NEW IDEAS AND TRENDS IN ENGLISH POETRY DURING THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE XXTH CENTURY

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It is impossible to study the poetry of a nation detached from her history, and this is particularly so if we are to trace the genesis and make an analysis of the thought expressed in the recent poetry of a nation like England which has always occupied a significant place in the history of civilization. The English poet has always had a very high sense of responsibility to truth, man, and civilization in general, and the English poetic mind is most productive when these are exposed to danger. During the 2nd and 3rd decades of the present age the Englishman and his institutions were exposed to a great danger as a result of which a fundamental change began to pass over the English spirit. The poetry of these two decades, that is the 20's and 30's, is a most thorough index of this change, because it was during these two decades that the character of this age began to reveal itself. Future historians may regard the period between the two World Wars as both the most crucial and complex in the history of mankind. In exactly thirty years the peace of the world was twice threatened, lost, and restored. Looking back from the sixth decade of this century over the last four decades we see that it has been an age of destruction, of chaos, and of collapse not only in the physical but also in the intellectual and moral aspects of life. The generation of Englishmen who lived through the First World War became conscious of the break up of their world by realizing that its foundations were destroyed by a sudden and bewildering loss of faith in the whole moral, religious, and social heritage of the nation. The post-war generation of English writers, who had the misfortune of growing up in an age of explosives, were men uneasy and unsure of themselves and their place in a tormented age. In response to this situation there was an outpouring of poetry which spoke of the "end", the "decline", the "crisis", or the "death" of western civilization. This generation of war-rebels made short work of the whole Victorian ideological structure; they felt that some of the ideas of their fathers were in need of urgent critical examination. Among these were the dogma of Progress, the belief in the perfectibility of Man, and the subordination of literature to conventional morality. The Victorian Age was an age of belief in progress, commerce, industry and individual freedom, and Victorians hoped that they were on the way to securing a stable and perfect society. It was, moreover, an age of unparalleled prosperity and of astonishing growth of population. Optimism and complacency were the dominant sentiments of the
times. It was the age of Shaw and Wells, whose social criticism was turned towards such institutions as the church, the rights of property, the marriage laws and traditional morality which handicapped progress. This mood of hope and belief in progress was, however, soon abandoned, and the seed of doubt entered the minds of many intellectuals. Nothing could hide the fact that in spite of all this hope and belief in the future there was something wrong.

English society was, contrary to the prevailing ideas, beginning to fall apart rather than proceed towards perfection; it was becoming more and more impersonal and going out of control, for industrialism had severed the ties which had bound man and society together for centuries. Such a society is a dangerous one, for it is inhuman and is ultimately self-destructive. Thomas Hardy, who did not share in the optimism of his age, was one of the writers who had a profound feeling of the dangerous character of this society. In the preface to his Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922) we have him making the following statement:

"Whether owing to the barbarizing of taste in the younger minds by the dark madness of the late war, the unabashed cultivation of selfishness in all classes, the plethoric growth of knowledge with the stunning of wisdom, a degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, or from any other cause, we seem threatened with a new Dark Age."

This was the prophetic statement of a pessimistic mid-Victorian at the beginning of the inter-war period, but it must be noted that Hardy (1840-1928) had a fixed world view and tragic vision little affected by the circumstances of this period. Most of his work was in the nature of a protest against the optimism of the earlier Victorians and the whole Victorian scheme of life and society. He was a naive poet of simple attitudes and outlook; he felt deeply and consistently and communicated his feelings perfectly. His great poems, almost always, are inspired out of his own remembered past, and are expressions of utter loss, the blindness of fate, and the cruelty of time. He rejected the dogma of Christianity but in general respected its morality. He had no belief in the natural goodness of Man, because when he looked about him he saw nothing in nature but evil, cruelty and ugliness, for all of which he blamed God. The Dynasts (1906, and 1908), which is his most important work, expresses Hardy's interpretation of world history as having no order and purpose. At the end of this epic-drama we have the following comments of the choruses on the defeat of Napoleon, which will serve to illustrate the importance Hardy attached to blind fate in the universe:

1 The Dynasts, published in three parts in 1904, 1906 and 1908 is the largest single work of poetry in English literature since the Victorian Age. It is an epic-drama of the war with Napoleon, and is divided into nineteen acts and one hundred and thirty scenes. It serves a didactic purpose; it abounds in action and comments on action. The action of the play covers ten years, from 1805 to Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. In this vast international tragedy Hardy seems to stress England's part in saving Europe from the domination of a dictator.
"Spirit of the Pities:
   Why prompts the Will so senseless-shaped a doing?

"Spirit of the Years:
   I have told thee that It works unwittingly,
   As one possessed, not judging.

"Semichorus of Ironic Spirits:
   Of Its doings if It knew,
   What It does It would not do!
   Since It knows not, what for sense
   Speeds Its spinnings in the immense?
   None; a fixed foresightless dream
   Is Its whole philosopheme.
   Just so; an unconscious planning,
   Like a potter rapely planning!"²

In *The Dynasts* Hardy makes statements which are mature and of universal appeal. Hardy regarded the world and humanity as parts of one vast unconsciousness "an ever unconscious automatic sense, unweeting why or or whence!" All through his literary career he never stopped questioning the purpose of the universe. Here are unforgettable lines:

Has some Vast Imbecility,
Mighty to build and blend,
But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?
Or come we of an Automaton
Unconscious of our pains?¹

The following are some of the responses he gives to his questionings:

It works unconsciously, as heretofore,
Eternal artistries in Circumstance ...²

Thinking on, yet weighing not Its thought,
Unchecks Its clock-like laws ... ³

This viewless, voiceless Turner of the Wheel...⁴

Like a knitter drowsed,
Whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness,
The will has woven with an absent heed
Since life first was; and ever will so weave.⁵

¹ "Natures Questioning", *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*, (1898).
The Victorians believed that they were living in a house constructed on firm foundations and established in perpetuity, but Hardy did not share in this belief; he felt that the Victorian world was passing away:

The bower we shrined to Tennyson,
Gentlemen,
Is roof-wrecked; damps there drip upon
Sagged seats, the creeper-nails are rust,
The spider is sole denizen;
Even she who voiced these rhymes is dust,
Gentlemen!¹

Kipling, who was a staunch defender of Victorian standards, might be taken as complete contrast to Hardy. He was not interrogative like Hardy, on the other hand he was acquiescent, as one can see in his "Natural Theology":

This was none of the good Lord's pleasure,
For the Spirit He breathed in Man is free;
But what comes after is measure for measure,
And not a God that afflicteth thee.
As was the sowing so the reaping
Is now and ever more shall be.²

There are times when Hardy shows the same degree of awareness of the ugliness and desolation of the modern world as T.S.Eliot:

I leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.³

This is reminiscent of some of the bold descriptions of desolation in The Waste Land:

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel,
There is the chapel, only the wind's home.
It has no windows, and the door swings,
Dry bones can harm no one.⁴

¹ "An Ancient to Ancients", Thomas Hardy, *Collected Poems*, (Macmillan, 1925;)
² "Natural Theology", Kipling, *Collected Poems*, 1920
³ "The Darkling Thrush", Thomas Hardy, *Collected Poems*, (Macmillan, 1925;)
The following quotation in taken from the second stanza of "The Darkling Thrush" and is strongly reminiscent of the opening lines of "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock":

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant¹

W.B.Yeats, who had a unique vision of the life and destiny of Man had also felt that the world was on the eve of a great change. Yeats's poetic career, which began in 1880 and ended in 1939, coincides with the period of disintegration of belief in Western Europe. In his effort to compensate for this disintegration he created a coherent system of thought which found its expression in a complex pattern of symbols comprehensible to almost no one but the poet himself. Victorian science had destroyed the possibility of belief in Christianity and Yeats was seeking a substitute for a faith no longer tenable in a materialistic age. Being very religious, but deprived by Huxley and Tyndall of the simple beliefs of his childhood, he made a new religion and a new world where he could feel at home and give order and proportion to his thoughts. When he first began writing poetry he was interested in a romantic dream world and lacked a clear system of thought, nevertheless he had a vision though without certainty. In a time of rapid flux and change, when the old standards had been shaken and the new not yet proved and tested, he had no choice but escape into a private world. His private world was the mythological world of Irish legend on which he built some of the finest poetry of our time. This escape, however, into a complete and systematic symbolical world finally led him to a highly abstract and artificial philosophy from which ordinary human values had been driven out. In his effort to reach an orderly philosophy of life he forgot about life itself and he died in complete disillusionment. In his epitaph for himself he says

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman pass by.

Briefly, Yeats was, like some of his contemporaries, aware of the crumbling foundations of western civilization, and that the only solution for him was by a withdrawal from the outer world and a reconstruction of an inner one. Losing his Christian faith in early youth he was driven to a tradition of belief older than Christianity in which he found a unity of culture. He did not seek refuge in this tradition merely for its strangeness or its beauty but for an actual foundation on which to build a coherent personal world at a time when

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world²

¹ "The Darkling Thrush", Thomas Hardy, Ibid.
Yeats was an imposing and arresting figure in English poetry but he stands in a curious, isolated world of his own belonging to no school. Yeats's thought was extremely old-fashioned for the time he lived in a belief in race, blood and folk-soul and an anti-democratic attitude to society. All through his poetry we find an aristocratic ideal set against the utilitarian ideal of the middle classes. The inborn aristocracy of the peasant and the landed gentry was dependent on a certain tradition, whereas the shopkeeper had no tradition and thought only of commercial gain. As a matter of fact, in his view, the world had been shattered under the pressure of the newly emerging middle class and the mass standardization which followed. He, therefore, looked either below or above this class for a firm basis of tradition.

For Yeats the antagonism between the poet and his world was rhetoric, and between the poet and himself was poetry; therefore he never in his work permitted argument to replace vision. In his search for possible themes for poetry he never felt the desire of writing a poem of action, or a poem of wide contemporary reference.

All through his poetical career, Yeats was trying to find a substitute for a tradition which had been destroyed by modern science; in his autobiography he says:

"I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-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."

Yeats's philosophic system was an attempt to make a coherent formulation of the natural and the supernatural. Finding modern science abstract and meaningless he set forth a symbolical system which was concerned with values and interpretations. He was aiming at a logical and boundless philosophy which would unite the scientific with the poetical in such a manner as they are united in religion. Yeats's system was concerned with three important issues: a) a picture of human history, b) an account of human psychology, and c) an account of the life of the soul after death. His theory of history is the easiest to understand. It is, in many respects, similar to Spengler's cyclic theory. Civilizations are, according to this theory, run through cycles of two thousand years, i.e. periods of growth, maturity, and of decline. Yeats uses a symbolism drawn from the twenty-eight phases of the moon. A civilization reaches its highest point at the full moon, and then gradually declines. He also uses the symbolism of the moon to describe the different types of men who are classified on the basis of their mixtures of the subjective and objective. There are, however, not twenty-eight types of men but only twenty-six. Yeats's system of psychology assigns four faculties to man: Will; Mask; Creative Mind; and body of Fate. The interplay of influences among these four faculties is very intricate and cannot be treated here. [Regarding the life of the soul after death Yeats believed that it went through certain cycles in which it relived its earthly life, becoming free from pleasure, pain, good and evil, finally reaching a state of blessedness. When the soul has finished its cycles of human births, it drinks from the Cup of Lethe, and having forgotten all of its former life, is reborn in a human body. The soul, therefore carries on its existence after the death of the physical body, and under various conditions souls may communicate with the living.]
to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians.\textsuperscript{1}

For Yeats, science and abstraction were threatening art, and he was so anxious to believe in the independence of art from external things that he was searching for a system in which nature was essentially symbolical. He rejected any theory of art which claimed that art was an imitation of the outer world. Symbolist movement, to which Yeats was so closely attached, was essentially an anti-scientific tendency.\textsuperscript{2} The symbolist's hostility to science was directed against its trespassing into regions where it had no business to be. Yeats's system with its gyres and cones, its strange psychology and its open acceptance of the supernatural, leaves an impression on one of sheer superstition and unrealism; but his autobiographies shows how deep was his interest in the life around him. He was not an escapist, and he refused to run away from life. \textit{He was seeking a system of thought which would leave his imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of one history, and that the soul's}\textsuperscript{3}

Much of Yeats's philosophy revealed a preoccupation with the issues which were raised by the Romantic Movement of the early 19th century. This movement was essentially a reaction against scientific ideas which emerged with certain discoveries in the physical sciences. The 17th and 18th centuries were in Europe the great period of the development of the mathematical and physical sciences with Descartes and Newton as ruling influences. The mechanical explanation of the universe put forward by these scientists exerted a profound influence over many writers\textsuperscript{4}. Following hasty generalizations based on scientific theories, many writers believed that they could subject the principles of human nature to a treatment similar to the scientist's dispassionate examination of the physical world. But the conception of a fixed mechanical order operating in every sphere of life finally exhausted itself, because it failed to offer any satisfactory explanation for many aspects of human experience, and it was not long before a reaction set in against this mechanical conception of nature. The idea of a well-regulated universe, obeying physical laws, could not be accepted by such poets as Blake and Wordsworth for whom the universe was something more mysterious than a machine, and their own souls were far from being well-regulated; because when they looked into themselves they saw nothing but fantasy, conflict and confusion. So they had to find a language, a new set of principles and a system of thought which would explain the experience of the individual soul. Thus we have the beginnings of a new philosophical revolution and a new insight into nature. In the middle of the 19th century scientific ideas were again

\begin{itemize}
  \item[2] During the nineties, Yeats met Mallarme in Paris, and although he knew little French at that time, was introduced to the doctrines of Symbolism by his friend Arthur Symons whose translations from Mallarme influenced his early poems considerably.
  \item[3] From the dedication to the 1925 edition of \textit{A Vision}.
  \item[4] The geometrical plays of Racine and the well-balanced couplets of Pope are only some of the manifestations of these influences.
\end{itemize}
in vogue because some destructive new theories had been introduced under the light of recent biological discoveries. Darwin's Theory of Evolution reduced man to the position of a helpless, insignificant animal at the mercy of the forces about him. It was believed that the laws of heredity and environment could explain almost anything that is worth explaining about man. Such ideas were the philosophical basis of a doctrine of literature called Naturalism which regarded literary writing as a kind of laboratory experiment. It would, however, be wrong to attribute the emergence of Naturalism in literature entirely to Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), because by the middle of the 19th century a reaction had already set in against the looseness and sentimentality of Romanticism which can be observed in such poets as Tennyson and Browning. We find in the verse of these poets something of the exactitude of description and severity of language as we do in the Parnassian group of French poets. This is especially noticeable in the technical, precise, and almost metallic descriptions of Tennyson. But this reaction is seen much more clearly in French literature, because English poets, after the Romantic Movement, were not greatly interested in literary methods till the end of the 19th century. Although the 19th century English poets had a profound belief that nature cannot be divorced from its aesthetic values at the expense of purely quantitative scientific values, they remained peculiarly passive regarding new developments of technique against the machine-like technique of Naturalism. The French poets of the second half of the 19th century, on the other hand, realizing the danger of the Parnassian ideal, which was characterized by a preoccupation with form and description at the expense of art, brought about

1 The doctrine received critical support by historians and critics like Taine who claimed that human virtue and vice were physiological processes similar to chemical processes and that geographical and climatic factors could explain the thought and style of a particular writer or a particular period of literature.

2 This group, which had among its members Gautier, Leconte de Lisle and Heredia, first made its appearance in the 1850's. They were aiming at an objective and accurate treatment of historical incidents and natural phenomena.

3 The following quotation will, I think, illustrate this tendency in Tennyson:

The silver eel, in shining volumes roll’d,
The yellow carp, in scales bedropp’d with gold.

Tennyson was trying to come to terms with science but he can never be completely sure of its premises. The mechanistic explanation of the universe and human nature puzzles him continuously:

"The stars," she whispers, "blindly run." (*In Memoriam*)

The earlier poets had solved the perplexity of such like issues by ignoring them. Milton was completely assured of the justice of the ways of God; notice his feeling of confidence in the existing order of things:

Just are the ways of God
And justifiable to men (*Samson Agonistes*)

We have Pope writing fifty years later with the same view of the universe:

A mighty maze! but not without a plan. (*Essay On Man*)

But a reading of *In Memoriam* will show that this note of confidence does not occur there. Tennyson was deeply perplexed with intellectual issues brought about by scientific discoveries.
a string reaction against it called Symbolism. This new movement was headed by Verlaine and Mallarme who shook the whole edifice of traditional French art and culture. For many centuries French poetry had been following the assumption that its aim was the imitation of nature, but now it began to explore the misty depths of the subconscious and the indefinite streams of mental associations. By a strange coincidence America supplied a powerful stimulus to this new movement in France through the writings of Edgar Allan Poe. He was first discovered in France in 1847 by Baudelaire who happened to read some of his writings in an American magazine. In 1852 Baudelaire published Poe's tales in French thus making his influence firm in France; his critical writings must be considered as the earliest scripture of the Symbolist Movement in France. Poe was aiming at ultra-Romantic effects through a suggestive iridefiniteness of expression not unlike the vagueness and indefiniteness of music. He achieved this mood of vagueness by a confusion between the imaginary world and the real world of sensations. Although Symbolism was considered a literary revolution in France, it received no such recognition in England where almost all the elements of this new movement had long been in literary currency, especially in the English poetry of the 16th and 17th centuries; Shakespeare, Donne, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats used Symbolism without theorizing about it. French poetry, however, had always been logical and precise and it was not until the advent of this new movement that French poetry began to achieve a degree of fluidity and richness of imagery approximating to this quality in English poetry. Revolting violently against the mechanistic view of nature and the social conception of man, and trying to make poetry dependent entirely on the sensations and emotions of the individual, are probably the most marked features of the Symbolist Movement, and it was in these respects that the modern English poetry was indebted to French poetry.

It is a peculiar fact that a lost element of English poetry should be returned to it by way of France and by a non-English poet. This peculiarity seems to be explained to some extent when we consider the nationality of the greatest symbolists who have contributed to English literature, viz. writers like Joyce and T.S.Eliot. Of these Joyce was an Irishman like Yeats, and T.S.Eliot an American. The English poetic mind is, on the whole, less critical and philosophical than the French, and furthermore it is less preoccupied with aesthetic theory and particular effects.¹

Three of Yeats's poems are particularly interesting as they illustrate some fundamental aspects of his political, religious and moral philosophy: they appea-

¹ The case of Walter Pater (1839-1894) deserves attention here. He was the only English writer who was trying to bring about a symbolist revolution in England; he says that experience gives us

"not the truth of eternal outlines, ascertained once for all,
but a world of fine gradations and subtly linked conditions,
shifting intricately as we ourselves change."

This was exactly how the French symbolists regarded this matter.
red in the collection *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). "The Second Coming" expresses Yeats's idea that the present era is dying:

"Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innoence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

These were the features of the democratic world system for Yeats. For this decaying system he was offering an aristocratic order which had its roots in his hatred against the vulgarity and materialism of industrial England.¹

To Yeats the French Revolution was the first sign of disintegration and the rise of abstraction, science, and democracy, which in his system meant confusion, coarseness and vulgarity. He laments the lost order of things and is afraid of the new in his "What was Lost":

"I sing what was lost and dread what was won"

In "The Man and the Echo"³ we find him in utter hopelessness regarding the present time:

"And all seems evil until I
Sleepless would lie down and die."

but the echo answers:

"Lie down and die."

Against this hopelessness we find him offering a system of aristocracy in "Meditations in Time of Civil War".⁴

"Surely among a rich man’s flowering lawns
Amid the rustle of his planted hill,
Life overflows without ambitious pains;
And rains down life until the basin spill,
And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains
As though to choose whatever shape it wills
And never stoop to a mechanical
Or servile shape, at others’ beck and call."

His aristocratic sentiments are further revealed in "A Prayer for My Daughter"⁵

1 Yeats believed that the Celtic race was opposed to the present civilization:

"We irish, born into that ancient sect
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
And by its formless spawning fury wrecked.
Climb to our own proper dark, that we may trace
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face. (Last Poems and Plays)"

2 Last poems and Plays, Macmillan, 1939. p. 36.
3 Ibid. p. 83.
4 Ancestral Houses
5 Michael Robartes and the Dancer, Macmillan, 1921.
"And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree."

Yeats found one consolation in life, and that was in art, because he believed that works of art belong to eternity. This is the theme of "Lapis Lazuli"¹:

"All things fall and are built again,
And those that build them again are gay."

Yeats's poems abound in violent protests against his age, but they have to be searched. From about the publication of The Green Helmet (1912) onwards he protested strongly against democratic vulgarity², middle class caution³ and newspapers⁴.

Regarding his religion one may say that he was a perfect pagan. In his "Vaccination VIII"⁵ he says:

"I—though heart might find relief
Did I become a Christian man and choose for my belief
What seems most welcome in the tomb — play a predestined part.
Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.
The lion and the honeycomb, what has scripture said?
So get you gone, Von Hügel, though with blessings on your head."

Yeats implies here that Christianity sterilizes man's heart and leaves there no concern for art and the rich variety of life; it imposes its cruel ascetism on the poet.

We may sum up Yeats's system thus: his system combined idealistic, static, tragic and religious conceptions, but the predominant idea in it was fatalism. Which tended to refraining from action. Yeats believed in purification from evil after death, but he saw no end to evil in life.⁶

¹ Last Poems and Plays, Macmillan, 1940, p. 4.
² "All things at one common level lie", "These are the clouds" Collected Poems, p. 108.
³ "The merchant and the clerk breathed on the world with timid breath'' "At Galway Races'', Ibid. p. 108.
⁴ "An old bellows full of angry wind"
⁵ Collected Poems, Macmillan (1935), p. 285-6 The reference here is to Fredrich Baron von Hügel (1852-1925) who was a British Roman Catholic philosopher. He wrote two books: The Mystical Element of Religion (1908) and Eternal Life (1912). His influence on modern Catholicism has been considerable.
⁶ Our discussion of Yeats's position ends here. This brief discussion aims at clarifying certain ideological issues that disturbed or stimulated Yeats's mind in the rapidly changing world of the 20th century. Our treatment of him here has had to be fragmentary and far from being thorough; For a detailed treatment of his life and poetry the reader is referred to Jeffares: W.B. Yeats, Man and Poet, London, Routledge, 1949.

Macneice: The Poetry of Yeats.
Yeats was not the only poet of the early 20th century who was deeply concerned with the increasing ugliness and wickedness of his times; there were others who would agree with Yeats that.

"Many ingenious lovely things are gone"¹

from their world. As early as 1913 G.K. Chesterton (1872-1936) felt that his world was doomed:

"The Victorian Age made one or two mistakes but they were mistakes that were really useful: that is, mistakes that were really mistaken. They thought that commerce outside a country must extend peace: it has certainly often extended war. They thought that commerce inside a country must certainly promote prosperity; it has largely promoted poverty.²

His poetry is full of severe social criticism of a kind which is direct and at times even coarse:

"III fares the land, to hastening ills a prey
Where Wealth accumulates and Men decay!
So rang of old the noble voice in vain
0’er the Last Peasants wandering on the plain,
Doom has reversed the riddle and the rhyme,
While sinks the commerce reared upon that crime,
The thriftless towns litter with lives undone,
To whom our madness left no joy but one;
And irony that glares like Judgement Day
Sees Men accumulate and Wealth decay."³

His awareness of the increasing ugliness of the English countryside under the heavy industrialization of the pre-1914 days was very acute:

"Smoke rolls in stinking, suffocating wrack
On Shakespeare’s land, turning the green one black;"⁴

Those who look back nostalgically upon the years preceding the First World War and believe that they had been years of order and calm are seriously mistaken, because those were the years of unrest in the social system. In poetry the spirit of the time shows itself in the bitter social satire of a few poets like Chesterton, Wilfrid Wilson Gibson (1878- ), D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) and the philosophical questionings of Lascelles Abercrombie (1881-1939)⁵, who are often classified as Georgian Poets, but in fact they have a vitality and vigour

² First appeared in The Tower (1928).
³ The Victorian. Age in Literature, Butterworth, 1913, pp. 250-251.
⁵ "By a Reactionary", Ibid. p. 9.
⁶ Of these poets Gibson will receive especial attention as one of the War poets towards the end of this section.
which are enough to separate them from this group. How could one dare to include the poet of these lines among the Georgians:

The men that worked for England
They have their graves at home:
And bees and birds of England
About the cross can roam.

But they that fought for England,
Following a falling star,
Alas, alas for England,
They have their graves afar.

And they that rule in England,
In stately conclave met,
Alas, alas for England
They have no graves as yet.\(^1\)

The Georgians were too much occupied with the beauty of English countryside to notice the ugliness of industrialism spreading over it, but Chesterton was not so blind or deaf as they were:

God rest you merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay:
On your reposeful cities lie
Deep silence, broken only by
The motor horn’s melodious cry,
The hooter’s happy bray.\(^2\)

His sensibility was almost post-1914 War in its sharpness and awareness of significant detail:

The folk that live in Liverpool, their heart is in their boots;
They go to hell like lambs, they, do, because the hooter hoots.
Where men may not be dancing, though the wheels may dance all day
And men may not be smoking; but only chimneys may.\(^3\)

Gibson was a keen observer of aspects of modern city life and industrialism. His poetry is traditional in every respect but his imagery, which is modern in every sense of the word, as will be seen in the following lines which describe the eyes of modern factory workers:

The great, red eyes ... 
They burn me through and through.
They glare upon me all night long;
They never sleep;

2 "A Christmas Carol" Ibid.p. 90.
3 "Me Heart" Ibid. p. 212.
But always glower on me.
They never even blink;
But stare, and stare . . .¹

His *Daily Bread* (published 1910) was a realistic study of the moments of crisis and sorrow in the lives of factory workers mainly of Northumberland. *Fires* (1912), *Thoroughfares* (1914) and *Livelihood* (1917) were all realistic studies in verse of working-class life. Gibson is important because he introduced the proletarian note into English poetry at a time when poetry was not interested in humble folk. His concern was centered round the contemporary social scene which he treated with the stern realism of Crabbe. But in spite of the originality of subject matter he was faced with the difficulty of finding suitable forms.

John Masefield (1879) was also involved in a similar struggle; he was traditionalist at heart, but he chose the modern aspects of life without having the necessary social attitude. He expresses his aim in his poem "A Consecration":

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 lookout.²

He can, hardly however, be said to have pursued this aim to any significant extent and he has been subjected to so much condemnation by the younger generation who considered him "as good as dead or practically dead". But Masefield's importance from a historical point of view should be emphasized, because he made poetry popular at a time when it received very little attention from the general public.

Lascelles Abercrombie (1881-1939) had a tragic and fatalistic vision of life which is similar to Hardy's in many respects. This fatalism, which runs through the poetry of these poets, and assumes greater intensity in the poetry of Yeats and Eliot during the 1920's, seems to be a reflection of the general mood of political appeasement and passifism that was prevailing during the period between the two world wars. Abercrombie's fatalistic outlook does not leave any room for hope and he finds mankind completely at the mercy of an irresistible force which is engaged in an action that will, in the end, destroy life altogether. Abercrombie's fatalism, however, was not an entirely materialistic one, because he believed that good and evil were results, not of man's free will, but of heredity and the spiritual order of the universe. His conception of good and evil was allied to Blake's in that they both moved from the theory of the contraries claiming that

Without contraries no progress. Attraction and repulsion, Reason and Energy, love and hatred, are necessary to human existence. From these contrasts spring that religion calls Good and Evil.¹

Basing his judgement on these premises of absolute determinism he blames God for the blood that his creatures shed.

If there was harm
Done through me, let the Lord repent, not me.²

Man's hopeless position in this deterministic world is illustrated with powerful imagery in the following lines:

I see a man's life like a little flame
Clinging to one end of a burning spill;
And the man's in the grasp of a great anger.³

Apart from his meditations on life, Abercrombie also makes some interesting analyses of the nature of man from the biological and philosophical points of view. He is, for instance, concerned with the differentiating characteristics of man and animal. He concludes that man's consciousness of sin can be the only truly distinguishing factor to guide us in this matter.

All these poets we have briefly discussed reflect, in a minor degree, the increasing incoherence of their society, and also the fact that they could no longer see or feel this society as a whole⁴. It is this very lack of the ability of correlating the individual life with the life of the society that forms the basis of the crisis in modern poetry. Almost all of these poets continued writing poetry⁵, passing through the calamitous years of the First World War, to the time when the Second World War broke out in 1939, without undergoing any fundamental ideological change, because they had arrived, before 1914, at certain fixed formulations about life and man that could hardly be shaken by the War of 1914-1918. It was left to the generation which grew through the War to bring the revolt to bold affirmation, maturing its possibilities and enlarging the area of its action. The years 1914-1918 saw an unprecedented extension of public interest in poetry. The verse which was in vogue at the time was that of the Georgians. The Georgian Group flourished in the reign of George V, and included Gordon Bottomley, Rupert Brooke, William H. Davies, Walter De la Mare, John Drinkwater, James

¹ W.Blake: Marriage of Heaven and Hell, p. 117.
² L.Abercrombie: Blind, p. 58.
³ Cf. Like flies on a heath
Hiding from the wind they are; but there comes running
A singeing wild fire through the heather.
(King Lear, act IV, sc. 1, lines 37—38)

⁴ Poets like Yeats, Lawrence and Eliot attempted to build up coherent personal worlds of their own. Yeats escaped into the Irish past and mythology; Lawrence into Primitivism; Eliot went back to the secure foundations of European civilization and tradition.

⁵ Abercrombie lived until the eve of the Second World War; Chesterton died in 1936; Lawrence died in 1930.

The Georgian Movement owed its birth to the publication of an anthology of five volumes, between 1912 and 1922, known as Georgian Poetry, the first volume of which contained a manifesto by Edward Marsh, its editor:

This volume is issued in the belief that English poetry is now once again putting on a new strength and beauty. Few readers have the leisure or the zeal to investigate each volume as it appears; and the process of recognition is often slow. This collection, drawn entirely from the publications of the last two years, 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.

The poets of the Georgian Group had a common aim—search for certainty in a world of vague ideas and crumbling foundations. All new literary movements have a similar origin and aim viz. dissatisfaction with the past and the desire to keep in touch with the spirit of its time. This was exactly the case in the emergence of the Georgian Movement—dissatisfaction with the artificiality and insincerity of Victorian conventions and attitudes and a longing for rejoicing in those aspects of England which were still suitable for treatment in the traditional manner. Thus, the Georgian poetry is characterized by a quiet, meditative mood and a music that keeps time to the slow pulse of rustic England. It is completely devoid of originality and depth of thought, because it was aiming to avoid all kinds of intellectual conflicts in order to find relief from the complex burden of an era of dangerous thought and seek refuge in whatever simplicities were still available. The following lines from Rupert Brooke's "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester" which was published in the first volume of Georgian Poetry (1911-1912), show us that he was deliberately closing his eyes:

Say, is there beauty yet to find?
And certainty? and Quiet kind?
Deep meadows yet, for to forget
The lies, and truths, and pain? ... oh! yet
Stands the church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?

Disturbed by the rapid flux of change they were seeking something unchangeable to rest their thought, and the English countryside had not yet been affected by the devil of industrialism; for the time being it ravaged in the urban areas. Therefore Beauty, Certainty and Quietness, those unchangeable aspects of ci-

³ Only the most outstanding Georgian poets are listed here. For a more complete index of these poets the reader is referred to Swinnerton: The Georgian Literary Scene, Dent, 1938 and Twentieth Century Poetry, An Anthology ed. Harold Munro, Chatto & Windus, 1929. It will be seen that Harold Munro included such poets of different temperaments as Eliot, Lawrence and Pound side by side with typical Georgians like Davies and Drinkwater.
NEW IDEAS AND TRENDS IN ENGLISH POETRY DURING THE FIRST...

vilization, form the most important part of their subject matter. They were principally concerned with nature, love, leisure, childhood, animals and other non-controversial subjects. Their style was, on the whole, characterized by a lyrical strain and a certain amount of discipline but none of these features was intense. Typical Georgian poetry was a poetry of simple statements entirely free from complex attitudes and philosophies which were subject to attack and disintegration. Any social or philosophical issues would have been undesirable as such-like questions would expose the poet to the disturbing effects of disintegration and change, so we find him purposely avoiding ideological conflicts of all kinds. He looked upon city life and mechanization as regrettable necessities, and his return to the simple life of countryside, sea, and open road was a reaction to the industrial tendencies of his day. The opposition to the Georgian Movement was represented by Wheels which was edited by Edith Sitwell. Miss Sitwell and her group which included such fine poets as Owen, Nancy Cunard, Osbert Sitwell and Aldous Huxley, brought to English poetry a critical awareness of the social forces that break the ties between man and nature, and man and man. All the volumes of Wheels were characterized by a certain verbal richness and lack of a unified attitude to life which sometimes revealed itself as deliberate artificiality and sometimes as despair. This is certainly the case in Osbert Sitwell's "Twentieth Century Harliquinade":

The pantomime of life is near its close:
The stage is strewn with ends and bits of things,
With mortals maim'd or crucified, and left
To gape at endless horror through eternity.

It is difficult to determine to what extent this attack against Georgianism, undermined the prestige of the Georgian anthologies, but there was in the fourth volume of Georgian Poetry (1918-1919), an obvious feeling of dissatisfaction with the whole Georgian attitude and the falsity of their sentiments. The attempt to recapture decaying traditions had exhausted itself, and the shallow foundations of the Georgian Eden had lost its protecting walls; the grim realities of the War of 1914-1918 were not easy to evade.

The great majority of English poets in the period immediately before the 1914 War had no sense of the coming catastrophe and their poetry reflects a shal-

1 Wheels appeared annually from 1916 to 1921 publishing a miscellaneous collection of pieces. Almost all of its contributors were under the influence of Edith Sitwell who dominated not only her brothers Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell, but also Arnold James, Nancy Gunard, Iris Tree, Helen Rootham and Alan Porter - several of whom later developed along different lines. Nancy Gunard, in her poem "Wheels", which gave the title to this anthology, expressed their common view of life. These poets, like the Georgians hated the city; but resorting to nature was no solution of their problems, because their hatred was directed against life itself, and its purposeless cruelty. Wheels anticipates the cynical and pessimistic mood of the 20's. Edith Sitwell's own poetry is shadowed by a terror of death, a sense of life's futility, and a regret for the passing youth. She found relief in plunging into a world of phantasy, escaping from thought altogether.

2 Osbert Sitwell: Collected Poems and Satires, 1931.
low optimism which seemed deliberately to avoid all the harder things in life. The reality of the War penetrated rather slowly into English poetry. Rupert Brooke's *Memoir* (1918) contains certain significant records of experience which serve as an index to a profound change of mood in the younger generation. In a letter he wrote to Miss Cathleen Nesbitt in 1913 he says:

"Oh! it's mad to be in London with the world like this. I can't tell you of it. The excitement and the music of the birds, the delicious madness of the air, the blue haze in the distance, the straining of the hedges, the green mist of shoots about the trees -oh, it wasn't in these details- it was beyond and round them -something that included them. It's the sort of day that brought back to me what I've had so rarely for the last two years- that tearing hunger to do and do and do things. I want to walk 1000 miles, and write 1000 plays, and sing 1000 poems, and drink 1000 pots of beer, and kiss 1000 girls, and- oh, a million things! ........... The spring makes me almost ill with excitement."

This mood of optimism still continues in a letter he wrote to Miss Asquith from Blandford before his departure for the Dardanelles:

"... I am filled with confident and glorious hopes. I have been looking at the maps. Do you think perhaps the fort on the Asiatic corner will want quelling, and we'll land and come at it from behind, and they'll make a sortie and meet us on the plains of Troy? It seems to me strategically so possible. Shall we have a Hospital Base on Lesobs? Will Hero's Tower crumble under the 15" guns? Will the sea be polyphloisbic and wine-dark and unvintageable? Shall I loot mosaics from St. Sophia, and Turkish Delight, and carpets? Should we be a Turning point in history? Oh God!"

More or less the same sentiments prevail in "Peace" which he wrote in 1914:

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,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,

And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!

Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release there
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;

2 Ibid. p. cxxvii.
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.¹

But below the surface optimism of "Peace" there is an unmistakable note of pessimism manifesting itself in the concern with the idea of death, which in the work of other war poets, will be intensified. First the young war poets were entirely ignorant of what they were to expect in a modern war. They regarded the expedition in Europe as a kind of holiday until war there developed into a trench warfare with all its misery and inhumanity; it is only then that we find the war poet awakened to the realities of life. In the beginning war existed as an instrument of romantic ideal, and the prevailing mood was the fundamental certainty of the Victorian age. This was necessary for the peace of mind of a generation going to war²; thus on 4th August all the complexities of the world narrowed down to one simplicity—"Make me a soldier, Lord."

By all the glories of the day
And the cool evening's benison,
By that last sunset touch that lay
Upon the hills when day was done,
By beauty lavishly outpoured
And blessings carelessly received,
By all the days that I have lived,
Make me a soldier, Lord.³

Robert Nichols (1893-1944) expresses his feelings in "Farewell to Place of Comfort" which is significant as revealing some of the deep psychological factors playing in the subconscious mind of certain war poets. It is a fact commonly known to psychologists that young men suffering from various types of neuroses, especially from those types of neuroses which develop out of early childhood frustrations and inhibitions⁴ become completely relieved of their symptoms on the battlefield. We have reason to believe that poets of the First World War were subjected to an upbringing that was typically Victorian in character, and what we know, today of the importance attached to paternal authority in the Victorian family would justify us in concluding that certain inhibited feelings found full satisfaction in time of war. Thus Nichols, who while a true Georgian at heart,

¹ One of the sonnets called “1914”. Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke, Sidgwick, 1918, p. 144.
² English society during the early period of the First World War became very comprehensible and coherent. The conditions under which society acquires such coherence are very inadequately studied. This problem, which concerns the literary historian as well as the social-psychologist should be subjected to a very thorough investigation.
⁴ Paternal fear is known to be the cause of many neuroses. If the free expression of the instincts to destroy, to kill and to hurt are not under certain conditions, checked by the father the child seeks abnormal ways of satisfying these urges. The Victorian period was one of false morality, and artificial standards of decorum which were conveyed from the father to son. In time of war young men who had such inhibited childhood experiences would feel relieved of their inhibitions considerably and recover from their neuroses.
with all his fondness for things English, feels a strange emotional discharge in leaving England for the battle front:

They shall not say I went with heavy heart:
Heavy I am, but soon I shall be free;
I love them all, but oh! I now depart
A little sadly, strangely, fearfully,
As one who goes to try a mystery.¹

Herbert Read's "The Happy Warrior" is an excellent example to illustrate the free discharge of inhibited energies of a young man who, given a bayonet and the sanction to kill, feels a strange satisfaction:

His wild heart beats with painful sobs,
His strained hands clench an ice-cold rifle,
His aching jaws grip a hot parched tongue,
And his wide eyes search unconsciously.

This is a condition of hysteria in which the young soldier wants to shriek, but

He cannot shriek.
Bloody saliva
Dribbles down his shapeless jacket.
I saw him stab
And stab again
A well-killed Boche.

This is the happy warrior,
This is he. . . . . . ²

The War of 1914-1918 stimulated much feeling but very little thought, because war does not usually give the poets time to think things out. It brings up issues in too urgent a need of solution. One such issue is the adjustment of the individual to the reality of war; this the poet finds exceedingly difficult to achieve. The sentiments that the soldier poets of the 1914-1918 war fed on before the outbreak of the war were those symbolized in Kipling's *If* which expressed the Victorian Englishman's attitude to life. Its aim was to remind the average Briton what his country expected from him. The war generation felt guilty because they had not lived up to those standards Kipling had formulated for them; this feeling of guilt became particularly acute towards the end of the war when its horror and tragedy had reached unbelievable proportions. Kipling's standards of conduct for each Englishman must have been embedded in the unconscious mind of the race, but the violent impact of war played havoc with them. As a consequence of this emotional shake-up a far more serious condition of neuroses developed in the minds of young soldiers.

¹ "Farewell to Place of Comfort" Robert Nichols, *Ardours and Endurances*, 1917.
² Herbert Read, *Collected Poems* 1913-1925, Faber & Gwyer, 1926, p. 82.
Added to this there was the discovery that scientific and social progress could lead to such an extent of horror. Sentiments of international humanitarianism began to creep into English poetry, but contrary sentiments arising from the fear of being called a coward were not altogether absent from the ideological content of the war poetry. The problems that particularly occupied the War poets were the pity, the horror and the futility of modern war, and especially the problem of death. The greatest war poems written during the First World War are those charged with anti-war feelings, in these we have an endless compassion, pathos and a desire for complete lack of violence. Among the numerous war poets only half a dozen achieved any degree of fame, these were Robert Nichols (1893-1944), Siegfried Loraine Sassoon (1886), Charles Hamilton Sorley (1895-1915), Richard Aldington (1892), Wilfred Owen (1893-1918), Willfred Wilson Gibson (1878) and Herbert Read.

Nichols aimed at producing impressionistic effects with battle sounds and noises. He knew the war as it was, grim, inhuman but nevertheless fascinating. He never uttered a word of protest against it. His description of an assault will give us an idea of Nichols's ability in achieving bold pictorial effects:

The beating of the guns grow louder.
"Not long, boys, now."
My heart burns whiter, fearfuller, prouder.
Hurricanes grow
As guns redouble their fire.
Through the skaken periscope peeping
I glimpse their wire:

Gather, heart, all thoughts that drift;
Be steel, soul,
Compress thyself
Into a round, bright whole.
I cannot speak

Time. Time!

A vail
Lights. Blurr.
Gone.
On. on. Lead. Lead. Hail
Spatter. Whirr! Whirr!
"Toward that patch of brown;
Direction left." Bullets a stream.
Devouring thought crying in a dream.
Men, crumpled, going down....

1 "Assault, The", Robert Nichols, Arduors and Endurances, Chatto&Windus, 1917.
Sassoon had been attracted by the less inspiring aspects of modern warfare as the following lines will illustrate:

Dim, gradual thinning of the shapeless gloom
Shudders to drizzling daybreak that reveals
Disconsolate men who stamp their sodden boots
And turn dulled, sunken faces to the sky
Haggard and hopeless. They, who have beaten down
The stale despair of night, must now renew
Their desolation in the truce of dawn,
Murdering the livid hours that grope for peace.¹

His poems are particularly memorable for their detailed descriptions of scenes of horror such as these:

The place was rotten with dead; green clumsy legs
High-booted, sprawled and grovelled along the saps
And trunks, face downward, in the sucking mud,
Wallowed like trodden sand-bags loosely filled;
And naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair,
Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime.
And then the rain began, — the jolly old rain!²

Soldiers returning to England on leave realized that there were two Englands, the England that was in the trenches and the England elsewhere; there were also two wars — the war that was being fought with flesh and blood and the war that was being waged with words. In other words there was a very deep psychological gap between the soldier and the civilian, who knew about the war through the newspaper. "Repression of War Experience" indicates the indignation that Sassoon felt towards the civilian's ignorance of what was going on across the Channel.

You're quiet and peaceful, summering safe at home;
You'd never think there was a bloody war on! . . .
O yes, you would . . . why, you can hear the guns.
Hark! Thud, thud, thud, —quite soft. . .they never cease—
Those whispering guns —O Christ, I want to go out
And screech at them to stop—I'm going crazy;
I'm going stark, ataring mad because of the guns.³

His contempt for the civilian is even greater in "Suicide in the Trenches":

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.⁴

² "Counter Attack" Ibid. p. 68.
³ "Repressions of War Experience", Ibid.p.90.
⁴ "Suicide in the Trenches", Ibid. p. 78.
Sassoon never idealized the war, because he experienced closely not only its spiritual but also its physical horror and brutality. After the war he was still attacking the so-called patriots and the official blunderers who caused the war. This attitude led to "appeasement" and "peace at any price", ideas that dominated political opinion in England during the 1920's.

Charles Hamilton Sorley (1895-1915) was the son of a Cambridge don. He was a student at Oxford when he was called up. He was killed in action in October 1915. His poems were edited by his father 1916, and were published under the title of Marlborough and Other Poems. His "Two Sonnets on Death" show a spiritual maturity and understanding that could hardly be expected from a boy of nineteen:

Victor and vanquished are a-one in death:
Coward and brave: friend, foe, Ghosts do not say,
"Come, what was your record when you drew breath?"
But a big blot has hid each yesterday
So poor, so manifestly incomplete.
And your bright promise, withered long and sped,
Is touched; stirs. rises, opens and grows sweet
And blossoms and is you, when you are dead.1

In a period of wholesale death this poem seems to have been written to commend its justice, beauty and perfection. This glorification of death, as we have already pointed out in another occasion, served a useful end, viz. it minimized the negative effects of fear from death among fighting men.

Like most of his fellow poets Richard Aldington (1892- ) was also concerned in his poems mainly with the problem of death. In "Soliloquy-1" we have his expression of his feelings when watching dead bodies being carried on stretchers:

No, I'm not afraid of death
(Not very much afraid, that is)
Either for others or myself;
Can watch them coming from the line
On the wheeled silent stretchers
And not shrink,
But munch my sandwich stoically
And make a joke when "it" has passed.2

A deep note of despair seems to be the dominating idea in the following lines:

Desolate we move across a desolate land,
The high gates closed,
No answer to our prayer.3

"A Fool I’ The Forest" is a symbolical treatment of the problems of a typical man of the War generation. It is mainly a satirical attack on English institutions and commercialism:

Out of ten thousand towering chimneys
Gushed black greasy smoke
That whitened to a cloud of banknotes.¹

The Church of England becomes the target in the following lines:
On the cloud sat God the Tradesman
Playing at the pianola
"Onward, onward, Christian soldiers";

Miss and Mrs God were calling
In the new Rolls-Royce war-chariot
(Ninety cherubim power, self-starting)
On the Abrahams and Isaacs.
All the dominations played on Remingtons:
"Glory, glory be to banking"!

On earth we are to enact Hell.
Why?²

A few words must be said here in connection with Aldington’s relation to Imagism, a movement which came to public notice, like the Georgians in a series of anthologies, Des Imagistes (1914), Some Imagist Poems (1915-1916-1917). The chief supporters of the movement were T.E. Hulme³, F.S. Flint and Richard Aldington. There were also three Americans who took active part in the movement: Ezra Pound (1885), H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)⁴ and Amy Lowell. It was Pound who invented the term "Imagist" and made the first anthology in 1914. Later he withdrew from the movement, and Amy Lowell took command. After 1917 the movement ceased to exist, partly because of dissensions and partly because its original theories no longer satisfied its members. The principles of the movement can be summarized as

1. Direct treatment of the subject.
2. Economy of presentation.
3. The doctrine of the image.⁵
4. The use of organic rhythm.

¹ Ibid. p.208. Cf.T.S.Eliot’s The Waste Land, to which work it has similarities.
² Ibid. p. 208
³ Hulme was not a poet; all his poetry consists of 5 poems which run into 33 lines altogether.
⁴ Sherbecame Mr. Aldington’s wife in 1913.
⁵ Pound defined an "image" as follows:-
An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time…. It is the presentation of such a complex instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.
The significance of the movement was that through it English poetry was
undergoing a process of hardening. The advocates of this movement despised the
softness and looseness of the Georgians:

... we were right to go groping in all forbidden places,

Making ourselves hard for the hard age of machines.
I like the men and women of my age,
I like their hardness.¹

Pound, who was the leader of the movement, asserted that art need have no
message, make no criticism of life, that its existence is justified merely by its beauty.
His views of art assumed a practical tone by 1913; he believed the arts and sci­
ences had the same subject matter—Man:

The arts, literature, poesy, are a science, just as chemistry
is a science. Their subject is man, mankind and the individual... The arts give us a great percentage of the lasting and unassailable
data regarding the nature of man, of immaterial man, of man con­sidered as a thinking and sentient creature... No science save the
arts will give us the requisite data for learning in what ways men
differ.²

The Imagist doctrine had not an ideological manifesto, its aims were aes­
thetic and restricted to problems of style in modern poetry. Imagism was

... an ideal of style, an attempt to recreate in our language
and for our time a poetry that shall have the qualities of the great
poetry of old... Imagists seek the qualities that make Sappho,
Catullus, Villon, the French Symbolists (whose influence still do­
minates all European poetry) great.³

It was largely due to the experiments of the Imagists that free verse gained
popularity during and immediately after the war. Many writers misused it as an
easy way of expressing incoherent and undigested ideas.

As far as Aldington's ideas are concerned, one may say that they
were those of a typical disillusioned romantic, as expressed in the following lines:

Millions of human vermin
Swarm sweating
Along the night-arched cavernous roads.⁴

Wingate, 1948, p. 283. Cf. "We wanted to write hard, clear patterns of words, interpreting moods
by " images, i.e., by pictures, not similes" (From an unpublished letter (of Aldington) to Amy Lo­
These are his feelings and impressions in an underground train:

A row of advertisements,
A row of windows,
Set in brown woodwork pitted with brass nails,
A row of hard faces,
Immobile.

A row of eyes,
Eyes of greed, of pitiful blankness, of plethoric complacency,
Immobile,
Gaze, stare at one point,
At my eyes.

Antagonism,
Disgust,
Immediate antipathy,
Cut my brain, as a dry sharp reed
Cuts a finger.
I surprise the same thought
In the brasslike eyes:
"What right have you to live?"¹

The post-war development of Aldington has been in the same direction as of T.S. Eliot—increased sensibility towards man's modern situation. His Life Quest, which was published in 1935, is an account of the modern man's search for happiness in the waste land of post-war years. Although this work was written in the 30's ideologically it belongs to the 20's.

An Etruscan tomb is gayer than London streets.
Sharp-lined and glinting
The traffic clots go curdling
Through the dark veins of the town
In sharp mechanistic spasms
Like the fierce bleeding of a great machine,

Like a huge grey leech
The city sucks our lives.²

Wilfred Owen, who was killed at the age of twenty, produced a few lyrics and sonnets that will be remembered as the most moving poems produced by any war. He was quite unknown at the time of his death—a week before the armistice, but he influenced poets who came twenty years after his death³. His

¹ "In the Tube", Ibid. p. 49.
² Life Quest, Doran, 1935. The above quotation is from Complete Poems. p. 319-320.
³ Auden and Spender are indebted to Owen not only ideologically but also technically.
difference from the other war-poets was that he would have been a poet without
the war. His attitude towards this struggle in which he was involved are explai­
ned by him in one of his letters written from a hospital on the Somme. This let­
ter embodied some of his preoccupations which he later expressed in the medium
of poetry:

"Already I have comprehended a light which never will filter
into the dogma of any national church: namely, that one of Christs
essential commands was: passivity at any price! Suffer dishonour
and disgrace, but never resort to arms. Be bullied, be outraged, be
killed; but do not kill. It may be a chimerical and an ignominious
principle, but there it is. It can only be ignored; and I think pulpit
professionals are ignoring it very skilfully and successfully indeed ... And am I not myself a conscientious objector with a very seared
conscience? ... Christ is literally in "no man's land". There men
often hear his voice: Greater love hath no man than this, that a man
lay down his life for a friend. Is it spoken in English only and French?
I do not believe so. Thus you see how pure Christianity will not fit
in with pure patriotism." 1

He had written a little poem, only a few weeks before he was killed in France,
which is the most important document for the literary historian of this period.
In this we have the most significant declaration of aims in English poetry since,
possibly, the publication of the Lyrical Ballads in 1798. Owen's manifesto, which
he meant to use as a preface to a book of poems he was considering to prepare,
was as follows:

This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to
speak of them. Nor is it about deeds or lands, nor anything about
glory, honour, dominion or power,
except War.
Above all, this book is not concerned with Poetry.
The subject of it is War, and the pity of War
The Poetry is in the pity.
Yet these elegies are not to this generation,
This is in no sense consolatory.
They may be to the next.
All the poet can do to-day is to warn.
That is why the true Poets must be truthful.

What Owen meant in the above lines was that he could no more write about
any of the themes which according to the old tradition were considered fit material
for poetry. The traditional English war poetry was mainly concerned with patriot­
ism and the hatred of the enemy; if it sought anything it was to stimulate

1 Quoted by E.Blunden in his preface to The Poems of Wilfred Owen, Chatto & Windus, 1931,
warlike emotions, thus contributing to ultimate victory. In Owen's war poetry we find such unsoldierly emotions as tenderness and pity which would have been frowned upon by the older generations. He had completely broken with the traditional British blustering patriotism. It would be interesting to note here how disgusted he was when he read in a biography of Tennyson that the older poet had been disillusioned in life. He finds him too naive and inexperienced:

"The other day I read a biography of Tennyson, which says he was unhappy, even in the midst of his fame, wealth and domestic serenity. Divine discontent! I can quite believe he never knew happiness for one moment such as I have for one or two moments. But as for misery, was he ever frozen alive, with dead men for comforters? did he hear the moaning at the Bar, not at twilight and the evening bell only, but at dawn, noon, and night, eating and sleeping, walking and working, always the close moaning of the bar; the thunder, the hissing, and the whining of the Bar? — Tennyson, it seemes, was always a great child."¹

Each war must have its particular aspects of horror for the soldier, but the war of 1914-1918 must have surpassed all the past wars in its terror and inhumanity for the individual soldier. It was the first war in which mechanical destruction developed on a colossal scale. In one of his letters he sent from the front Owen gives a description of battle scene which would explain the psychological effect of the war on his emotions:

"It is like the eternal gnashing of teeth; the Slough of Despond could be contained in one of its crater-holes; the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah could not light a candle to it—to find the way to Babylon the Fallen. It is pock-marked like a body of foulest disease, and its odour is the breath of cancer. I have not seen any dead. I have done worse. In the damp air I have perceived it, and in the darkness, felt... No Man's Land under snow is like the face of the moon, chaotic, crater-ridden, uninhabitable, awful, the abode of madness..."²

Owen had seen the war in its most terrible aspects, and he was determined to explode the belief in patriotic death:

If in some smothered dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gurgling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Bitter as the cud

¹ Quoted by Edmund Blunden in his preface to The Poems of Wilfred Owen, Chatto & Windus, 1933, p. 26.
² Published in the Appendix to The Poems of Wilfred Owen, Chatto & Windus, 1931.
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend you would not tell with such high zest
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.¹

The soldier, without any concern for nationality, was his hero. He could understand his situation and the strength of his faith better any other poet. In his view, all the soldiers of the world were conscious of being members of a vast society of fighting men. In the "Strange Meeting", which is one of the finest poems ever written in the English language, we see an English soldier showing great pity for a German soldier not because he was an individual German but because he was representative of fellow victims of the war. In an imaginary situation the poet meets the ghost of a dead German soldier, who says to him:

I am the enemy you killed my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now.²

The beauty and the expressiveness of the following lines should be noted:

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifle's rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.³

Is there a more memorable elegy for a dead soldier in the whole of English literature than this one:

Move him into the sun
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home whispering of fields unsown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds,
Woke, once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides,
Full-nerved—still warm—too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—Oh what made, fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?⁴

¹ The Poems of Wilfred Owen, ed. Edmund Blunden, Chatto & Windus, 1933, 66.
³ "Anthem for Doomed Youth" Ibid. p. 80.
⁴ "Futility" Ibid. p. 73.
If the measure of greatness in poetry depends upon memorable lines, then Owen's poetry must rank among the highest in English or even world poetry; lines as these will forever haunt the memory of the poetry lover with a strange fascination:

Red lips are not so red  
As the stained stones kissed by the English dead.

Heart you were never hot,  
Nor large, nor full like hearts made great with shot;¹

Owen knew very well the terrible mental shock of the war on young minds and he wrote "Mental Cases" when he was in hospital suffering from battle shock:

Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh.²

Always they must see these things and hear them,  
Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,  
Carnage incomparable, and human squander,  
Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.³

Pity, grief and despair for men involved in war have never found more beautiful expression in English poetry. If Owen had survived the war he would have become a poet with some political philosophy with international aims.

Notable among the poets who lost their lives in the war were Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918) and Julian Grenfell (1888-1915). Both of these poets were killed before they reached maturity. Their small output, however, contains a good deal that is worth remembering. Rosenberg was, like the rest of the war poets, mainly concerned with the cruelty of war and the suffering it caused to the soldier. His poem "God" is unique in English poetry in the violence of the anger it expresses:

Who rests in God's mean flattery now? Your wealth  
Is but his cunning to make death more hard.  
Your iron sinews take more pain in breaking.

Ah! this miasma of a rotting God!⁴

Grenfell's famous piece is "Into Battle" in which we find him looking for peace in death. Death in battle is the necessary reward of taking up arms:

.... Life is Colour and Warmth and Light,  
And a striving ever more for these;

¹ "Greater Love" Ibid. p. 62.  
² Cf. with the opening lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"  
³ "Mental Cases" Ibid. 72.  
⁴ "God", Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg, Chatto & Windus,
And he is dead who will not fight:
And who dies fighting has increase.¹

His idea of God is far removed from Rosenberg’s:

God who stands in Pity’s name
Many may ye be or less,
Ye, who rule the earth and sun:
Gods of strength and gentleness,
Ye are ever one.²

If poets like Owen, and Rosenberg had survived the war would have had a strong anti-God element in English poetry between the two wars. Anti-God sentiments were already current in the poetry of Hardy and A.E. Hoesman³, and men came to realize that the idea of a fatherly old God interested in the individual was not in accordance with the evidence. We have the anonymous statement of an atheist in the *Diary of the Dead Officer*,

If there is a God at all responsible for governing the earth
I hate and abominate him. I rather despise him—but I do not think there is one.

There remain two poets of note who must receive attention here; both of these poets survived the war and continued their career up to the present. Wilfred Gibson’s poems directly dealing with the war were first published in the 1916-1917 volume of *Georgian Poetry*, and they marked a reaction against the unrealistic attitude to war that was entertained by John Freeman in his "Happy Is England Now". He was disgusted with the cruelty of the war right from the beginning, and he expressed his disgust in simple verse. The following lines, in which he reveals his high sense of comradeship and also the shame of being separated from "the pale citizens of the kingdom of death":

We who are left, how shall we look again
Happily on the sun or feel the rain . . . .?
A bird among the rain-wet lilac sings—
But we, how shall we turn to little things
And listen to the birds and winds and streams
Made holy by their dreams,
Nor feel the heartbreak in the heart of things?¹

Read’s war poems show a feeling of infinite compassion, pathos, horror and utter lack of violence. His "Refugees" offers us a vivid picture of the effect of war on civilians:

1 "Into Battle" quoted in *Poems of To-day, Second Series*, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1922, p. 4.
2 "To a Black Greyhound" Ibid, p. 94-95.
3 Their shoulders held the sky suspended;
   They stood, and earth’s foundations stay;
   What God abandoned, these defended,
   And saved the sum of things for pay.
Mute figures with bowed heads
They travel along the road:
Old women, incredibly old,
And a hand-cart of chattels.
They do not weep:
Eyes are too raw for tears.¹

His control of feeling and form is obvious in the above quotation. Read was a master of the understatement; he never raised his voice in an attempt to achieve false rhetorical effects. The following lines from "My Company" may be called sentimentalistic outpourings by some, but no one could deny their sincerity and warmth:

Oh beautiful me, O men I loved
O whither are you gone, my company?²

"The Execution of Cornelius Vane" is a narrative poem which shows the poet's great capacity for sympathy. Cornelius Vane was charged with desertion, and courtmartialed; the evidence against him was very strong, and he was found guilty and was sentenced to death.

One morning at dawn they led him forth.
He saw a party of his own regiment,
With rifles, looking very sad.
The morning was bright, and as they tied
The cloth over his eyes, he said to the assembly:
"What wrong have I done that I should leave these:
The bright sun rising
And the birds that sing?"³

The effect of much war poetry depended upon the strong contrast between the simplicity and beauty of nature and the complexity and ugliness of the war situation. The greatest war poetry, however, is that which is not directly about war, but problems which are in some significant relationship with it. War experience must first be digested and seen in perspective before it is recorded. Much of the poetry produced during the war of 1914-1918 is based on simple human emotions aroused by war: nostalgia, courage, love of man and concern for death. The best war poems are those which see war beyond its immediacy, and in relation to man and civilization. It may be argued that such poems were rather rare, and that their absence was partly the cause of later "passivity". The poets we have so far discussed in connection with war were so intimately involved with war that they could not help being attracted by its particularities, and consequently very few of the war perns written between 1914-1918 achieved a universality of utterance.

¹ "Refugees" Herbert Read: *Collected Poems* 1913-1925, Faber & Gwyer, 1926, p. 84.
³ "The Execution of Cornelius Vane" Herbert Read: *Collected Poems*, 1913-1925, Faber & Gwyer, 1926, p. 90.
The war poetry of 1914 and 1918 is significant in that it expressed a new sensibility of the 20th century mind—a sensibility which later became more intense, and was inclined to seek relief from its complex burden in the simplificities of either Catholicism, or Primitivism, or Communism, three idealistic "isms" which relieve man of moral responsibility.

The years immediately following the 1914-1918 War saw the accumulation and the climax of the difficulties and dislocations arising from the military economic, and the psychological demobilization. Britain suffered very heavy losses in material as well as in men, and the lavish expenditure she had to make had dislocated her finances beyond any hope of repair. The general mood of the post-war years was one of despair and disillusionment which the poetry of the period reflects and records. The effect of the War on the established poets had been definite and disastrous: the Georgian Movement had lost most of its spirit, in fact it ceased to be a movement altogether after the publication of the last volume of *Georgian Poetry* in 1922. Lascelles Abercrombie produced very little poetry after 1923. W.H. Davies and Edmund Blunden were the only Georgians who were able to maintain their allegiance to the movement which was rapidly becoming out of fashion. After the War the 19th century belief in progress and society was realized to have been a false one; instead there was the belief that mankind was not up to much, and that "the War to end all Wars" had, after all, been fought in vain. The deep disillusionment brought about by the War revealed itself in poetry in the form of an absolute rejection of romantic hopes and romantic diction. The mood of disillusionment crystallized first into a comprehensive scepticism regarding society and various programmes were designed to improve it. In some poetry such as T.S. Eliot's it assumed the more reasonable form of a return to tradition; more reasonable, for the present was chaotic, and the future doubtful, therefore, the past seemed the one remaining thing which could be depended upon. D.H. Lawrence was equally discontented with the state of the world, and the entire process of history; the only hope he saw was in return to the primitive way of living. With the rise of the totalitarian regimes certain younger writers believed that society could go backwards if it was not made secure against a disaster; society had either to change or go to pieces. Eliot looked back on what remained of human tradition, and hoped that it might still be preserved by the effort of a minority and the civilization thus saved. But by the 30's society was falling apart rapidly, and the generation of Auden and Spender could no longer see any choice but to hasten the process and work for a new order.

1918 was a dismal year; it was a year of "whither do we go from here?" The young poets had not only seen death wholesale, but they had seen it in a in an affair of machines, an international industry. Now they found themselves in

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1 Although an American by birth, T.S. Eliot is considered here as an English poet, as most of his poetry is written in England, and besides he is now a naturalized British subject.

2 For a detailed study of Lawrence's ideas in relation to his poetry see my article on "Some Trends of primitivism and Anarchism in Modern English poetry" *Review of Faculty of Letters* (DTCFD), vol. XV No. 1-3, June, September 1957.
an utter confusion as to their aim and purpose in society. Some were recalling their war experience in order to understand it better:

What, then, was war? No more discord of flags
But an infection of the common sky
That sagged ominously upon the earth
Even when the season was the airiest May.

War was the return of earth to ugly earth,
War was foundering of sublimities,
Extinction of each happy art and faith
By which the world had still kept head in air,
Until the unendurable moment struck
The inward scream, the duty to run mad.¹

Was a return to the country the best thing to do after all?

What life to lead and where to go
After the war, after the war?

I'd thought a cottage in the hills,
North Wales, a cottage full of books,
Pictures and brass and cosy nooks,
And comfortable broad window-sills,
Flowers in the garden, walls all white,
I'd live there peacefully and dream and write.²

Some were contemplating the vanity and the stupidity of the war:

Died some, pro patria
non "dulce" non "et decor" ....
Walked eye-deep in hell
Believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving
Come 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.
There died a myriad
And of the best among them,
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
For a botched civilization.
Charm, smiling at the good mouth,
Quick eyes gone under earth's lid,

² Ibid
For two gross of broken statues,  
For a few thousand battered books.  

Wyndham Lewis explains in his *Writer and the Absolute* (1952) what exactly the Great War meant for his generation:

1913 was just the other side of a cyclopean dividing wall in time: a thousand miles high and a thousand miles thick, a great barrier laid across our life, known to the Press as "the Great War". This Great War made possible something far greater than itself, namely the Russian Revolution.

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Why 1914-1918 is so dense and towering an obstacle for anyone whose life it traverses admits of no simple answer, for this wall was complex in its composition, as in its origins. To take the least of the innovations coeval with it first, the vert aspect of everyday life was radically altered. The internal combustion engine alone was a great revolution. It changed the streets of our cities into roaring machine-gullies, literally from one day to the next and broke into the remotest beauty-spot with a bang. Then the great development of the radio, the cinematograph and the telephone all can be integrated in this almost mystical barrier.

But such novelties as these could not alone have produced this Great Divide. Europe was turned upside down politically as well as physically, and these revolutions were simultaneous. First, there was the collapse and disappearance of the Central Empires, while the great German state became a chronically embittered slum". Great Britain was fatally shaken, economically and morally. The French people deeply demoralized and resentful: lastly -and above all- the Russian Empire of the Czars had gone up in smoke and out of its ashes a new religion had been born at once hard-boiled and puritanic, savagely militant and proselytizing.

The change in poetry was no less; the Georgians were regardless of the industrial city, of the Christian religion, and of the background of Europe. Their poetry was limited to fine observation of objects or nature, ant to expressing honestly and pleasantly their reactions to such. They had no world view. With T.S.Eliot we have a poet who has a world view and is interested in the study of mankind. It was natural that those who honestly try to find a sound basis for thought and behavior for their age should look for it outside the chaotic fields of social and political controversy. In a period of chaos and cultural disintegration the poet must reunite our fragmentary culture and create order from the chaos. Eliot focuses his attention first on the individual, and then widens his scope to cover the entire western society. His concern is the preservation of civilized va-

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1 "Ode pour L'élection de son Sepulchre", Ezra Pound, *Collected Poems*
lues in an age of mechanical barbarism, and his only hope lies in the salvation of the individual. He says in his *Selected Essays: 1917-1932*:

The world is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse, meanwhile re redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the world from suicide.¹

Eliot's major premise, then, was that the world was corrupt and that it was in need of salvation if it did not want to plunge itself into a hell even more terrible than the Great War. This attitude is linked with the prevalent idea of "peace at any price, even dishonour".

What is the mood and general direction of the thought of this poet? The general mood of much of Eliot's poetry is one of ironic disillusionment and despair which is only relieved by a melancholic faith of the later poems. His early poems "The Love Song of J.Aldred Prufrock", "Portrait of a Lady", "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" all appeared in *Prufrock and other Observations* published in 1917, and also most of the *Poems* (1919) and *Ara Vos Prec* (1920) contain his best poetry. In *Prufrock and other Observations* Eliot is concerned with the observation of externals—the ugliness and spiritual emptiness surrounding modern man. The two of the outstanding poems in this volume, "The Love Song of J.Aldred Prufrock", and "Portrait of a Lady" are both strongly reminiscent of what Henry James was occupying himself with in fiction—creating lonely, sensitive and fastidious characters. These poems, like much of James's fiction, are built on the realization of the deep significance of apparently trivial events, the lack of purpose in modern man and the meaninglessness of time. The opening lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", the first of his published poems, set the key-note of much of his early poetry:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Let us go then, you and I} \\
\text{When the evening is spread out against the sky} \\
\text{Like a patient etherised upon a table;} \\
\text{Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets} \\
\text{The muttering retreats} \\
\text{Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels} \\
\text{And saw-dust restaurants with oyster-shells;} \\
\text{Streets that follow like a tedious argument} \\
\text{Of insidious intent} \\
\text{To lead you to an overwhelming question} \ldots
\end{align*}
\]

In these poems he is merely an observer of the ugliness and emptiness of the modern city, and he can, as a poet, do nothing but escape into his poetry. The

ugliness of the urban scene forms the background in these poems, and it is presented to us in "a thousand sordid images" which shock our senses. Eliot's purpose in these poems seems, in fact, to be nothing more than to shock us with the materialism, spiritual sterility, and insecurity of modern man, whom the poet knows to be an "Infinitely suffering thing"; but helpless to save himself from his predicament, the death-like condition in which he finds himself. His whole environment reminds him of death; when he goes out in the evening, when the din of factory wheels stops, and the smoke from towering black chimneys settles down, he feels as if he is watching a patient etherized upon a table and when he goes through narrow streets he gets sensory impressions which deaden his spirit: "one-night cheap hotels", "the yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window panes", "smoke that rises from the pipes of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows"; these are all images of sleep, and fatigue. The modern man is, in fact, tired and sleepy, but his soul is restless and wants to stretch "tight across the skies" but only to "fade behind a city block".

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a soliloquy of a modern man, timid, introverted and suffering from a neurotic conflict. He is bored and crushed with the pressure of the ugly things around him, and the only refuge for him is withdrawing into a state of passive day-dreaming. The pressure of society is too much for him; that is why he says

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

He believes the existence of a lobster at the bottom of the sea is better than the tortured life of a modern man; the weight of the ocean is preferable to the pressure of society, because, it is at least free from the ugly attributes of the latter. He can, however, do nothing but measure out his life with coffee spoons, and, like a typical neurotic desires to revert to a time and world where he would be free from the disturbing problems of life.

In "Portrait of a Lady" we have the description of a lonely, sensitive and fastidious woman who desires friendship in the utter isolation of the inhuman age in which she had the misfortune to be born. She has a deep understanding of life and the value of friendship, but she knows she is "about to reach her journey's end"; she says to the poet:

"Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know
What life is, you who hold it in your hands";

"You let it flow from you, you let it flow."

1 Preludes, 1. 27.
2 Ibid. 1. 51.
6 "Ibid." 1.50.
7 "Portrait of a Lady", 1.67.
8 "Ibid.", 1.44-45, 47.
The theme of this poem seems to be *inaction and irresolution*. The "Lady" of the poem is a woman making tentative advances to a man younger than herself, a man whose mind is torn with indecisions, who listens to her conversation, smiles and goes on drinking his tea. At last he makes up his mind to leave, but he does not know how he can "make a cowardly amends for what she has said" to him. The other early poems are merely sketches of suburban life in which Eliot piles up murky and squalid images to create a pictorial effect of decay and horror. In "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" we see the poet wandering through the streets late at night when

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Dissolve the floors of memory
And all its clear relations,
Its divisions and precisions,
Every street lamp that I pass
Beats like a fatalistic drum,
And through the spaces of the dark
Midnight shakes the memory
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.¹
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In all these early poems we are presented with a world in which life is a dull routine of an existence, and that every morning means only the resumption of the same monotony, and evening brings nothing better than

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The burnt-out ends of smoky days.²
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Up to the publication of the 1920 *Poems* Eliot is mainly occupied with looking at people and things with the eyes of a very sensitive and sophisticated observer, but in the 1920 *Poems* he begins to organize his impressions and emotions into a criticism of society. He no longer simply expresses disgust with the present; he begins to compare it with the past. In "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar" he deals with the decline of Venice under the usurping Jew, and all through the poem he is comparing the present state of Venice with that of its glorious past:

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The horse, under the axletree
Beat up the dawn from Istria
With even feet. The shuttered barge
Burned on the water all the day.³
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The reference here is to the Greco-Roman image of the sun, and Cleopatra's barge, which are all gone, and "the smoky candle of time is reached"⁴ when

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The rats are underneath the piles.
The Jew is underneath the lot.
Money in furs.⁵
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¹ "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", 11.5-12.
² "Preludes", 1.4.
³ "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar", 11.9-12.
⁴ Ibid., 120.
⁵ Ibid., 11.22-24.
In "Sweeney Erect" we have a satirical attack on sexual vulgarity, and in "A Cooking Egg" on modern ideals. The poet asks "Where are the eagles and the trumpets?" those symbols of order, simplicity of living and above all, faith; and he answers his own question:

Buried beneath some snow-deep Alps.¹

"The Hippopotamus" is a satire on the Church in general, and it is directed not against faith as such, but against its decay into formula. "The broad-backed hippopotamus", which represents, the Church, seems firm to us, but he is, in fact "merely flesh and blood".

Flesh and blood is weak and frail,
Susceptible to nervous shock;
While the True Church can never fail
For it is based upon a rock.

The hippo's feeble steps may err
In compassing material ends,
While the True Church need never stir
To gather in its dividends.²

The laziness of the Church is attacked in the following lines:

The hippopotamus's day
Is passed in sleep; at night he hunts;
God works in a mysterious way
The Church can sleep and feed at once.³

"Whispers of Immortality" is another example of Eliot's dissatisfaction and revulsion against a society in which

... our lot crawls between dry ribs
To keep our metaphysics warm.⁴

and the life of thought has given up all in favour of the sensual life, which is the only source of consolation for man:

Grishkin is nice; her Russian eye
Is underlined for emphasis;
Uncorseted, her friendly bust
Gives promise of pneumatic bliss.⁵

2 "The Hippopotamus", 11.5-12.
4 "Whispers of Immortality", 11.31-32.
In these early poems Eliot was influenced by the verse of Baudelaire, Tristan Corbiere and Jules Laforgue, because he discovered in his studies of French literature that these poets had a high degree of awareness of the contemporary situation, of the complexities of the age of science, as Shakespeare had been of Renaissance scepticism and Dante of medieval Christianity. Yet Eliot cannot be described as a blind imitator of these poets, because he has employed the technique he borrowed from them with such power that he has become even superior to them. He has definitely surpassed them in his skilful use of imagery, and sureness and precision of expression. All through his early poetry we find signs of indebtedness to Corbiere and Laforgue, some of which may be worth mentioning here. If we compare the last part of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" with Laforgue's "Legende" we shall have an idea to what extent Eliot was influenced by the elder poet. Eliot's poem has strong resemblances to Laforgue's not only in its irregularity of meter but also in its subject matter, because Laforgue's poem, like Eliot's, deals with the hesitations and indecisions of a disillusioned and timid man. This resemblance is not, however, carried into his later work to any considerable extent; therefore we have very few echoes of these poets in "Gerontion, The Waste Land and Ash Wednesday, but an ever growing preoccupation with the technique of the later Elizabethan dramatists.

"Gerontion" is a dramatic monologue in which the poet contemplates human life and civilization. Gerontion (meaning a little old man) represents the sensitive intellectual in an age of materialistic values, of isolation and of spiritual drought, and the whole poem consists of the "thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season"; he is an old man who is patiently waiting in the spiritual and physical drought of the modern waste land for a relieving rain which he is sure will never come. He has not fought for the preservation of civilized ideals against the barbarism of the international money power; now he finds that the

1 In acknowledging his indebtedness to these poets Eliot says:

"I can say that he (Laforgue) was the first to teach me how to speak, to teach me the poetic possibilities of my idiom." "Talk On Dante" The Adelphi 1st Quarter 1951.

"From Baudelaire I learned first, a precedent for the poetical possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic. From him, as from Laforgue, I learnt that the sort of material that I had, the sort of experience that an adolescent had had, in an industrial city in America could be the material for poetry; and the source of new poetry might be found in what has been regarded hitherto as the impossible, the sterile, the intractably unpoetic. That in fact, the business of the poet was to make poetry out of the unexplored resources of the unpoetical; that the poet, in fact, was committed by his profession to turn the unpoetical into poetry. A great poet can give a younger poet everything that he has to give him in a few lines. It may be that I am indebted to Baudelaire chiefly for half a dozen lines out of the whole of "Fleurs du Mal"; and that his significance is summed up in the lines:

Foumillante Cite, cite pleine de reves,
Ou le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant...

(From "Talk on Dante", The Adelphi, 1st Quarter, 1951.)
values he believed in are no longer valid, and that there is nothing for him to do but wait for death in a decayed house which does not even belong to him; the Jew owns it, squats on its window sill, darkens it.

My house is a decayed house,
And the jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.¹

What was the cause of this decay? Why did civilization become like this? In the beginning of our civilization a sign was given to us in the birth of Christ, which we wondered at but did not understand. We misunderstood the message of Christ, and by eating and drinking him we secured for ourselves its strength and fierceness, just as certain savage tribes eat the flesh of an animal to absorb its strength.

Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a sign!"
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,²
Swaddled with darkness, in the juvescense of the year³
Came Christ the tiger

In depraved May⁴, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers;

The old man's memory runs to and fro like "vacant shuttles" which "weave the wind", but he goes on to argue that our civilization has known the truth without following it; how, then, can we be forgiven

After such knowledge, what forgiveness?⁵

It is true that

History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities.⁶

Yet despite all these traps and pitfalls that life presents to us, we cannot be considered free from guilt, because we have had knowledge of the coming of Christ. Gerontion merely reveals his thoughts, which are "thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season", without suggesting any way out for mankind. Gerontion is utterly hopeless of any change for the better:

¹ "Gerontion", 11.7-10.
² The idea of the verbum infans, the unspeaking word, creeps into other poems such as "Ash Wednesday" and "A Song for Simeon".
³ "Juvescence of the year" means the youth of our civilization.
⁴ "Depraved May" means the Renaissance period which is considered as the end of faith and religious unity, and the beginning of secularism.
⁵ "Gerontion", 1.33.
⁶ "Ibid.", 11.34-36.
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch: How should I use them for your closer contact?1

It is the modern civilization that is speaking through Gerontion's mouth. We have all the tragedy of modern civilization expressed in these lines: it has a deep consciousness of its sterility, but not the power necessary to cure it. With Gerontion we are only one step from The Waste Land, the central conception of which is also the spiritual malady of the modern world. What differentiates The Waste Land from Gerontion and the rest of the early poems is its largeness of scope; it deals, not with the thoughts of a single individual as in the early poems, but with the whole post-War generation and its peculiarly confused and disturbed mind. One can trace the development of Eliot's mood of despair from its early expression in poems such as "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock", "The Hippopotamus" and "Gerontion" to its culmination in The Waste Land. In the early poems we find him preoccupied with the confusion and aimlessness of the post-War years; he is concentrating on one or two aspects of civilization, making violent attacks on a decadent church, and the degraded morality of his generation, but only in The Waste Land do we find him summing up the desperate situation of a Europe going through a life and death struggle in which chances of victory are very slim. In this poem Eliot is using sexual impotence as a symbol for the spiritual aridity of our world. This symbol is connected with the vegetation and fertility rites found in ancient Eastern cults which are described by James Frazer in his Golden Bough2, but the plan and greater part of the complicated symbolical structure of the poem is derived from Miss J.L.Weston's From Ritual to Romance (1920) in which it is claimed that the story of the quest for the Holy Grail is a Christianized version of "an ancient ritual, having for its ultimate objects the initiation into the secret of the sources of life, physical and spiritual."3

In the second chapter of From Ritual to Romance, where the Grail romances are discussed, the existence of a Waste Land ruled by a maimed and impotent Fisher King is related. According to the legend the King is relieved from his impotence and the land from its aridity by a certain deliverer called Gawain, who uses certain magical instruments -a spear and the grail, both sexual symbols- in effecting this cure. Miss Weston finds relationships between fertility cults and the Grail legends and explains their connection with the person of Christ and Christianity.

1 "Ibid." 11.59-60.
2 "Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L.Weston's book on the Grail legend: From Ritual to Romance (Cambridge). Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than any notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. To another work of anthroponology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean The Golden Bough; I have used especially the two volumes Adonis, Attis, Osiris. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies." "Notes on the Waste Land", Collected Poems: 1909-1935. Harcourt Brace, 1936.
3 From Ritual to Romance, p. 191.
Eliot's poem presents a land in a state of drought and devastation, a land which is suffering from a spiritual illness due to the loss of religious belief. It would be vain to seek to find a logical sequence of events through the poem, because in the very structure of the poem there is a fragmentariness and lack of coherence which seems to emphasize the confused state of modern culture; the whole poem gives us a series of trains of thought in the mind of a highly sensitive, disillusioned man. Part One which is called "The Burial of the Dead" begins with a lament over the loss of fertility as a result of the crucifixion of Christ, the Vegetation God in April; it is, therefore, a cruel month, because it stirs up the elements of life in a people who have only the desire to die.

April is the cruellest month, breeding Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing Memory and desire, stirring Dull roots with spring rain. Winter kept us warm, covering Earth in forgetful snow, feeding A little life with dried tubers.¹

This immediately reminds one of the beginning of another great poem in the English language, that is the Prologue to The Canterbury Tales where April is spoken of as a month of sweet showers.

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote The droughte of Marche hath perced to the rote, And bathed every veyne in swich licour Of which vertu engendered is the flour; When Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth Inspired hath in every holt and heeth The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne.²

Although six hundred years separate these two poems, the circumstances under which they were written were not so different as one might be tempted to believe; Chaucer's world was like ours a richly varied and vigorous one; it was the world of Froissart and Petrach, of the Battle of Crecy and the Black Death, of Wycliff, and Wat Tyler's rebellion. We must, then, conclude that these two poets differed in their temperaments and individual outlook on life. Chaucer was a man of action, of quick spirit and generous appreciation as the very opening lines of his great work show, Eliot, on the other hand, is an introverted scholar with a pessimistic outlook, a type of individual who would not necessarily be the product of our time; as the following lines will show, such people existed even in Chaucer's time:

2 "Prologue", The Canterbury Tales
A Clerk ther was of Oxenford also,
That un-to logik hadde longe y-go.
As lene was his hors as is a rake,
And he nas nat right fat, I undertake;
But lokked holwe, and ther-to soberly
Ne was so worldly for to have offyce.
For him was lever have at his beddes heed
Twenty bokes, clad in blak or reed,¹

What has happened to the English poetic mind since Chaucer's time is that it has acquired a degree of consciousness hardly possible a century ago. This high degree of consciousness in the modern poetic mind is the outcome of its contact with the forbidding mass of modern scientific and literary knowledge. To-day a modern poet like Eliot, who is a profoundly learned man, possesses a knowledge of history and literature of the past to such a high degree that he can feel as if the whole of the literature of Europe, from the beginning of civilization to the present, has a simultaneous existence; added to this historical-literary consciousness he has a deep consciousness of his own mental processes, which is made available to him by recent psychological discoveries. Thus we see that the modern poet possess a greater knowledge of the objective world than his forefathers, but also a knowledge of the hitherto unchartered world, viz. his inner world.

Man's conception of the nature of the physical world has undergone some important changes since Newton's time; Newton believed that matter had a solid core which could be measured and weighed and that the secret of the universe could be solved in this way. But experiments in the field of electricity and radioactivity have opened up, in the 20th century, entirely new vistas for the scientists, leading them to reinterpret the old ideas of matter, time and causality. In 1903 Rutherford and Soddy tried to postulate the laws of radioactivity, and arrived at the conclusion that the ultimate laws of nature were not causal at all. The path was thus prepared for the emergence of Einstein's theory of Relativity which revolutionized the customary ideas of time and space which were long believed to have absolute validity. Now the modern scientist is bewildered at the complicated behaviour of matter, and is far from being confident in his effort to understand its ultimate nature; the best he can do now is to offer a provisional explanation instead of an absolute one. According to the new theory of Relativity the old division of time into past, present and future had to be modified. The new conception of time was that it contained all time in every moment of time. The outcome of all these recent speculations was that modern scientist began to be aware of the impossibility of obtaining a precise knowledge of the outer world. The change which took place in man's idea of time and matter gave him an entirely new outlook on the world which is explained by Virginia Woolf in her Common Reader:

¹ "Ibid."
The mind receives a myriad impressions trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday .... So that if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could base his work on his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest, no catastrophe in the accepted style. Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged. Life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit?¹

While these developments were taking place in man's knowledge of the material world, a far more important change was beginning to take shape in man's idea of his inner world. Freud's investigations into the subconscious mind and his theory of dreams and psychoanalysis have revealed such a variety of interesting facts about our inner world that many writers believed it was a richer subject to write about than the visible world.

In his studies of dreams Freud brought another interesting fact to light, that is the uniform nature of the content of the subconscious mind of the race. With the aid of hypnosis he discovered that dreams and fantasies were direct copies of very ancient race-myths and folktales; this was a discovery which united the artist with the anthropologist.

The new ideas thus produced were stirring the mind of writers, but it was not until the end of the First World War that they found artistic expression. We have, in Eliot's The Waste Land and Joyce's Ulysses, very original experiments in dream symbolism, and in removing casual connections from all activity. Another idea which crept into the mind of modern writers was the conviction that the Western culture was going bankrupt, and drawing to a close. This idea is an entirely post-War notion, and it owes its origin to the realization of the Russian Revolution and its threat to European values. Many European intellectuals were seriously concerned with this new situation -Communism vs. European civilization. Between 1919 and 1923 Paul Valery in France was asking: "Will Europe become what she is in reality- that is, a little promontory of the continent of Asia? Or will Europe remain what she seems to be- that is the precious part of the terrestrial Universe, the pearl of the sphere, the brain of a vast body?" Oswals Spengler in Germany was expressing the dominating pessimism of the European intellectual in his Decline of the West (1922). In 1920 Herman Hesse had published his In Sight of Chaos, which was translated into English in 1923. Hesse was of the opinion that the primeval Asiatic mentality was beginning to destroy the European soul, and bring about the downfall of Europe. It was a time, when the European mind was disturbed by such ideas of imminent chaos, that The Waste Land

¹ Virginia Woolf: Common Reader,
was produced, and the anthropological structure of the work, and the impact of psychoanalysis on it are easily seen. What Eliot is, in fact, doing in this work, is an organization of his experience with a view to understanding it better under the light of recent scientific knowledge, or to put it in his own words he is "giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy" of his time. We are not in this study, going to engage ourselves with the problems of elucidation and explanation of its symbolism; nor are we going to point out those qualities and characteristics of its style which would help towards a fuller understanding and enjoyment of its aesthetic excellences; these are admirably done by such well-known critics as F.O. Matthiessen\(^2\), F.R. Leavis\(^3\), Edmund Wilson\(^4\), Cleanth Brooks\(^5\), Elizabeth Drew\(^6\) and Helen Gardner\(^7\). Our task here is an examination of the thought content of the work, not an appreciation of its purely artistic aspects.\(^8\) Approaching it from this standpoint we see, at once, that \textit{The Waste Land} is a bitter comment of a contemporary intellectual on the ideas and manners of his time. It is, however, solely destructive in its aim, because it contains no promise that we can obtain our life-giving rain by questioning our condition, and suffering its horror we can learn the hard lesson of life in death. It shows the complete hopelessness of our situation.

All through the poem we are reminded of the barrenness and ugliness of our present condition in lines like these:

\begin{quote}
What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images,\(^9\)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
\end{quote}

\(^3\) Edmund Wilson: \textit{Axel's Castle}, Charles Scribners 1931, pp. 93-131.
\(^6\) Helen Gardner: \textit{The Art of T.S. Eliot},
\(^8\) The present writer is quite aware of the danger of an approach to poetry which preoccupies itself with merely ideological issues with the exclusion of all other elements that participate in poetical creation. Studies of this kind have often been criticised for being sociological rather than literary investigations. Our defense against such a critical attack would lie in stressing the fact that literature is concerned with the whole of life, and in that sense nothing upon this earth could be foreign to its comprehensive nature. It is, therefore, the duty of the literary critic to follow where ever the literary mind may turn for material. In times of great activity literature also becomes active, and charged with ideas, which are closely linked with the emotional political and intellectual life of the society. If literature may sometimes trespass into sociological or philosophical fields, then the literary investigator should not hesitate meeting it in such fields.
\(^9\) "The Burial of the Dead", \textit{The Waste Land}
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we would stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop and think.

Then we are given a reason for all the difficulties in which we find ourselves:

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
He who were living are now dying.

But He, whom we crucified, is always beside us; but we are unable to recognize him:

Who is the third who always walks beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapped in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
But who is that on the other side of you?

Any consideration of the complicated symbolical structure of the poem, (which implies the idea that in modern society patterns of behaviour persist which can be traced back to the most primitive ritual and magic practices) would be irrelevant here. What is important for our purpose is that Eliot is, in The Waste Land, completely without hope about the condition of the world.

"The Hollow Men" which was published in 1925 presented a still more hopeless state of desolation and chaos, in which

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw.

and our world is reduced to
Shape without form, shade without colour.

With the following lines Eliot gives us a final description of the aridity of the modern world before he turned towards the source of the life giving water Christ.

1 "What the Thunder Said", Ibid.
2 "What the Thunder Said", Ibid.
3 "What the Thunder Said", Ibid.
4 "The Hollow Men" Collected Poems, Faber & Faber, 1936.
5 "The Hollow Men"
This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.¹

The turning point in Eliot's thought is seen in his Journey of the Magi which
was published in 1927. In this poem the poet has found his way out of the Waste
Land, and after much suffering and hardship he reached the source of the life-
giving water:

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey;
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.

A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.²

But what he found at the source upon his arrival was again a cruel situation,
because there was a birth and a death waiting for him there the birth and death
of Jesus Christ, which meant his rebirth and the death of his old self. It was a hard
process of change, but worth the trouble.

And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different: this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.³

In Ash Wednesday, which was published in 1930 we have for the first time a
definite statement of Eliot's solution. He has made up his mind to evacuate the
Waste Land, and proceed towards the fortress of Christianity. Ash Wendnesday
is the first day of repentance when one begins to strive for the resurrection of the
soul-life; it is also the time of tension between dying and birth-between the dying
of the old man and the birth of the new. The poem is in the form of a prayer and
its mood is one of submission and humility

¹ "The Hollow Men"
² "The Journey of the Magi"
³ "The Journey of the Magi"
Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.¹
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,²

After his conversion Eliot began to write a kind of poetry which seems to represent a withdrawal from the outer world and an exploration of the inner life under the guidance of Christianity; the poet wants to avoid all the distractions of the outside world in order to devote himself entirely to religious contemplation:

And I pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain
Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again
May the judgement not be too heavy upon us³

In Ash Wednesday Eliot passes from a historical conception of society to a religious one; the Church, for him, is an institution in which the individual can come into contact not only with the living but with the dead as well. It is, therefore, preferable to such faiths as Socialism and Communism, because they are solely concerned with the living.

In The Rock, which was written in 1934 to be performed on behalf of the Forty-five Churches Fund of the Diocese of London, we have a bitter ironic comment on the England of the 30's, and a criticism of the new creeds of Communism and Fascism. Through the mouthpiece of the chorus of this play Eliot speaks his own social criticism in a manner that is comprehensible by both the cultured and uncultured. The allusiveness and the complex symbolism of his previous writings are exchanged for directness and simplicity with a view to obtaining quick and definite public response. It would not be difficult to find an expression of almost all of Eliot's political and social ideology in this work; it seems Eliot is repeating here, in simpler terms, what he has said elsewhere in symbolical disguise.

Her first stresses the fact that our knowledge of the physical is going to lead us to destruction:

The endless cycle of idea and action
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,

² "Ash-Wednesday" Ibid.
³ Ash-Wednesday” Ibid.
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God
Where is the life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?¹

Our forefathers were to be blamed for many of our difficulties now:

Exporting iron, coal and cotton goods
And intellectual enlightenment
And everything including capital
And several versions of the Word of God:
The British race assured of a mission
Performed it, but left much at home unsure.

Of all that was done in the past, you eat the fruit, either rotten or ripe.²

The commercialism and materialism of modern city, where people no longer listen to the Word of God, becomes a target for bitter satire:

...............the timekept City;
Where my word is unspoken,
In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels
The rabbit shall burrow and the thorn revisit,
The nettle shall flourish on the gravel court,
And the wind shall say: Here were decent godless people:
Their only monument the asphalt road
And a thousand lost golf balls.³

The whole trouble is that

Men have left God not for other gods, they, say, but for no god;
and this has never happened before
That men both deny gods and worship gods, professing first Reason,
And then Money, and Power, and what they call life, or Race, or or Dialectic.

...............what have we to do
But stand with empty hands and palms turned upwards
In an age which advances prograessively backwards?⁴

Eliot's position in The Rock is definitely polemical and propagandist, because he is urging society to adopt his own religious and political viewpoint; but in doing so, he is not sacrificing anything of his essentially artistic function of

¹ "Chorus I, 11.6-16, The Rock; A Pageant Play, Faber, 1934.
² "Chorus II, 11.19-24, Ibid.
³ "Chorus III, 11.29-36, Ibid.
⁴ "Chorus IV, 11.27-32., Ibid.
giving pleasure. He is a poet who has to a high degree the power of seeing and feeling the spiritual meaning of things, and the ability to quicken our imagination and sympathies through his expression and interpretation of what he sees and feels. His poetry, like all great poetry, is made out of life, belongs to life, and exists for life; in fact his one major concern all through his poetry is life in the widest sense of the word, and the quality of life. If his work sometimes assumes the character of propaganda, it is mainly a propaganda for life. A work of art which is indifferent towards life does not deserve to be called art. If judged by Matthew Arnold's dictum that "poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life to the question: How to live”, Eliot deserves to be called a very great poet.

Much of the negative criticism directed against Eliot's poetry was based on one of the following three assumptions: 1 that his premises were wrong; 2 that he was not for life, but for death; 3 that he was unintelligible and obscure. Let us examine each of these accusations in turn.

We can reject the first accusation for two reasons; first that such an accusation has a non-literary and a scientific basis, and secondly that it was unjustified even from the scientific point of view. This accusation is non-literary, because literary criticism does not evaluate a work of art according to the truth or falsity of its statements, but by the impression a work of art makes upon us, by the feelings of pleasure or pain, hope or fear, wonder or religious reverence it arouses in us. By poetic truth we do not mean fidelity to facts in the ordinary sense of the word; such fidelity we look for in science. Our first test of truth in poetry is its accuracy in its expressing not what things are in themselves, but their beauty and mystery, their human interest and meaning for us. Eliot's poetry undoubtedly passes this test.

It has been said that the opposite of poetry is not prose, but science. The scientist establishes hypotheses which enable man to weigh and measure the physical universe and to deduce laws which will prosper him in his conflict with his environment, his fellows and himself. Poetry, on the other hand communicates the emotions of men in these conflicts and in their resolution. It is, however, no less purposive, practical and precise than science. The purpose of the scientist is to decrease the evils with which an indifferent nature has filled our lives, and to develop the goods it offers. The purpose of the poet is to give the quality of living, and so help man to realize the world, both inner and outer, more fully.

The psychological critic, concerned with the way in which poetry changes men's attitudes, has raised a doubt as to whether the aim of poetry is merely a stimulus to action or the betterment of the quality of life. We would support this view with a reservation; the quality of living is dependent on certain good actions, and poetry, by its power to stimulate men towards good action serves the useful purpose of preserving and promoting his quality.

Another type of psychological critic claims that the writer is not objective, because he looks at the world through the spectacles of his neurosis, and what he writes is his reflection of a powerful crisis in himself; since he would not know the subconscious mechanism of his neurosis this reflection of it is often based on wrong premises. There may be truth in this, but it does not alter our original assumption that a work of art does not lose any of its value by starting from a wrong premise. Applied to Eliot's poetry such criticism would be highly illuminating; in searching for a theme for his poetry, he first looked around himself, and what he saw—the decomposition of civilization, the mass hysteria and lack of direction—bore a strong similarity to the crisis going on in himself.

His premise that the modern world is corrupt seems to be true. The quality of living and moral behaviour have indeed been deteriorating during the last fifty years or so. The arts have almost been smothered by the barbarian demands of mass entertainment. Statistics show that for the last fifty years there has been a steady drift away from religion, and that in many families the abandonment of religious ties has deprived the children of an effective teacher of decent behaviour. The artist today must confront a world in which the biggest rewards for artistic creation go to mass producers of sex films or novels. So we see that Eliot's conclusion about the corruption of the modern world is of definite validity. The generation of poets called "The Poets of the Thirties" also arrived at some valid conclusions about the situation of the contemporary world; what distinguishes them from Eliot is not their diagnosis, but their treatment. Eliot saw the hope in individual salvation which was possible by establishing the severed ties with the authority of religion, whereas they found hope in deepening this severance, and in establishing man's lost ties with the material world. They believed in salvation through a return to the authority of the physical world, which man had neglected for so long. The second charge against Eliot is usually from the critic who defends this point of view, and his heaviest charge is that Eliot is a fascist. Douglas Garman, writing in Left Review on The Rock has this to say:

Confronted by the breakdown of capitalist society, his reaction against liberalism is seen to be merely the relinquishing of an untenable position, and his conversion to religious orthodoxy—his particular choice is a personal idiosyncracy—is a last attempt to elude the fundamental political issue. The graph of his personal development is closely parallel with that of Fascism; just as the latter, having rejected democracy, strives to perpetuate the capitalist system in a disguised but more stringent form, so Eliot, the bankrupt liberal, turns to a creed which, while proclaiming its authority, gives full play to his individualist bent.¹

Harold Laski, a powerful leader of intellectual materialism in our era makes the following remarks about Eliot in his Faith, Reason and Civilization (1944):

¹ Douglas Garman "What? ... The Devil?" in Left Review, Vol.1., p.36.
... the most important thing in Mr. Eliot was his horror of the common man, his shrinking from any contact with the masses, the fastidious sensitiveness which seemed to regard whatever is democratic as in its nature vulgar and ugly and barbarous. . . . . . he has so divorced thought from action that he has hardly wanted even an audience to address. The poet who thus cuts himself off from his fellows is cutting himself off from life.¹

Such charges are unwarranted and based on a socialistic conception of poetry which would reject all poetic attitudes indifferent to problems of social welfare, and mass education. For such critics poets were parasites if not serving the society in a way which can be demonstrated on statistical charts. Eliot was a poet of great sensibility, and cultural integrity, a man who saw the salvation not in action, political or otherwise, but in suffering and submission. His prayer was

Teach us to sit still²

How could his human sympathies be narrow? He was concerned all the time with the lot of common man

Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee,
Those who are torn on the horn between season and season time and time, between Hour and hour, word and word, power and power, those who wait In darkness?³

In his long contemplation of life experience he had arrived at the conclusion that:

The world turns and the world changes,
But one thing does not change.
In all of my years, one thing does not change.
However you disguise it, this thing does not change:
The perpetual struggle of good and evil.⁴

All kinds of action, no matter whether national racial or humanitarian, are in his opinion, serve evil ends. Agressiveness and pride lead direct to death:

Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning death
Those who glitter with the glory of the hummingbird, meaning Death⁵

What kind of life should we pursue upon this earth then? It should be

Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me
Resign my life for this life, ray speech for that unspoken,
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.⁶

² "Ash-Wednesday"
³ "Ibid."
⁴ "Chorus I", The Rock
⁵ "Marina", Ariel Poems
⁶ "Ibid".
It will be obvious from the above observations that Eliot was in favour of pacifism in political as well as private behaviour, and in his work we have the most intellectual defence of this view of life ever presented before in any other form or language. The direct influence of Eliot's pacifist views must have been confined to the intellectuals of his generation, but indirectly, through second-hand sources, these ideas must have found their way into the heart of the Englishman, to produce a pattern of behaviour called pacifism. It would, however, be a serious blunder to assume that British pacifism as observed in the politics of the inter-war period, is wholly due to the influence of Eliot's ideas. Eversince the later part of the First World War there has been a steady flow of anti-war publications most of which were novels describing the futility and horror of the War in complete nakedness. Most notable among these were Blundens Undertones of War (1928), Aldington's Death of a Hero (1929), R.C.Sheriff's Journey's End (1928) Robert Graves' Goodbye to All That (1929), Private X's War is War (1930), Her Privates We (1931), Montague's Disenchantment (1922) and Tomlinson's All Our Yesterdays (1930)¹.

To estimate the effect of this anti-war literature would not be an easy matter, but we may say that its most immediate result was the breeding of a mood of fear at a time when the signs of another catastrophe were beginning to appear. The morale of the entire nation had already been shaken by the Great Depression, and the political developments taking place in Central Europe and the Far East tended to confirm the writers claims about the futility of the "War to end all wars". Churchill writing in 1928 ² had a feeling of the coming catastrophe:

Mankind has never been in this position before. Without having improved appreciabltly in virtue or enjoying wiser guidance, it has got into its hands for the first time the tools by which it can

¹ There was also a surge of foreign war-books which had been translated into English. Public reading these came to understand that the fundamental likeness between men and women of various nationalities was greater than the sum of superficial differences. The most well-known of these were Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front (1929), Ernst Glaeser's Class 1902 (1929) and Arnold Zweig's Sergeant Grischa (1929).

² Quite different from the above war-books, which offered us the individual point of view about the cruelty and horror of the war, was Douglas Jerrold's The Lie About the War (1930) which claimed to be the expression of the collective view of the War. Jerrold was holding the militaristic stand-point, and claiming that war was inevitable as man's nature made it necessary, and that the preservation and cultivation of fighting instincts was a necessary precaution against enemy attack. Attacking against the opinion that the War had been futile he says:

Why this damnably foolish cant about a futile war, a war which broke up the structure of Europe, hurled three empires to the dust, brought into the very forefront of history three new great states, liberated the German people from a military despotism, established a new system of international relationships and by a curious inversion, carried western conception to Eastern nations ?


unfailingly accomplish its own extermination. That is the point in human destinies to which all the glories and toils of men have at last led them. . . . Death stands at attention, obedient, expectant, ready to serve, ready to shear away the peoples en masse; ready, if called on, to pulverise, without hope of repair, what is left of civilization.

Feeling the inevitability of the Second World War Churchill was making desperate efforts to convince the nation and its rulers of the necessity of meeting the facts squarely, and rearming before it was too late. But the Baldwin-Mac Donald government, which was in power then, did not realize\(^1\) the magnitude of events taking place in Europe. Again quoting Churchill

This was one of those awful periods which recur in our history, when the noble British nation seems to fall from its high estate, loses all trace of sense or purpose, and appears to waver from the menace of foreign peril, frothing pious platitudes while foes forge their arms.\(^2\)

Churchill was one of the very few Britons who saw the danger approaching, and advocated quick action against it. But the government and a good many intellectual young Britons, studying at universities at the time had a different view of the matter altogether. There is need for a more thorough study, than

**CONCLUSIONS**

The first quarter of the XXth century is a period in which radical changes in the life of British people have changed fundamentally the nature of English poetry. The breaking down of basic organic unities necessary for man's sanity and culture was at the root of most of these changes; these are unities (I) which binds man to the soil (2) which bind men to their nation, (3) which bind the sexes in their normal relationships. These three unities were broken largely by the growing industrialism of this century, the Great War, and the economic instability which followed it. All these are factors which affected the mood and thought of poets writing during this period. Their mood was characterized by a deep pessimism due to their insecurity and frustration. The fact is that men are children of nature; there are organic bonds between the two reaching back through ages of evolution. It is out of these ancient bonds with nature that the commonest themes of poetry develop. Modern man has forgotten how to live in the very attempt of achieving a better life.

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1. May be the British government was in full realization of the degree of the danger but, like the intellectuals, it saw no hope in meeting it in its own terms.
The most important outcome of the breaking of the bonds between man and nature was in the sphere of beliefs. The word "belief" is used here to cover all those convictions, rational and irrational, religious, moral, social and political which in the ordinary individual are the main spring of behaviour, and in the poet form the basis of his attitude. It is changes in attitude that affect the course of poetry.

In the period which this study is about there had been a gradual liquidation of belief in God (in a benevolent personal Deity). Many factors have contributed to this, though the most obvious are the progress of science, the War, and a series of economic crises.

The War had a powerful impact on the poetry of the period, because it gave an urgency to the problems which were preoccupying the minds of poets in the period preceding its outbreak. When death is imminent it becomes less possible to contemplate eternity with detachment; and when the future is suddenly foreshortened, the value of present existence is increased considerably. But on the other hand new time philosophies have tended to make man realize the insignificance of his life-span on earth. Thus, fear of imminent death, and a feeling of insignificance brought about a mood of pessimism, and fatalism which were the most characteristic features of the psychology of the generation of 1920's. The poets of this period reflect this pessimism and fatalism. Living in a time when the values of a civilized Europe were thrown into the melting pot, the poets of this period suffer from a general loss of direction, but they tend to turn to simple certainties to find a sound basis for thought and behaviour. So they shrink from the chaotic field of social and political controversy. The dominating poetic influences of this period (1920's) were Yeats, and, Eliot. In the poetry of these poets we find, not only a general overtone of disillusion, but a return to more subjective and introspective ways of feeling. This is something entirely new in English poetry; it is a post War characteristic. We may illustrate better what we mean by comparing the war poems of such poets as Owen and Rosenberg with a representative post-war poem such as Mr. Eliot's "Gerontion". In the former the starting point of a poem is nearly always in some external incident or object -a gas attack, the sudden singing of larks- in some experience outside the poet's own mind. And the imaginative development of the theme proceeds away from the individual towards a broad universality in which personal problems are merged in a larger humanity. In other words there is in this kind of poetry a marked objectiveness. Whereas in "Gerontion", and still more in the earlier poems of T.S. Eliot there is both a subjective starting point and a subjective method of treatment.

By the end of the decade of 1920's the prevalent disillusion of the 1920's had spent itself, and a new climate of opinion had set in 1929 with the publication of C.D. Lewis's Transitional Poem which was followed in 1931 by
From Feathers to Iron. In the interval Auden's Poems had appeared, and later in 1933 Lewis's The Magnetic Mountain, and Spender's Poems were published. Little as these three poets resembled each other in utterance, they had this significant quality in common: that their work reflected a particular and roughly uniform attitude to life, or at least to contemporary pressing problems. In their poetry, disillusion is replaced by a more specific dissatisfaction, and an attempt is made both to formulate the issue and suggest a remedy. Where Eliot and Lawrence are concerned with the plight of the individual, with the modification of the individual's experiences and beliefs by the environment in which they find themselves, Auden, Spender and Day Lewis are concerned with an opposite aspect of the problem, with the influence of the individual upon his environment, the possibility of changing it for the better. It may be true that:

This is the dead land
This is the cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star,

but for them a more important truth, is that there is virtue in humanity and no limit in human endeavour, and that the future is, at least to some extent, still what we choose to make it. Inevitably, poetry which is the expression of such beliefs will tend to present an invitation to "a change of heart". All poetry in a sense is this; but the invitation is usually implied. It works through the exaltation which good poetry engenders and which in turn, a dissatisfaction with one's previous state of heart. Whereas in the poets of the 1930's the invitation is direct and open, and in fact a kind of exhortation.

Take off your coat: grow lean:
Suffer humiliation:
Patrol the passes alone,
And eat your iron ration.

What is immediately noticeable about such poetry, and what has given it so comparatively wide an appeal, is its air of efficiency and quick-witted address, its general manner of facing a modern problem with honesty and realism. But the poetry of this generation has weaknesses: it offers solution for the problems of man and society in too general term.

Psychologically there are two ways of facing the problem of life: either by trying to change oneself or by trying to change the external world. Eliot, Lawrence and Yeats are poets who have taken the first course; Auden, Lewis and Spender, have taken the second. Just as the poetry of introspec-
tion is always liable to degenerate into a private and personal revelation, so the danger to the poet whose eye is turned towards the external world is in the ease with which intellectual convictions become divorced from the passionate apprehension of a truth. Indeed the danger to the artist in all formalized systems of belief is that they flatter the intellect at the expense of the heart.