagist creed. His earliest poems, he tells us in the introduction to his *Collected Poems* (1948), were published in *Poetry* (Chicago) on the recommendation of Ezra Pound. It was, he says, "a mere accident that what I was writing then chanced to meet with the approval of the verse revolutionaries, just as the publication of the poems in America was an accident." Accident or not, Aldington, with his aesthetic temperament and his profound feeling for the classical traditions of Greece and Rome, was one of the most successful in realizing the aims of the group. His poems might well have served as the model and it is not at all extraordinary that he should have been encouraged to allow free rope to his natural inclinations. From the beginning he seems to have mastered the art of evoking sharp images and, in free verse, of adapting his rhythms to the ideas he had to convey. Admittedly the ideas were usually slight, giving his poetry a superficial character; but that was a weakness inherent in the Imagist method, a weakness which, if not controlled, inevitably leads to the exaltation of the image at the expense of the sequence of thought. His earliest poems are like swift-flowing, shallow rivulets, flashing in the Mediterranean sunlight; but a careful inspection reveals their lack of depth. *The Poplar*, from his first book entitled *Images, New and Old* (1910-15), demonstrates just how vividly his imagination can snatch at a single aspect of his subject and with a few light strokes bring it to life for his readers:—

*"I know that the white wind loves you,
Is always kissing you, and turning up
The white lining of your green petticoat.
The sky darts through you like blue rain,
And the grey rain drips on your flanks
And loves you.
And I have seen the moon
Slip his silver penny into your pocket
As you straightened your hair;
And the white mist curling and hesitating
Like a bashful lover about your knees."*

The best of these poems, *Choricos*, *To a Greek Marble*, *At Mitylene* and *Argyria*, etc., are informed by classical subjects. Through them

the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece move with a lyrical and almost poignant grace which betrays Aldington's peculiar attachment to the life and pattern of society of a bygone age, whose passing he could not contemplate without a gentle flood of wistfulness sweeping over him. "The ancient songs/Pass deathward mournfully," is the nostalgic opening of *Choricos*. "Our wearied eyes/Yearn for the heavy bowed gold blossoms/Beneath the very grey sky of Persephone," he laments to *Hermes, Leader of the Dead*. In another poem, *Eros and Psyche*, his personal conflicts rise to the surface in an unmistakable manner. In this poem Aldington relates how, from the top of a bus, he catches sight of an old grimy statue of Psyche and her lover, Eros, "surrounded with pots and terra-cotta busts/and urns and broken pillars", in a lumber yard near Camden Town. He is at once reminded of another statue, that of Cobden, "hero of Free Trade—Or was it the Corn Laws?", which is distinguished by its relatively superior position opposite the Tube entrance: this, he says with heavy irony, he can understand, for "England must honour its national heroes". What he resents so bitterly is the consignment of Psyche and Eros who should

*"Stand for ever embraced
By the side of a rustling fountain
Over a marble basin
Carved with leopards and grapes and young men
dancing
Or in a garden leaning above Corinth . . ."*

to this place of noise and defilement

*"What are they doing here in Camden Town?
And who has brought their naked beauty
And their fresh young lust to Camden Town,
Which settled long ago to toil and sweat and filth,
Forgetting—to the greater glory of Free Trade—
Young beauty and young love and youthful flesh?"*

It signified, for Aldington, the contrast between the culture of the past and that of the modern industrial society which he regarded

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

with utter loathing and contempt. Nor has he ever been quite able to reconcile the two, though in a small number of isolated poems he has, by a semantic process, temporarily bridged the gap between them. *Eros and Psyche* falls into this category. Here the opposing elements are nicely balanced, violent emotions are kept under control, and the juxtaposed imagery associated with Greece and Camden Town, respectively, are fused into the total unity of the execution. Unfortunately, he has seldom achieved such a synthesis, principally because his veneration of the one age and his antipathy towards the other (and his own) lead him into curious emotional extravagances which destroy both his sense of organic rhythm and the subtle tensions demanded by poetry. A typical example of this lack of restraint is provided by *Cinema Exit*:-

*"Millions of human vermin
Swarm sweating
Along the night-arched cavernous roads.*

*(Happily rapid chemical processes
Will disintegrate them all.)"*

If it be suspected that the premonitions of our Atomic era give his words a more sinister bearing than they might otherwise have, we need only refer to some of his other poems of this period (for instance, *Childhood*, *In the Tube*, or *Whitechapel*) to assemble further evidence of Aldington's unintegrated response to the conditions of his own time. Under the Imagist veneer and respect for tradition was the aesthetic attitude of the nineteenth century, the tendency to revert to an earlier culture; yet Aldington's integrity would never permit him to ignore what instinctively he was inclined to reject from his consciousness. He was compelled to "go groping in all forbidden places,/Uncovering horrors politely forgotten/And facing them, too." It is to be expected, then, that his experience of military service in the 1914-18 War would do little to resolve his personal conflicts; at the same time, it did bring him into closer touch with reality.

Unable, save at rare intervals, to recapture the serenity of his earlier moods of aesthetic detachment—the ancient charms having lost their potency under the impact of war:

IMAGISM: AN ANGLO-AMERICAN MOVEMENT

*"Were even the sweet grey eyes
Of Artemis a lie,
The speech of Hermes but a trick,
The glory of Apollonian hair deceit?"*
(Disdain)

—he was forced back upon the bitterness pervading *Images of War* (1918), from which he could secure relief only by turning his imaginative powers to the contemplation of man's physical need for woman (*Images of Desire*, 1919). This was, of course, an experience shared by thousands of the young men cast haphazardly into the horrors of trench warfare. To some extent it released Aldington from himself, directing his bitterness towards the common enemies of mankind—suffering, separation and death. Though his war poems do not possess the rhythmical flow of many of the earlier poems, they gain in immediacy and warmth of feeling. By identifying himself with his comrades, fellow victims of the holocaust, the poet evinces a greater capacity for ordinary human sympathy and understanding than when he was painting colourful miniatures of the gods or recalling the miseries of his childhood.

During the years that followed, his preoccupation with the sexual relationship between man and woman gradually became more dominant and replaced the mythological element in his poetry, whether he treated the subject lightly and in mockery of convention (as in *Songs for Puritans*), or as verse-romance (*A Dream in the Luxembourg*, 1930), or raised it to the level of a personal philosophy owing something to the ideas of D. H. Lawrence (*The Eaten Heart* and the love-sequence, *The Crystal World*). Love, particularly in its physical context, assumes the proportions of a religious faith:—

*"But, gazing back at the old dead Europe,
I think perhaps there is one thing worth achieving—
Escape the fate of Philoctetes, the essential solitude,
Achieve release, so that one's total nature
At all points meets another's
Whereby life becomes positive and immeasurably enriched."*
(*The Eaten Heart*)

That Richard Aldington is aware of the nature of his conflicts can

be inferred from the phantasmagoria *A Fool i' the Forest* (1925). In this long poem he sets out to portray the three broad aspects of his temperament as separate characters: Mezzetin, who "symbolizes the imaginative faculties—art, youth, irresponsible gaiety, liberty"; the Conjuror, who "symbolizes the intellectual faculties—age, science, religious cant, solemnity, authority", and is always antagonistic towards Mezzetin; and "I", the man of artistic inclinations, torn between the other two in a vain struggle for fulfilment in an alien world. After various adventures together (somewhat reminiscent of Aldington's own experience), the three are drawn into the War and Mezzetin is killed. Back in civilian life, "I", unable to tolerate his remaining companion any longer, hurls the Conjuror over Waterloo Bridge into the river; to settle down later as a typical London clerk with a house and family in the suburbs, occasionally dreaming of his lost youth. In a sense it represents the tragedy of the artist in a mechanistic age. But to paraphrase the poem so briefly is to give no adequate account of its symbolism, diversity of treatment or its changes in tone. It is perhaps Aldington's most ambitious effort, and, though it does not accomplish his purpose, it does reveal quite a lot about his state of mind. But self-analysis is at best a delicate operation, and the analyst in this instance does not convince one that he has probed deep enough beneath the surface of his material. Nor do his characters ever become anything more than caricatures, so that the subtleties inherent in the problems posed by their relationships with each other are not fully brought out.

Among the whole group in both countries, the American poet, H. D., can be cited as the perfect Imagist; and though others drifted away from the movement, she continued to apply the principles of Imagism to her poetry throughout her life. Even more engrossed in the culture and spirit of ancient Greece than Aldington, she seems to have been able to immerse herself completely from the external world of events. Nothing disturbs the equipoise of her crystalline art. ". . . The inner world of the imagination, the ivory tower, where poets presumably do live, in memory, does," she insists,* "stand stark with the sun-lit isles around it, while battle and din of battle and the whole dreary, tragic spectacle of our time seems blurred and sodden and not to be recalled, save in moments of repudiation,

* *A Note on Poetry* from *The Oxford Anthology of American Literature* (New York, 1938).

historical necessity. . . ." This is indeed supported by the impression her poems create. Even her moments of repudiation, rare as they are, do not weaken her judgment in the selection of concise, evocative imagery or so much as tempt her to relax the sculptural firmness of her lines. When the historical necessity of the present compels her attention at last, it is accepted only on such terms as she herself stipulates and is construed in the light of her familiarity with the distant past. *Sea Garden* (1916) and *Hymen* (1921) show the delicacy and exquisite craftsmanship with which she handles her precision instruments upon the slightest of themes, and yet succeeds in capturing the most elusive sensations in the true Hellenic fashion.

If, in these first two volumes, the concentration upon presenting the pure, naked image and the flawless structure tended to detract from the emotive qualities of her work, *Heliadora* (1924) proves that within the space of a few years H. D. had learned how to charge her language with an intensity of human feeling common to all ages, without abandoning either the classical Greek style or material. There was a further development in *The Walls do not Fall* (1944). This sequence of poems was written during the bombing of London in the World War of 1939/45:—

*"Pompeii has nothing to teach us,
We know crack of volcanic fissure,
slow flow of terrible lava,*

*pressure on hearts, lungs, the brain
about to burst its brittle case
(What the skull can endure!):*

*over us, Apocryphal fire,
under us, the earth sway, dip of a floor,
slope of a pavement . . ."*

but in it no attempt is made to describe the excitement of the scene, the skies over St. Paul's pink with reflections from the flaming buildings below, the malevolent drone of enemy aircraft above the clouds at night, the fear and suspense in the hearts of the people as the bombs whistled towards their targets. All these have been fully

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

assimilated or, as seems more likely, they were, for the poet, transient if drastic events which had less importance in their immediate results than the moral and spiritual evils they symbolized—both in their historical parallels and in the eternal quest of man the individual. It is with spiritual values that she is so deeply concerned:

*“O, do not look up
into the air,*

*you who are occupied
in the bewildering*

*sand-heap maze
of present-day endeavour;*

*you will be, not so much frightened
as paralysed with inaction,*

*and anyhow,
we have not crawled so very far*

*up our individual grass-blade
towards our individual star.”*

For all that the poem records of the actual circumstances, after its persuasive opening, its author might have been living in cold detachment on another planet. There is a great deal to be said for such a refusal to be intimidated by the violence of the present, for such a determination not to be stampeded into prejudiced and emotional states of mind, particularly if the ensuing purity of vision enables the poet “to resolve our secret hoard in the light of both past and present”—the specific purpose of *The Walls do not Fall*. H. D. addresses herself to this formidable task, first by an attempt to penetrate to that sphere of the mind known as the collective unconscious, and second by delving into the lore of antiquity (it should be mentioned that the poem is rich enough to be enjoyed at other levels). She is convinced that throughout all ages, and under the shock of its worst disasters, the human race has been sustained by a mysterious Healing Power (“other standards hallowed us; strange texture, a

wing covered us") which, if known and acknowledged with heart and mind and being, will lead to the redemption of mankind and the individual (she speaks to each, jointly and severally) through a spiritual rebirth. It is, then, a religious quest. Starting from the point and taking the direction she does, the poet comes inevitably to the "resurrection myth"; and, therefore, one might assume, to Christianity, the destination reached by T. S. Eliot on an equally difficult journey. For H. D., however, the "Christos-image" of organized religion has become blurred, indistinguishable from the "paint-and-plaster mediaeval jumble of pain-worship and death-symbol" by which it has been surrounded. Christ, she finds, like so many before her, is an archetypal figure to be equated with Osiris, Amen, Ra, father of past aeons: the Holy Ghost is the Dream, the open way of inspiration . . .

*"it merges the distant future
with most distant antiquity,*

*states economically
in a simple dream-equation*

*the most profound philosophy,
discloses the alchemist's secret*

*and follows the Mage
into the desert."*

But H. D.'s peculiar type of mysticism or, as she prefers to call it, her "ego-centric personal approach to the eternal realities", is one that attaches undue significance to the *naming* of the magic symbols, to the efficacy of the charm, incantation or prayer,

"which will reveal unquestionably

*whatever healing or inspirational essence
is necessary for whatever particular ill*

the inquiring soul is heir to . . ."

The mysteries of the ritualistic cults of earlier days may well have a direct bearing upon the spiritual predicament of our time; but the mere invocation of the whole hierarchy of Egyptian deities, or the verbal jugglery with symbols appropriated from any mythological systems, will avail us nothing in cutting out the "cancerous growths in present-day philosophy". We are left precisely where we were; for the possibility of relating the various divinities and their meanings is by no means a revelation to us. The same criticism can be levelled at *Tribute to the Angels*, the poem which appeared shortly afterwards and, which, with its accent upon the renewal of life—

"where, Uriel, we pause to give
thanks that we rise again from death and live."

—is, in fact, a sequel to *The Walls do not Fall*. The two poems should be read together. In neither has the poet succeeded in accomplishing her purpose. Admittedly she was working upon intractable material and, in her serene manner, wrestling with the intangible powers of darkness. Yet the primary cause of her failure lies in the Imagist method she has always employed: the image, without reinforcement, is not tensile enough to bridge the "deplorable gaps" in time between the experience of the past and the experience of the present. In spite of this, however, the poems have considerable value in their own right and comprise two of the most outstanding strictly Imagist poems that have been written. Few contemporary poets have had the incentive or the boldness to grapple with a theme of such magnitude. There is no empty rhetoric or sentimentality, no exploitation of trick devices or excessive demands upon the reader's emotions; the results are obtained by the cumulative effect of meticulously chosen imagery and the disciplined force of language which sustain the poems from beginning to end. On the evidence of *The Walls do not Fall* and *Tribute to the Angels* it can justifiably be said that H. D. has thoroughly tested the principles of Imagism and, in pressing them to the limit of their resources, demonstrated their inadequacy to the total needs of poetry.

Not many of the Imagist poets adhered so singleheartedly to the creed, Amy Lowell perhaps least of all. Although the recognized spokesman of the movement in America and the compiler of three

Imagist anthologies, she experimented freely in a wide variety of styles, most of them derivative. At her best she was colourful and dynamic—a vivid contrast to H. D.—but the main body of her work is decidedly uneven. *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* (1914) and *Men, Women and Ghosts* (1916) contain the poems in which her hard, visual images are most abundant; they also include the first examples of the polyphonic prose she subsequently extended into the long “narratives” of *Can Grande’s Castle* (1918) and other books. John Gould Fletcher was far more influenced by Mallarmé and the French Symbolists than by the Imagist group to which he was introduced by Ezra Pound. After the appearance of *Irradiations* (1915), *Goblins and Pagodas* (1916), *The Tree of Life* (1918) and *Breakers and Granite* (1921), he virtually renounced his association with the Imagists by the publication of *Branches of Adam* (1925), a long poem revealing his metaphysical proclivities. In the late ’twenties he focused his thoughts upon his native Arkansas (he returned there in 1933), and in the symposium *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930) aligned himself with the southern regionalists known as the Fugitives. Since then, in his writings, he has been more engaged with prose than with poetry. D. H. Lawrence was from the first as little at home among the Imagists as he was among the Georgians.

H. D. and Marianne Moore were fellow-undergraduates at Bryn Mawr College, but there is scarcely a trace of an affinity between these two poets, and if the early poems of the latter bear a slight resemblance to those of the former, the connection is an extremely loose one. Marianne Moore is an intellectual poet, absorbing a wide range of literature and metamorphosing it through her creative processes into the inimitable poetry we recognize as hers almost at a glance. She is fond of inserting quotations from and allusions to learned works or obscure books of reference into her poems, as if by doing so to corroborate her poetic arguments or to establish parallels with them; but, as a rule, she scrupulously acknowledges the sources from which they have been taken. Her affiliations are with T. S. Eliot and, through the modulation of her speech rhythms, with John Crowe Ransom. In an illuminating study* of her poetry, Miss Vivienne

* *The Peaceable Kingdom of Marianne Moore* from the *Quarterly Review of Literature* (Vol. IV, No. 2).

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

Koch has remarked (with reference to "her charmed movement between the human and animal kingdom") that "Marianne Moore is in the tradition of the great fabulists, for her method is the method of discourse. . . . There is, in her work, a vast emblematic heraldry of symbols cunningly disguised in zoological, ornithological, botanical or piscatorial forms." It is in this sphere, in what might for the sake of expedience be termed her studies of the animal world (they are always something more) that this poet approaches nearest to the common ideals of the Imagists. She is acutely perceptive in her observations and possesses an astonishing aptitude for embodying in succinct phrases the vital quality of the gesture, movement or flicker of an eyelid of the thing she is bent upon describing. Thus, when she is not taking advantage of the reader's interest to indulge in discussion for discussion's sake—as she sometimes does—she evokes the image in an exact and often witty language. Her images frequently have a symbolic depth too. Her vocabulary is both colloquial (of the drawing-room and lounge, rather than of the street) and casual to the point of deception; for a sting is concealed beneath the surface of many of her poems and remains unnoticed until it suddenly strikes home. Like the thorns in her *Roses Only*, the sting is the "best part" of her, lending her work a curious mordacity:—

*" . . . Would you not, minus
thorns, be a what-is-this, a mere*

*peculiarity? They are not proof against a worm, the elements,
or mildew;
but what about the predatory hand? What is brilliance without
co-ordination? Guarding the
infinitesimal pieces of your mind, compelling
audience to
the remark that it is better to be forgotten than to be remembered
too violently,
your thorns are the best part of you."*

Marianne Moore has conducted a number of useful experiments in the technical field, especially in the form and texture of poetry. One of the most important of these, as several critics have pointed

out, is the employment in some of her poems of a syllabic metre as distinct from accentual or quantitative metre. This has enabled the poet to achieve greater freedom in her rhyme-patterns, as well as a more flexible rhythm in the overflow from one line or stanza to the next.

In H. D. and Marianne Moore, Imagism has produced two outstanding craftsmen, though in both cases the initial impulse to concentrate upon technique was probably due more to the high standards demanded by Ezra Pound than to any precepts of the movement. In *The Tempers* (1913) and *Al Que Quiere* (1917), the first publications of William Carlos Williams, the influence of Pound is clearly marked; but in Williams's poetry the images, even when sharply defined and integral to the poem, carry with them few of the collateral associations and undertones with which Pound manages to galvanize many of his lines. Echoes are rarer still in his early poems. Until recent years the impression given has been an instantaneous one, depending almost entirely on the picture conjured up and leaving little or nothing to the chance of the reader's mental connections. Thus the images often lacked weight or subliminal pressure. But unlike Pound, who has, to a large extent, abandoned his American roots, Williams has close links with the regionalist poets in his feeling for his own people and his own country. The local scene, if not directly featured, furnishes the background to most of his poems. It is in this area of his work that the skilful miniatures of his immediate surroundings, whether of the city, the small town or the country, have their rightful place and invariably justify their function.

Perhaps because his social sensitivities have precluded any effectual measures of detachment, because he has striven to keep his feet firmly grounded upon his native soil and to capture the moods of the American people, his technical progress has been slower than that of H. D., yet his vision is wider and his range of subject more diverse. *Kora in Hell* (1921), *Sour Grapes* (1922) and *Spring and All* (1923) are the hit-or-miss experiments of a poet gaining familiarity with the tools of his trade. How well he has applied himself to the task of developing his natural talents through the medium most suitable to his special requirements is illustrated by *Perpetuum Mobile: The City*. It is noticeable that Williams's images are beginning to exert more force at the deeper levels of consciousness. In *The Sea Farer* they initiate strong undercurrents in the symbolic pattern:

"*The sea will wash in
and the rocks—whether seen
by air, jagged ribs
riding the cloth of foam
or a knob or pinnacles
lined with gannets—
whose screams we may guess
are the stubborn man.
He invites the storm, he
lives by it! . . .*"

A further characteristic of his later work is the search for a mythological structure to contain the images in a way which will bring out both their connotative values and their surface indications without detracting from the visual impact. *The Bull*, for instance, has two principal themes, each distinct in itself, yet woven tightly together, the one contrasting with and accentuating the other, in a framework of myth that determines the general movement of the poem.

All the developments mentioned above have been brought into operation and, one might add, into conflict, in Williams's current work-in-progress, *Paterson*, a long poem in four volumes. There is the complexity of human relationships and social conditions in his home town, Paterson, New Jersey; there is the symbolic pressure of the images pushing the poem in one direction and then in another, frequently threatening the balance; and, finally, there is the broad mythological framework containing the whole. The subject of this extraordinary work is Paterson, the town; yet it is also the history of man the individual, man the artist, man in relation to his environment; and yet again it is an autobiographical record of Williams the poet in his struggle for self-expression. Book I, *The Delineaments of the Giants*, introduces "the elemental character of the place" and some of the problems to be treated in the poem. Book II, *Sunday in the Park*, confines its action to a single day in the public park, elaborating upon the tragedy of inarticulate humanity; and the third instalment, *The Library*, examines man's need for a redeeming language. The fourth and last book, in which it will be revealed that "the poet alone in this world holds the key to the final rescue" of mankind from "the perverse confusions that come of a failure to untangle the language", has yet to be published at the time of writing

the present study. It is, therefore, too early to undertake a comprehensive assessment. In the interim, to judge by what has already appeared, it would seem that the mythological structure, based upon this Paterson the town-man-language conception of life, is too weak to hold the poem intact. This is reflected in the lack of form and of co-ordination between the symbols, in the conflicting ideas and the varying changes in stress, and in the uneven quality of the writing.

In Aldington's reversion to the culture of ancient Greece and his attention to erotic relationships, in H. D.'s cool detachment and Williams's self-conscious defiance of authority (as in *Paterson*), one can detect strains of the aesthetic spirit of the later nineteenth century; aestheticism, one might put it, in modern guise. The earliest influences of Ezra Pound were those of Browning, Swinburne and the pre-Raphaelites, Dowson, Symons and Yeats. Viewed from this angle it is possible to see why Pound and his fellow Imagists were initially attracted to each other. Between them there was a community of interest, rooted firmly in the aesthetic temperament. Pound, however, did not long remain in that phase. What he felt to be worth preserving in the work of the nineteenth century poets, as in that of the many other poets he studied afterwards, was soon mentally digested and absorbed into his own poetic system. For despite all the objections raised against his "ultra-modernity" by those readers who have experienced difficulty in understanding his poetry (his *Cantos*, above all), he has done more to rediscover and revive poetic traditions than any living poet. This is not generally appreciated for the simple reason that for many readers the conception of "tradition" is such a limited one, usually confined to the nineteenth century, with extensions into the past to admit only the major figures writing before that time, but seldom going back further than Shakespeare or beyond the boundaries of *English* literature. In his turn Pound has affected the styles of his contemporaries to an incalculable extent. Mr. T. S. Eliot, who has acknowledged his own indebtedness, goes so far as to say: "I cannot think of anyone writing verse of our generation and the next, whose verse (if any good) has not been improved by the study of Pound."

The influences mentioned above can be discerned in *Personae* (1909), the first book by Ezra Pound to appear in England (he had previously published *A Lume Spento* in Italy), and in *Exultations* (1909), yet there was also an unmistakable individual style, a new

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

vitality, which was remarked by such discriminating critics as Edward Thomas. This quality is readily seen in *Sestina: Altaforte*, which was included in the latter volume:

"Damn it all! all this our South stinks peace.
You whoreson dog, Papiols, come! Let's to music!
I have no life save when the swords clash.
But ah! when I see the standards gold, vair, purple,
opposing
And the broad fields beneath them turn crimson,
Then howl I my heart nigh mad with rejoicing."

Though Pound was never exclusively an Imagist poet, and though he retired from active collaboration with the group after Amy Lowell had so eagerly taken up the cause, he continued in his poetry to apply the fundamental principles of Imagism, together with the technique he acquired from years of assiduous study, experiment and devotion to craftsmanship. The concrete image, the precise language, the sequence of the musical phrase, these are always present in his work from his first book to the latest of his *Cantos*.

It has been indicated that among the benefits the Imagist movement conferred upon the poetry of this century were (a) the impetus it gave to the development of organic rhythm (that is, "fitting the rhythm to the idea") and (b) the introduction of new elements from other literatures. For both innovations Ezra Pound was primarily responsible. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive what the Imagist movement would have accomplished without its versatile leader and pioneer. If the conventional patterns of the previous century were to be discarded, laws of rhythm of a positive nature had to be set up in their place; Pound was the first of the Imagists to realize that these laws could arise only from and be properly determined only by the exigencies of the poem in the process of creation. There must needs be an organic unity between the rhythm of the poem and material from which it is being constructed. Many imitators of Pound's methods have failed to understand this rudimentary but essential feature of *vers libre*.

"Great literature," said Ezra Pound in *How to Read*, "is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost degree," and he directed his energies to the acquisition of such a language, which should, at the same time, have its basis upon natural speech-rhythms. He was

already well acquainted with the cadences of Provençal and mediaeval Italian poetry and had made skilful use of them in *Personae* and *Exultations*. From Browning he learned the value of dramatization in colloquial idiom; from Yeats, with whom he was on the friendliest of terms for many years and whose style he did a great deal to improve (Yeats probably derived most benefit from the relationship), how to harness the powers of suggestion and association by means of effective symbols. Then he turned back to Anglo-Saxon four-stress alliterative poetry and produced his own magnificent version of *The Seafarer*. The extension of his studies of Laforgue, Corbière, and other French poets added a new pungency to his tone, and in 1912 he published his translations from Guido Cavalcanti, the mediaeval Italian poet. As a result of these diverse experiments in form, technique and manipulation of language, his *Canzoni* (1911) and *Ripostes* (1912) marked a definite stage in his advance towards what Mr. Eliot has described as "the synthetic construction of a style of speech" which he was seeking.

In an early poem he gave the first hint of his ambition to write the long poem now known to us as *The Cantos*:*

"If so it be His will, with whom
Are all things and through whom
Are all things good
Will I make for thee and for the beauty
of thy music
A new thing
As hath not heretofore been writ.
Take then my promise!"

and his preparation for this, his life's task, continued as diligently as before. His translations from the Chinese have been mentioned earlier in this chapter; it was his practice in Chinese poetry which enabled him to compress so much thought and feeling into the word-picture on his poetic canvas:

"Fu I loved the high cloud and the hill,
Alas he died of alcohol."

About the same period he was experimenting with Japanese forms—

* *The Cantos* will be considered in the second volume of this series.

the *tanka* and *hokku*, with their fixed number of syllables—and translating the Japanese Noh plays which excited the interest of Yeats, Edmund Dulac and Arthur Waley. Other studies, among them the work of Rémy de Gourmont, Flaubert, Tailhade, de Rénier, Gautier, and translations from several languages, were included in his curriculum, but they are far too numerous to mention them all in a volume of this type. Few poets can have taken their craving for perfection of style and mastery of language so earnestly. Nor were his predilections as inconsistent as the list of his many influences might suggest. Pound recognized two types of writers as being of the utmost importance to the genuine scholar: the inventors, who were “the discoverers of a particular process or of more than one mode or process”, and the masters, or “inventors who, apart from their own inventions, are able to assimilate and co-ordinate a large number of preceding inventions”. It was to the writers, of any age or country, whom he could place in either of these categories that he went for his example and inspiration.

Besides his work in all these different fields of literature, Pound could still spare the time to help his contemporaries by encouraging them, criticizing (and sometimes altering) their poetry, and by submitting it to the right quarters for publication. Mr. Eliot has told us that it was due to Pound's efforts on his behalf that his first book was published in England, and that Pound substantially cut the original version of *The Waste Land* to the length at which it was presented to the public. In a similar manner he acted as critic and agent to Yeats, Richard Aldington, James Joyce and others.

So far he had contented himself with capturing in his poetry the spirit of the past, the mediaeval world of Europe, the classical world of Greece or Rome, or the ancient world of China, as in his delightful *The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter* (from *Cathay*):—

*“ At fourteen I married my Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.*

*At fifteen I stopped scowling.
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
For ever and for ever and for ever.”*

With *Lustra* (1915) we find him directly approaching his own age and adopting a modern language shorn of his "quaint devices" and archaisms. If the pre-Raphaelite and Decadent influences have now been absorbed, the new satirical tone, the urbanity and caustic humour of these poems are reminiscent of Laforgue and Corbière. Here, too, are the piquant epigrams in the Greek elegiac tone and the exquisite Chinese effects. In *Commission* Pound appropriately sends his songs out "like a blight upon the dullness of the world."

The brilliant *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) marks the apex of his achievement. In this sequence making up a single long poem Pound has at last faced and come to grips not only with his personal problems, but also with those of his own society, which had witnessed the break-down and gradual disintegration of its values without being able to put anything in their place. It is at once a poem of disillusionment—

*"For three years, out of key with his time,
He strove to resuscitate the dead art
Of poetry; to maintain 'the sublime'
In the old sense. Wrong from the start—*

*No, hardly, but seeing he had been born
In a half-savage country, out of date;
Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn;
Capaneus; trout for factitious bait . . ."*

—and an indictment of the age; therefore, both of historical and immediate significance. Assessing the aims and preoccupations of his own life, Pound assesses modern civilization. Technically, it is a tribute to the poet's vision of perfection. The derivations, the recognizable cadences from various sources, the obtrusive fragments and imitations of the styles of other writers, which are noticeable in some of his early poems have been completely assimilated and fitted into the pattern; the voices of the inventors and masters have merged into the individual voice of Ezra Pound, *il miglior fabbro*. It is still possible at particular stages of the sequence to point to an affinity with this or that poet, Gautier or Laforgue, for instance, or the seventeenth century Metaphysicals, and to discern similarities of style or pitch, but there is no doubt of the poem's originality. There

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

is the subtlety of inferring far more than is actually said; of proceeding from irony to serious reflection and back again to a pungent mockery in swift transitions of mood without losing control of the governing theme; of incorporating popular phrases and throwing them into fresh contexts, so that the new ironic connotations carry with them the weight of the familiar and generalized meaning at the same time as they debunk the false sentiment attached. The variations in rhythm reflect both the import of the poem and the integrity of the poetic experience. Pound is concerned with presenting the aesthetic as distinct from the moral aspect of the situation, with the position of the poet living in a society inimical to him and to the demands of his vocation. Yet the moral and spiritual values are asserted simply because Pound is so aware of the age in which he is writing, so responsive to the "shift of sensibility", so penetrating in his analysis. The first World War hastened the destruction of the old standards and Pound neither evades the real issue nor allows his personal feeling, expressed with intensity of phrase—

*"Died some, pro patria,
non 'dulce' non 'et decor' . . .
walked eye-deep in hell
believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving
came home, home to a lie,
home to many deceits,
home to old lies and new infamy;
usury age-old and age-thick
and liars in public places*

*Daring as never before, wastage as never before
Young blood and high blood,
fair cheeks, and fine bodies;*

*fortitude as never before,
frankness as never before,
disillusions as never told in the old days,
hysterias, trench confessions,
laughter out of dead bellies."*

—to destroy the equilibrium.

IMAGISM: AN ANGLO-AMERICAN MOVEMENT

The awareness of the present and the validity of the experience distinguish the poem from anything Pound had written before; and they have been communicated with such intensity and skill in both conception and execution that one is compelled to agree with Dr. F. R. Leavis's summing up: "*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* . . . is a whole. The whole is great poetry, at once traditional and original. Mr. Pound's standing as a poet rests upon it, and rests securely."

Inevitably, this poem invites comparison with Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and the same questions arise from each. In which direction does the poet move from this point of awareness? Having undertaken an analysis of his own and the whole human situation, having determined how far his personal values are at variance with the mechanical values of present-day society, should he seek a social or a personal solution? Or is it practicable for him, in some manner peculiar to himself, to effect a compromise between the two without endangering his poetic integrity or lowering his vocational standards of craftsmanship?

These are the fundamental questions which the modern poet, to be true to himself and to his medium of art, must answer; for the poet must be concerned with the underlying forces and potentialities and the universal nature of human life, if his work is to have significance for mankind. They were, in fact, the questions involved in the problems of Whitman, Poe and Emily Dickinson in America, of Tennyson and the Victorian poets, though behind the imposing façade of the nineteenth century not perhaps so clearly distinguished. Most of the poets of the first decade of this century either failed to grasp the implications of the problems, or tried to reconcile themselves to the changing conditions with as little readjustment as was absolutely essential. They were still able to preserve the tranquillity of their inner worlds of imagination, if not to achieve great art. Such an attitude was no longer tenable after 1918. The first World War brought the conflict between human values and the values of modern civilization into the full light of consciousness, without any shadow of doubt, and the individual, much less the poet, could not afford to ignore it.

This, then, was the predicament confronting the poet from 1918 onwards, and it is a basic factor in the development of modern poetry. Each poet had to find his own solution. Some poets, such as Eliot and Yeats, have rejected contemporary standards altogether and

TRADITION IN THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

attempted to work out their own salvation by turning inwards to the life and discipline of the spirit. Others, among them Auden and the social-minded poets of the 'thirties, have sought a solution in a change of the economic and political structure of society, only to discover that external change is unsatisfactory if unaccompanied by a change in the heart of man. D. H. Lawrence looked towards a sexual interpretation of the universe and a redemption through a mystical and sexual fulfilment. The Fugitives appealed to the agrarian order and tradition of the Southern region of the United States. Ezra Pound, who had already isolated himself from his own country and the falsity of life epitomized in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, turned outwards to the perfection of style and, haunted by the demons of usury, unrealistically and misguidedly gave his assent to the rigid order of Fascism.

But the problem was the same in every case, though the approach and the preconceptions of the poet might be different. It accounts for the increasing preoccupation with religious and metaphysical subjects during the last thirty years. It also explains the apparent obscurity of thought and language: for, because poetry is governed only by the organic laws of its creation, the poet is compelled to use symbols and speak in a language which, though artistically or ethically significant, may not necessarily be related to the superficial standards of modern civilization.

INDEX

- Abercrombie, Lascelles, 43, 45,
 46, 54
 Aesthetes, The, 17, 18, 20
 Aesthetic Movement, The, 17,
 18
 Aesthetic, -ism, 12, 17/20, 23,
 29, 55, 57, 63, 94, 96, 98,
 109, 114
 Aldington, Richard, 8, 60, 89,
 95/100, 109, 112
 America, -n, 6, 7, 8, 24, 30, 64,
 68, 73/88, 89, 91, 92, 93, 94,
 95, 96, 100, 104, 107, 115
 Anglo-Saxon, 25, 93, 111
 Armstrong, Martin, 64
 Arnold, Matthew, 14, 27, 48, 93
 Auden, W. H., 2, 116
 Australia, -n, 5, 6, 7

 Barker, George, 2
 Barnes, William, 25, 26
 Bateson, F. W., 11
 Baudelaire, Charles, 18, 61, 73,
 74, 94, 95
 Beardsley, Aubrey, 18
 Beddoes, Thomas Lovell, 12
 Belloc, Hilaire, 46, 47, 54
 Bible, The, 6
 Binyon, Laurence, 24, 29, 47,
 48, 54
 Blake, William, 19, 37, 54
 Blavatsky, Madame, 19
 Blunden, Edmund, 55, 64,
 68/71
 Blunt, Wilfred Scawen, 24
 Böhme, Jacob, 19
 Bottomley, Gordon, 46, 54
 Bridges, Robert, 16, 24, 29, 52,
 54
 Brittain, 19

 Brontë, Emily, 29
 Brooke, Rupert, 2, 54, 56/58,
 60, 62
 Brooks, Cleanth, 80
 Brown, John, 88
 Browning, Robert, 10, 14, 15,
 26, 70, 75, 109, 111
 Bunyan, John, 82, 83
 Burne-Jones, Sir Edward Coley,
 13

 Cambridge School, The, 2
 Campbell, Roy, 7, 8
 Canada, Canadian, 5, 6, 7, 8
 Carman, Bliss, 7
Catholic Emancipation Act,
1829, The, 16
 Catholic Tradition, Anglo-, 15,
 16
 Catholic Tradition, Roman, 15,
 16, 22, 46, 47
 Catullus, 60, 91
 Cavalcanti, Guido, 111
 Celtic, 22
 Celtic Twilight, The, 20
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, 33, 51, 91
 Chesterton, G. K., 46, 47, 54
 China, Chinese, 93, 94, 111,
 112, 113
 Christ, -ian, -ianity, 11, 15, 16,
 17, 19, 26, 45, 64, 90, 103
 Clare, John, 25, 70
 Classical, Classicism, 24, 28, 46,
 48, 60, 61, 89, 90, 93, 94, 96,
 112
 Classical Scholarship, 24, 28
 Coleridge, S. T., 10, 22, 37, 95
 Commonwealth, British, 5, 7, 8
 Corbière, Tristan, 95, 111, 113
 Cosmopolitan, -ism, 6, 23, 76,
 79, 89, 93

- Crashaw, Richard, 22
 Cummings, E. E., 3
- Dante, Alighieri, 48
 Darley, George, 12
 Darwin, Charles, 11, 36, 40
 Davidson, John, 19
 Davies, W. H., 43, 54, 55
 Debussy, 94
 Decadents, The (*See also*
 Aesthetes), 10, 17, 22, 28, 32,
 60, 113
 De la Mare, Walter, 36/43, 54,
 55, 63
 De Quincey, T., 37
 Dickinson, Emily, 73, 115
 Doolittle, Hilda (*See* H. D.), 89
 Doughty, Charles Montagu, 29,
 51, 52
 Douglas, Lord Alfred, 47
 Dowson, Ernest, 17, 18, 109
 Drinkwater, John, 54, 56, 57, 58
 Duffin, H. C., 39
 Dulac, Edmund, 112
- Eastaway, Edward (*See* Edward
 Thomas), 65
Education Act, 1870, The, 29
 Edwardians, The, 29, 44, 55
 Eighteenth Century, The, 12,
 31, 70, 71
 Eliot, T. S., 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 54,
 64, 73, 74, 77, 79, 93, 94,
 103, 105, 109, 111, 112, 115
 Elizabethan Dramatists, 4
 Elliott, Brian, 6
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 75
English Review, The, 32
 Evolutionary Meliorism, 50
- Fascism, 116
 Fausset, Hugh I'Anson, 14
Fin-de-siècle, 17, 19
- Flaubert, Gustave, 112
 Flecker, James Elroy, 54, 60,
 61, 62
 Fletcher, John Gould, 94, 105
 Flint, F. S., 58, 59, 89, 91
 Ford, Ford Madox, 60
 France, 18, 61, 73, 93
 Freeman, John, 58
 Free Verse, 91, 92, 93, 96
 French, 6, 17, 18, 21, 60, 61,
 73, 94, 105, 111
 Freud, Sigmund, 40
 Frost, Robert, 64, 67, 68, 76/84,
 89
 Fugitives, The, 77, 105, 116
- Gaelic, 19
 Gauguin, 94
 Gautier, Théophile, 10, 91, 112,
 113
 Georgians, The, 1, 24, 28, 29,
 31, 34, 35, 44, 53/71, 76, 77,
 89, 92, 105
 German, 6
 Gibson, Wilfrid Wilson, 43, 44,
 54, 55, 63
 Gordon, Adam Lindsay, 7
 Gourmont, Rémy de, 112
 Graham, W. S., 3
 Graves, Robert, 64
 Greek, Greece, 6, 19, 48, 93,
 96, 97, 98, 100, 101, 109,
 112, 113
- Hamilton, Sir George Rostrevor,
 3, 4
 Hardy, Thomas, 9, 25/28, 29,
 37, 39, 49/51, 54, 70, 75
 Hawker, Robert Stephen, 25
 H. D., 89, 100/104, 105, 107,
 109
 Heath-Stubbs, John, 25

- Heine, Heinrich, 91
 Henley, William Ernest, 24
 Hérédia, José-Maria de, 60, 61
 Herrick, Robert, 37
 Hodgson, Ralph, 63
Hokku, 112
 Homer, 1, 14
 Hood, Thomas, 12
 Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 4, 15, 16, 25, 52
 Housman, A. E., 28, 29, 54
 Howells, William Dean, 75
 Hueffer, Ford Madox (*See* Ford Madox Ford), 89
 Hulme, T. E., 60, 89, 90, 91, 93
 Humanism, 90
 Humanitarianism, 12, 54, 83
 Hunt, Holman, 13
 Huxley, Thomas Henry, 19
- Imagists, The, 60, 61, 89/114
 Immanent Will, 50
 Immigration, 6, 27
 Imperialism, 23, 54
 Industrial, -ism, 11, 12, 13, 17, 27, 29, 44, 75, 80, 97
 Industrial Revolution (or Age), 12, 27
 Ireland, Irish, 19, 20, 64
 Irish Literary Revival, 20
 Italy, Italian, 6, 93, 94, 111
- James, Henry, 75
 Japan, -ese, 93, 111, 112
 Jeffers, Robinson, 77
 Johnson, Lionel, 17, 18, 22
 Joyce, James, 112
- Kafka, Franz, 82, 83
 Keats, John, 2, 10
 Keble, John, 16
- Keyes, Sidney, 84
 Kipling, Rudyard, 23, 24, 29, 30, 31, 47, 54, 78
 Koch, Vivienne, 105
- Laforgue, Jules, 73, 74, 95, 111, 113
 Langland, William, 4, 51
 Latin, 6
 Lawrence, D. H., 2, 54, 60, 62, 93, 99, 105, 116
 Leavis, F. R., 2, 31, 115
 Ledwidge, Francis, 64
 Le Gallienne, Richard, 18
 Lewis, Monk, 12
 Lindsay, Nicholas Vachel, 76, 78, 84/87, 88, 89
 Lisle, Leconte de, 60
London Mercury, *The*, 62
 Lowell, Amy, 89, 91, 95, 104, 110
- MacDonald, Wilson, 8
 Machine, The, 13, 55
 MacLeish, Archibald, 93
 Mairé, Philip, 78
 Mallarmé, Stéphane, 21, 73, 94, 95, 105
 Maritain, Jacques, 90
 Marsh, Sir Edward, 53, 54, 56, 57, 60, 62, 65
 Masfield, John, 29/34, 43, 44, 54, 55, 56, 62, 78
 Masters, Edgar Lee, 76, 84, 85, 86, 88, 89
 Materialism, 11, 12, 16, 47
 Mediaeval, -ism, 12, 13, 28, 47, 90, 93, 111, 112
 Meredith, George, 29
 Metaphysicals, The, 4, 16, 113
 Mew, Charlotte, 60

- Meynell, Alice, 22, 29
 Middle-West (U.S.A.), 76, 84, 87
 Millais, Sir John Everett, 13
 Millay, Edna St. Vincent, 77
 Milton, John, 2, 4, 93
 Monro, Harold, 54, 56, 58, 59, 60, 63
 Monroe, Harriet, 76, 77
 Moody, William Vaughan, 73
 Moore, Marianne, 93, 105/107
 Moore, T. Sturge, 47, 48, 49, 54, 62
 Moréas, Jean, 61
 Morris, William, 13, 17, 19, 46, 47
 Moulton, Thomas, 64
 Murry, Middleton, 54
 Mythology, mythological, 6, 7, 19, 20, 22, 45, 99, 104, 108, 109

 Newbolt, Sir Henry, 24, 29, 47, 54
 New England, 68, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 83
 Newman, John Henry, 16
New Statesman, The, 62
 New Zealand, 5
 Nichols, Robert, 64
 Nineteenth Century, *The*, 9/28, 29, 47, 51, 54, 73, 75, 76, 80, 89, 93, 94, 98, 109, 115
 Noh Plays, 112
 Noyes, Alfred, 34, 35, 36, 40
 Nursery Rhymes, 4, 37

 O'Leary, John, 19
 Organic Rhythm, 93, 98, 110
 Oxford Movement, 16

 Parnassians, *The*, 60, 61, 94, 95
 Pastoral Tradition, 43, 55, 58, 59, 63, 64, 65, 69, 70, 71
 Pater, Walter, 17
 Patmore, Coventry, 16, 22
 Patriotism, 23, 47, 54
 Pellow, J. D. C., 64
 Phillips, Stephen, 46
 Philosophy, 10, 11, 14, 19, 20, 24, 26, 33, 42, 43, 45, 48, 49, 60, 75, 76, 81, 84, 99, 104
 Poe, Edgar Allan, 37, 73, 74, 115
Poetry (edited by Harriet Monroe), 76, 77, 96
 Poetry Bookshop, *The*, 58, 60
 Politics, 10, 29, 87, 116
 Pound, Ezra, 2, 54, 60, 73, 89, 91, 94, 95, 96, 105, 107, 109/116
 Pre-Raphaelites, *The*, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 21, 28, 35, 46, 47, 48, 52, 60, 109, 113
 Propertius, 60
 Provence, Provençal, 93, 94, 111
 Psychical Research, 19
 Psychology, psychological, 3, 12, 32, 38, 40, 75, 76, 83
 Pusey, Edward Bouverie, 16
 Pylon School, *The*, 44

 Quennell, Peter, 64

 Ransom, John Crowe, 77, 105
 Read, Herbert, 54, 89, 93
 Realism, 23, 30, 32, 44, 55, 56, 59, 68, 78, 83
 Regional, -ism, 6, 24, 25, 28, 44, 54, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 84, 85, 89, 92, 105, 107
 Régnier, Henri de, 60, 61, 112
 Religion, 11, 15, 16, 17, 19, 34, 47, 55, 64, 90, 94, 99, 103, 116

- Renaissance, The, 90
 Rhymers Club, The, 18
 Rhys, Ernest, 19
 Robinson, Edwin Arlington, 73,
 75/77
 Romantic, -ism, 10, 11, 12, 17,
 18, 54, 58, 59, 61, 90
 Romantics, The, 13, 61
 Rome, 19, 93, 96, 112
 Ross, Ronald, 54
 Rossetti, Christina, 16, 37
 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, 13, 16,
 17, 19, 46, 47
 Rossetti, W. M., 13
- Sackville-West, Victoria, 55,
 64, 71
 Samain, 60
 Sandburg, Carl, 76, 78, 84,
 87/89
 Sappho, 91
 Sargent, Edmund Beale, 54
 Satire, 46, 47, 49, 57, 77, 79,
 113
 School of Images, The, 91
 Schopenhauer, 50
 Science, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 21,
 26, 34, 35, 36, 38, 40, 94
 Sea Shanties, 30
 Seventeenth Century, The, 4,
 16, 22, 45, 77, 113
 Shakespeare, William, 2, 14, 45,
 46, 109
 Shanks, Edward, 58
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 2, 10, 22
 Shove, Fredegond, 64
 Sitwell, Sir Osbert, 60
 Sitwells, The, 54
 Sixteenth Century, The, 4
 Skelton, John, 4
 Smith, A. J. M., 7
 South Africa, 5, 7
- Southworth, James G., 79
 Spenser, Edmund, 51
 Sprung Rhythm, 4
 Squire, Sir John, 55, 58, 60,
 62, 63
 Squirearchy, The, 60
 Stephens, James, 54, 63, 64
 Stevenson, R. L., 24, 30, 36, 37
 Swedenborg, 19
 Swift, Jonathan, 82
 Swinburne, Algernon Charles,
 10, 29, 35, 60, 109
 Symbolism, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22,
 62, 73, 88, 94, 100
 Symbolists, The, 17, 18, 60,
 61, 73, 94, 95, 105
 Symons, A. J. R., 18
 Symons, Arthur, 17, 18, 19, 21,
 30, 109
 Synge, John M., 30
- Tailhade, Laurent, 112
Tanka, 112
 Tate, Allen, 77
 Tennyson, Lord Alfred, 2, 10,
 14, 15, 18, 21, 35, 44, 115
 Thomas, Dylan, 2
 Thomas, Edward, 55, 64/68,
 70, 78, 110
 Thompson, Francis, 22, 29, 60
 Totalitarianism, 23
 Transcendentalism, 75
 Translation, 6, 18, 91, 94, 111,
 112
 Trevelyan, R. C., 54
 Troubadours of Provence, The,
 93
 Turner, W. J., 58
 Tynan, Katherine, 21
- Verlaine, Paul, 18, 73, 94

INDEX—continued

Vers Libre (*See also* Free Verse), 110

Victorian Age, The, 11, 14

Victorian Poets, The, 1, 10, 12
35, 36, 46, 115

Villon, François, 91

Wagner, 56

Wales, 19

Waley, Arthur, 112

Walpole, Horace, 12

Watson, Sir William, 24, 47

Whitman, Walt, 73, 74, 75, 78,
84, 86, 87, 93, 115

Wilde, Oscar, 10, 17, 60

Williams, Oscar, 74

Williams, William Carlos, 89,
107/109

Wilson, Edmund, 94

Wordsworth, William, 2, 10, 11,
25, 31, 32, 43, 44, 54, 80

Wylie, Elinor, 77

Yeats, W. B., 9, 10, 18/22, 29,
30, 37, 54, 95, 109, 111, 112,
115

Yellow Book, The, 19

Young, Andrew, 78

