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SURREALISM:

The Spirit and the Letter in
Twentieth-Century English Poetry.

A Ph.D. thesis by Robert Jackaman,
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PREFACE:

The present thesis is the result of work carried out at Auckland University, New Zealand, on a full-time study basis, commencing on 21 February, 1968.

This final draft relies in the main on material assembled in an original draft, which was approximately twice the size of the present volume.

The magnitude of the first draft enabled me to examine and explore the period under study quite extensively, both in separate sections and as a whole. From this expanded survey, I was then able to select those aspects which seemed most relevant to my thesis, and which helped to provide the best perspective for the subject.

The work seems to me to divide up basically into three sections; these are surrealism in the thirties, surrealism in the forties, and what one might reasonably term the surrealist ancestry and progeny of these main decades—surrealism before and after its short-lived rise to prominence.

I have tried to maintain an approximate balance between these sections, so that roughly equal space is given to the material from the thirties (Parts One and Three), the forties (Part Four), and the period either side (Parts Two and Six).

The key to an unbiassed view of surrealism lies in ignoring
preconceptions, and in concentrating on the evidence available. This has been my prime concern throughout. In this way I have arrived, to the best of my abilities, at a reasonable statement of surrealism's extent, significance, and development in modern English poetry— a statement in keeping with the facts as they now appear.
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PART ONE:

PRELIMINARIES.

Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—
My haunt, and the main region of my song.

--William Wordsworth, The Recluse (1814),
Part I, Book 1, ll. 788-94.
CHAPTER ONE: Introductory.

Surrealism is dead. At any rate, that is the conclusion one might be tempted to draw in England. In France and America interest in the movement has been kept alive by intermittent discussion; but in England this has not been the case. In the latter country, little critical thought has been applied to the subject, apparently, since the middle of the thirties. This present thesis constitutes an attempt to fill the gap. In examining surrealism both before and after its overt éclat in England, I hope to put it into a meaningful historical perspective; this may help in arriving at the essence of the movement, by penetrating the sensationalism that has hitherto tended to obscure it.

To begin a discussion of the subject on a note of sobriety is somewhat unusual. But it is highly necessary, because Surrealism has already been the object of almost every imaginable overstatement, from the mouths of both opponents and supporters.

'Le Surréalisme', writes Yves Duplessis, 'est souvent considéré comme ... une dépravation de l'esprit ou une plaisanterie d'artistes désireux d'étonner à tout prix,' and he is undoubtedly correct. Though it would be reasonable to regard Surrealism as, in Stephen Spender's words, 'a movement ... riddled with charlatans and amateurs', the sort of opinion suggested by M. Duplessis above should not be allowed to follow automatically from the fact. There may well be idiots in the movement; but this is not per se sufficient argument for equating 'surrealist' with 'idiot', as does
John Berryman in a book review in the forties. Further, it is invalid to claim dogmatically that Surrealism 'is doomed from the outset, because its aim is irrationalism', or that 'Surrealism is ... an anti-social activity, and therefore destructive'; these comments manifest prejudices of critical approach which conspire from the outset to deny the possibility of seeing any positive qualities in the movement.

On the other hand, it would be to overstate the case in the opposite direction to claim that Surrealism should be regarded as 'the most vital and renovating movement of modern thought and art.' For, even if one accepts that 'Surrealism is an entire way of life, and not merely a set of rules governing an artistic production', it is fairly clear that in England today its influence on everyday life is limited to trivia—to 'interior decoration', to 'Advertisements and posters, ... ladies' dresses and especially hats, cartoons ....' Wallace Fowlie notes that the 'superficial or exaggerated aspects' of the movement have had a certain (and fairly widespread) influence on 'daily life'; but he goes on to point out that as 'a cause, and even as a way of life' Surrealism 'has deeply affected and transformed only a small number of men.'

*See especially The Great Poster Trip: Art Eureka (Ed. Cummings G. Walker), 1968.

**Herbert Read might add to this list 'the "superreality" of the James Bond films' (Art and Alienation, 1967, p.32); and the present 'psychedelic' trend in popular music is another possible addition.
In the final analysis one is forced to agree at least to some extent with Germaine Brée, who 'dismisses the claims surrealism makes ... as "exorbitant."' Undoubtedly, the persistent claims of the Surrealists to be undertaking 'la tâche la plus haute à laquelle la poésie puisse prétendre' are coloured with the exaggeration of propaganda.

The ultimate significance of Surrealism obviously lies between the two extremes. Though as an ethic it has many weaknesses, 'The credit side of the movement is important enough for us to disregard some ephemeral littleness and to forgive some adolescent provocations.' As Herbert Read says, 'When one has set aside the pathetic charlatanism which has always disfigured the movement, we are left with a very essential activity, one which the closed system of rationalism has always striven to repress .... In any reintegration of civilization, what the surrealists call the conquest of the irrational, but which might more subtly be called the wooing of the irrational, must play a decisive part ....' It would be inaccurate to regard such a 'wooing of the irrational' as a new theme; for it is not innovated by Surrealism though it is an essential element of the movement's philosophy. Surrealism, in fact, carries on an age-old interest in the irrational-- hence Mr. Fowle's remark that the movement follows 'an ancient belief' which 'is not limited to the 19th and 20th centuries'. As we shall see, there are certainly elements in surrealism which are no more than restatements of much earlier
trains of thought. Indeed, one might plausibly argue that surrealism is part of the perennial expression of a need basic to human nature itself—the need for some acknowledgment of rebellious, irrational impulses.

For the present purposes of this thesis, however, it is necessary to select an area of manageable dimensions; and consequently I shall limit myself (except where strictly relevant to the argument*) to discussion of surrealist trains of thought and impulses within the context of twentieth-century English poetry.

Though Surrealism is the subject of my thesis, and must inevitably, therefore, occupy the centre of the discussion, it would be wrong to overestimate the movement's apparent importance within the prescribed area of research. To claim that Surrealism has been the sovereign concern of more than a small minority would be misleading: it would be to ignore the literary-historical facts as they appear. If, for instance, one were to list the dominant poetic figures of the time-span under study, 'Surrealist' is not at first glance an appropriate description of them.

Indeed, to attempt to define any individual poet as a 'Surrealist' seems to involve a great deal of confusion and conflicting evidence. Even David Gascoyne, whose case is clearer than most (inasmuch as he admitted to subscribing to the movement) causes some difficulty. He announced his break with Surrealism as

*For instance, I shall occasionally have cause to refer to the bases of Romantic poetry as put forward by Wordsworth and Coleridge—poets from whom the English Surrealists claimed to be descended.
early as 1934, when he wrote, 'I no longer find this navel-gazing activity at all satisfying.'15 Yet his collection of Surrealist poems* was not published until 1936; and important critical works by Gascoyne on Surrealism also appeared after his avowed renunciation.**

The more one looks into individual examples, the more one becomes confused. Hugh Sykes Davies, for instance, is described in New Directions as 'one of the important members of the English Surrealist movement',16 and Herbert Read (most eloquent of the theorists sympathetic to Surrealism) evidently agrees with this opinion. But David Gascoyne (for a time the most confirmed of the English Surrealists) disagrees; he remarks that 'Mr. Herbert Read, in a recent article in The New English Weekly, has actually placed ... [some] work of Mr. Davies' ... in the surrealist category. It is rather difficult to justify this classification. For though Mr. Davies has obviously read the surrealists ... his method of writing is just as obviously different.'17

Fortunately these are difficulties in which it is unnecessary to become involved, other than to mention, in passing, their existence. For what is important in Surrealism is not to be discovered merely through attention to arbitrary and tenuous classification. The very nature of 'La Poésie Surréaliste'

*This is Man's Life Is This Meat of 1936, in which a footnote to p.4 explains, 'With the exception of Nos. 1-6, the poems in this collection are Surrealist poems.'
militates against such categorisation; for, as Jean-Louis Bédouin points out, 'Elle ne se laisse pas réduire à une formule'. This is because surrealism is a tendency rather than a clearly defined or definable school of poetry. It is an amalgam of various themes and approaches, and might best be regarded as one aspect of poetic modernism rather than as a separate entity in itself; for most of its themes and methods are neither innovated by, nor unique to, the movement. To use Vivian de Sola Pinto's terminology, it is one method of making the 'voyage within' in preference to the 'voyage without'; or, to use Mr. Spender's words, it is that part of 'The Struggle of the Modern' which concerns itself primarily with 'an inside ... reality' made up of elements such as 'subconscious life, childhood, personal history, sleep, dream, the subjective ego which moves into pasts and depths beyond individuality ....'

The Surrealists hoped to reach depths of the ego not only beyond individuality, but beyond nationality too. They prided themselves on being part of an international movement, and certainly there were groups of Surrealists in many countries. The initial critical impetus for these groups was given in France; the English branch of the movement therefore owes a considerable debt to French Surréalisme. This is revealed in the fact that a large amount of the English theory of Surrealism is no more than

*[The Surrealists, in fact, aspired to be great breakers of barriers—not only of barriers between individuals or nations, but even of the barriers conventionally set up between the various art forms: hence Patrick Waldberg, speaking of Surrealism as a 'spiritual orientation']

[cont'd overleaf]
a straight translation (or, sometimes, paraphrase) of the French original.** One of the necessary preliminaries to a study of Surrealism in England, therefore, is what Charles Madge advocates in his essay, 'Surrealism for the English'-- a 'Close study of the philosophical position of the French surrealists ....'22

The immediate ancestor of Surrealisme in France was the Dada movement. The period influenced by Dadaist thought was only a quickly-passing phase, however; for 'l'attitude purement négative de Dada',23 proved too nihilistic for André Breton (the leader of the Surréaliste movement) and his fellows. Indeed, Breton wrote, 'Le Manifeste Dada 1918 semblait ouvrir toutes grandes les portes, ... mais on découvre que ces portes donnent sur un corridor qui tourne en rond'.24 This dissatisfaction was to lead to the formation of Surrealisme itself.

[continued from previous page] (Surrealism, 1966, p.7), can describe the intellectual atmosphere in which Surrealism was formulated as a 'collective exaltation in which poetry and art were no longer differentiated' (ibid., p.9).

**This French influence in England is not peculiar to Surrealism. It had been prefigured, in the two decades prior to the thirties, in the influence of Symbolisme on certain important poets writing in English. G.S. Fraser notes that 'In French poetry ... can be found the basis of surrealism and here also one will discover the influences which made Eliot and Pound so interested in reconciling culture and tradition' (The Modern Writer and His World, 1964, p.35). Eliot acknowledges the debt to Symbolisme when he writes that 'without this French tradition the work of three poets in other languages ... I refer to W.B. Yeats, to Rainer Maria Rilke, and, if I may, to myself-- would hardly be conceivable' (Notes towards the Definition of Culture, 1948, p.112). In a sense, then, Surrealisme's incursion into native English poetry is no more than an extension of earlier French influences--those of the Symbolistes (who also profoundly influenced the French Surréaliste movement) on Yeats, Pound, and Eliot.
The first stage, or 'heroic epoch of surrealism', \(^{25}\) (also referred to as 'a purely intuitive epoch', \(^{26}\)) stretched from 1919 and culminated in the *Manifeste du Surréalisme* of 1924. In this document appeared the definition, 'SURREALISM, noun, masc., pure psychic automatism .... Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.' \(^{27}\) Such a definition had an unfortunate effect. As Frederick J. Hoffman points out, 'Surrealists, instead of releasing the ego from its rational prison, provided another, an irrational, prison for it, from which it could not escape except through a radical revision of surrealist practices.' \(^{28}\) The definition, suggesting an intransigent distaste for morals and aesthetics, still reflected the Dada influence. At a later date the author of the definition, M. Breton, looked back on it as being 'extremely mistaken': he admitted that 'I deceived myself at the time in advocating the use of an automatic thought ... disengaged from "all aesthetic or moral preoccupations".' \(^{29}\)

A 'radical revision' was to come, with the formulation of the *Second Manifeste du Surréalisme* in 1930. David Gascoyne says of this new manifesto, 'The function it performed was that of restating the surrealist programme in the light of five years' active experience'. \(^{30}\) In it was embodied the admission that, as Charles I. Glicksberg suggests, 'the conjunction, unconscious poetry' is 'a contradiction in terms'. \(^{31}\) The original definition was modified, so that now the poet was to make use of the 'strange forces' which lurk in 'the depths of our minds'; he was to put them at the service of some aesthetic and moral purpose: a conscious effort was now to be
involved, directed primarily at the attempt 'to canalize' these forces 'in order to submit them later, if necessary, to the control of the reason.'\(^{32}\) This typified the 'reasoning epoch',\(^{26}\) in which the more obviously weak links in the *Surréaliste* argument were removed. The reasoning epoch continued after this manifesto; M. Breton wrote in 1936, for instance, that 'From 1930 until today the history of surrealism is that of ... gradually removing from it every trace ... of artistic opportunism.'\(^{33}\) The movement, in fact, in these later years became less and less sensational and outrageous.

This is important to a study of English Surrealism, for the inheritance from France comes largely from this later period. The English poets had the advantage of the French mistakes of the 'intuitive epoch' from which to learn. To put it another way, the Dada extremity of the earlier phase of *Surréalisme* is little felt in the English variant.

It is necessary to be aware of the fact that the specifically English movement is a variant of the French original. F.L. Lucas puts his finger on the crucial difference when he writes that 'As in politics, so in literature, France has always swung to wilder extremes.'\(^{34}\) The difference between the French original and the English variant, therefore, is one of degree rather than of kind. Instead of the authoritarian pronouncements of M. Breton we have the persuasive suggestions of Mr. Read. Instead of the

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*That is, the aesthetic impulse was to be satisfied by giving poetic form to the anarchic outpourings; and the moral impulse was to be satisfied in the attempt to gain conscious control over the instinctual world.*
anarchic flow of Pablo Picasso's '29th March XXXVI'—'with the skein of her dark hair love begging reasons the hand brandishing a river held about the middle blazing at each extremity the sheaf of vegetables split by the strain of running two hares simultaneously on the lake cracking in the breeze fastened to the square roots of the sigh of the glazier ...',\textsuperscript{35}—we have the more measured irration-alism of Gascoyne's 'Phenomena'—'It was during a heat-wave. Someone whose dress seemed to have forgotten who was wearing it appeared to me at the end of a pause in the conversation. She was so adorable that I had to forbid her to pass across my footstool again.'\textsuperscript{36} Instead of Luis Bunuel's 'Bunches of withered nuns’ who ‘were dangling from the windows,’ while 'soldiers pissed against the convent wall and the centuries swarmed in the lepers' sores',\textsuperscript{37} we have Ruthven Todd's comparatively tame 'Priest who battens on the dead.'\textsuperscript{38} These illustrations serve to show, I think, the 'wilder extremes' of the French movement in comparison to its English equivalent. Somewhere along the course of Surrealisme's journey across the English Channel, moderation set in. It would be a valid generalisation to say that English Surrealism is altogether more conservative than its continental relative,* in tone, in

\textsuperscript{*This is reflected in a comment made by Humphrey Jennings on Surrealism, 1936 (ed. Read); he writes, 'How can one open this book, so expensive, so well produced, so con-formistly printed,... and compare it even for a moment with the passion terror and excitement ... which emanated from La Révolution Surrealiste and Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution' [militant Surréaliste periodicals in France] (Contemporary Poetry and Prose, No. 8 [December 1936], 167).}
movement of rhythm and imagery, and in moral standpoint.*

Because of the difference between the English and French manifestations of the movement I distinguish throughout between Surrealism and Surréalisme (referring to the latter only when it is relevant to the former).

In addition to this I also distinguish wherever possible between Surrealism and surrealism, between what M. Breton has called 'la lettre' and 'l'esprit' of the movement: that is, I differentiate between, on the one hand, 'an organized movement ... with its leaders and disciples, its manifestoes and publications, its exhibitions', and on the other hand surrealism's underlying and more permanent significance in 'a context far wider than that of the ... group'. Thus 'la lettre' of Surrealism is contained in England in the specifically thirties movement, which contributed to and supported the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1936 in London; whereas surrealism, 'l'esprit' of this movement, may be found preceding and succeeding Surrealism itself.

* The relative moderation in moral standpoint can be illustrated by the fact that the English theorists of Surrealist revolution remain intransigently theoretic: there is no attempt to translate theory into practice, either physical or political. One cannot imagine Mr. Read behind a barricade; his interest in 'Marx', 'Proudhon', and 'Sorel and Lenin,' (Poetry and Anarchism, 1947, p.28) is related to the world of action only in theory. So, when the Surrealistes shout, 'We are specialists in Revolt. There is no means of action we are not capable of using' (quoted by Maurice Nadeau, The History of Surrealism, 1968, p. 103), they are speaking for themselves, and not for their English counterparts. In England there is little active participation--no equivalent to the idealistic

[cont'd overleaf]
There remain only two preliminaries to discuss. One of these—the definition of a suitable area of search—can most conveniently be handled in a separate chapter; the other—a brief synopsis of the projected shape of the thesis—I shall attempt below.

I shall be concerned, in the main, with the development of the surrealist aspects of the Surrealist movement. This development, I shall argue, follows what the Surrealists themselves might describe as a 'dialectical' pattern—of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. My contention, then, might be summed up diagrammatically as follows:

[cont'd from previous page]------------------------
suicides (see Nadeau, p. 102), to the incitement to strike (see Nadeau, p. 101), nor to the public scandal of the Saint-Pol-Roux banquet (see Nadeau, pp. 112-14): these remain French phenomena, while Surrealism in England remains essentially a literary activity, in practice if not in theory.
A Diagram to Show the Dialectical Development of a surrealistic Influence in Modern English Poetry

(Hopkins) Yeats and Pound

ANCESTRY

Eliot
catalytic native environment
of the First World War and
immediately post-war iconoclasm.
a certain amount of external
(especially French) influence,
mainly theory.

---

Surrealism

30s
Surrealism
as THESIS

Social Realism
as ANTITHESIS*

40s
The 'New Apocalypse'
as SYNTHESES

---

The 'New Apocalypse'
as THESIS

The 'Movement'
as ANTITHESIS

50s & 60s
'Mavericks' (non-aligned poets)
or the 'Group'
as SYNTHESES.

*Though, of course, this plan is a drastic over-simplification, in which there are certain weaknesses; Social Realism, for instance, is not generated out of Surrealism (as the strict schema of dialectical development would demand); or, The 'New Apocalypse' as THESIS in the fifties is a residual influence from that group rather than the group itself. These weaknesses, inevitable in any broad generalisation, will not appear in the expanded body of the present study.


7. Ibid., p. 89.


15. Answer to 'An Enquiry', *New Verse*, No. 11 (October 1934), 12.


17. 'On Spontaneity', *New Verse*, No. 18 (December 1935), 19.


21 ibid., p. 117.
22 New Verse, No. 6 (December 1933), 14.
26 ibid., p. 50.
27 Patrick Waldberg, Surrealism, 1965, p. 11. (Also in the original, Breton, Manifestes du Surréalisme, 1962, p. 40)
28 'From Surrealism to "The Apocalypse" ', ELH, XV (June 1948), 148.
32 Breton, What Is Surrealism?, p.64.
33 ibid., p.82.
34 The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal, 1963, p.120.
35 Contemporary Poetry and Prose, Nos. 4-5 (August-September 1936), 76.
36 ibid., No. 7 (November 1936), 135.
37 'A Giraffe', ibid., No. 2 (June 1936), 42.
40 Fowlie, p.11.
CHAPTER TWO: Towards a Definition—In Search of a Significant Area.

We are close enough to the surrealists to understand the peculiar urgency of their poetry, and yet sufficiently removed from the epoch entre les deux guerres to begin to evaluate their achievement. This evaluation has as yet hardly begun, partly because of difficulties inherent in surrealist poetry, but also because of misconceptions of the nature of literary surrealism and its consequences.


The very nature of Surrealism tends, as has been noted already, to preclude rigid formalisation." Hence a definition in the conventional form of an explanatory sentence or, at most, paragraph is unacceptable for the present purpose since Surrealism 'ne se laisse pas réduire à une formule'.

The temptation to reduce Surrealism to an over-simplified formula

"Kenneth Cornell in his essay, 'On the Difficulty of a Label', writes that 'we may well never be able to define a Surrealist poem'; he suggests (not without good cause) that 'Perusals of anthologies of Surrealist poetry are disappointing and inconclusive', and that 'If we follow doctrine too closely we arrive at negations' (Yale French Studies, No. 31 [no date, but presumably 1964], 138).

This may account for the fact that certain critics prefer to regard Surrealism as a 'point of view' (Julien Levy, Surrealism, 1968, passim) or as a 'state of mind' (Cyril Connolly, 'Surrealism', Art News Annual, No. 21 [1952], 133) rather than as a clearly delineated 'school' of poetry.
has led in the past to much confusion about, and misconception of, the movement. The result is that, as David Gascoyne complained in 1936, 'the most vital issues of surrealism have been persistently misrepresented and obscured from the moment when, not so long ago, the rumour of this strange new "modern" movement first came to our ears.' From this state of affairs it follows that 'the word "surrealism" itself ... has become ... so mishandled and distorted by usage as to have lost much of its significance ....' Even such a description as that offered in Chambers's Encyclopaedia--'SURREALISM describes a 20th-century school of art which aims at expressing the working of the subconscious mind and depends for its effect upon the juxtaposition of incongruous or startling objects or actions'--while not incorrect, is almost more misleading by virtue of what it omits than informative by virtue of what it includes. What is needed for this present study, therefore, is a more expanded account of Surrealism, a résumé both of the most significant themes which it treats and of the attitudes at work and techniques employed in this treatment.* The résumé below will, I hope, form a basic working framework for the thesis, without involving more misleading simplification than is inevitable.

*In order to arrive at a representative précis of Surrealism's aims and methods I have tried to resolve certain contradictions inherent, seemingly, both in these aims and in the statement of them, and to extract what appear to be the most recurrent and essential themes and methods; I have done this with as much of the English theory as I have been able to obtain, and also with a certain amount of the original French theory (where it is relevant to the English movement).
I aim to highlight the recurrent themes and preoccupations typical of the Surrealist 'state of mind', and the poetic methods used to translate the source material into poetry; then I shall be able to trace the development or dissipation of Surrealism and the surrealist spirit (through the poetry of the period under study) by examining the growth or attenuation of these themes and methods.*

* * * * * * * * *

'Revolution ... Revolution ... Realism is the pruning of trees, surrealism is the pruning of life', cry the editors of La Révolution Surréaliste. Even in the more moderate, English form of Surrealism rebellion is an essential part of the philosophy. In the initial instance, this rebellion is that of the individual against what is seen as an increasingly totalitarian State (and also, to a lesser degree, against the established Church). Jean-Louis Bédouin claims that 'Le surréalisme est né d'une prise de conscience de la condition dérisoire faite à l'individu et à sa pensée, et du refus de s'en accommoder.' As a result of this refusal, 'Rootless and introspective, the surrealist poet composes a poetry of private vision in which public themes or events appear only for the purpose of accentuating the separation of the poet and his society.' This is the attitude produced by what Michel Beaujour describes as 'holding stubbornly to "alienation"'. In more positive terms, the rebellion has as its object an individual freedom, 'that sort of liberty which ensures freedom of choice and which is, therefore, the guarantee of the fullest opportunity for the individual to avail himself of any of

*Throughout this chapter I have underlined the main points, in order to aid recapitulation and later reference.
the choices which may present themselves. André Breton confirms this when he speaks of 'the liberation of man' as the 'primary condition' for 'the liberation of the mind, the express aim of surrealism'. Indeed, Wallace Fowle considers that 'The word "freedom" has an extraordinary resonance in so many of the important surrealist writings, that one often feels inclined to give it first place in the new world of men which this movement hoped to establish.'

In the world of poetic vision this freedom is affirmed by the positing of different realities from those conventionally accepted by the members of 'an excessively utilitarian world'. M. Breton goes as far as to claim that 'in this epoch it is reality itself that is in question'; he agrees with Louis Aragon in seeing 'reality' not as an absolute term, but as a relative one, and in the claim that 'the real is a relation like any other.'

The utilitarian vision of reality is dominated (or so M. Breton assures us) by 'The absolute rationalism which ... does not permit consideration of any facts but those strictly relevant to our experience.' By contrast, art (and especially Surrealist art) often relies on 'facts' other than those discerned

*Even G.S. Fraser notes that 'New subtleties of psychological approach, or new delicacies of presentation or description' create a situation in which ' "realism" is an elusive and ramifying conception' (The Modern Writer and His World, 1964, p.30).
by strict utility: it often presents a 'sudden view of things from their reverse, usually unnoticed side.'

An important alternative to the view of reality promoted by 'absolute rationalism' is that offered by illusion--illusion which, as C.G. Jung points out, is probably 'actual for the psyche'.

This psychic reality is denied or suppressed in modern civilisation, according to M. Bédouin, by 'cent ... idées reçues, cent ... réflexes conditionnés ... qui tendent à interdire à l'individu de se chercher hors des normes imposées par la société ... et s'efforcent, à cette fin, de le priver purement et simplement de toute imagination.'

Consequently, the Surrealist: in reaction away from these 'idées reçues' tends to promote the individual imagination, which has been, according to Jung, responsible for 'All the works of man' and which 'frees man from his bondage to the "nothing but",' of utilitarianism. Henri Peyre speaks of 'the unchaining of imagination', and M. Breton in *What Is Surrealism?* suggests that 'The imagination is perhaps on the point of reclaiming its rights.'

Surrealist art thus plays a compensatory rôle, invoking the imagination and the subconscious world of psychic reality to counterbalance the conscious results of materialism.

The immediate object of such a compensation seems to be the creation of a balance in outlook: faced with both 'interior reality and exterior reality', in theory the poet is to refuse 'to allow the pre-eminence of the one over the other'. Further than this,

*This term is merely a convenient fiction.*

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he is to attempt a unification of the two; M. Breton claims that 'we have attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, of finally becoming one.'\textsuperscript{22}

However, the theory is not easily to be put into practice in what is apparently 'an excessively utilitarian world'.\textsuperscript{12} In order to achieve balance in such an environment, it will not be enough simply to present a balanced view of reality: the existing imbalance must first be attacked. Consequently the Surrealist poet depicts the exterior reality of utilitarianism and material wellbeing promoted by ruthless rationalism as being undermined by an (often grotesquely exaggerated) interior reality of psychic forces. The object is to provoke what is termed 'a general and emphatic crisis in consciousness'.\textsuperscript{24*} Behind the crisis in consciousness is the hope 'that thereby man would be upset and would find the vital forces of his life elsewhere than in his intellect.'\textsuperscript{25} Frederick J. Hoffman puts it in a slightly less optimistic light when he says that the purpose of this 'surrealist revolution' is to give 'to the modern mind an awful awareness of a chaotic unconscious subvening its smooth surfaces'.\textsuperscript{26} Either way, it is one of the most important principles of Surrealist poetry that poets (in Julien Levy's words) 'deliberately propose to shock and surprise, so that you may be deprived of all preconceived standards and open to new impressions.'\textsuperscript{27}

*This is Julien Levy's translation of M. Breton's original phrase 'crise de conscience' (Manifestes du Surrealisme, 1962, p.153). I find Mr. Levy's phrase 'crisis in consciousness' much more appropriate than, say, Mr. Waldberg's translation---'crisis in conscience' (Surrealism, 1966, p.76).
Thus the poet becomes 'a sower of disturbances,' whose art 'has the purely practical purpose of loosening the reader's ... grip on everyday reality'.

The Surrealist's fascination with dementia seems to stem directly from the fact that it offers an alternative to 'everyday reality'. Madness of any sort represents an individual crisis in consciousness; presumably this is why the Surrealistes regarded 'Hysteria' as 'in every respect a supreme means of expression', and why Salvador Dali developed the 'paranoiac-critical activity'. G.S. Fraser claims that the function of a Surrealist text is 'to remind us how near we are to madness'. Reference to the examples of Hölderlin's and Blake's apparently genuine insanity strengthen the reminder offered by simulated madness.

But madness is rather a drastic therapy, even by Surrealist standards. Another (and more viable) alternative to everyday reality is the dream. Consequently, M. Breton says, we must 'cultiver le rêve'. At its most extreme the cultivation leads to M. Breton's claim that 'Oneiric values have once and for all

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*They even celebrated 'The Quinquagenary of Hysteria (1878-1928)' in La Révolution Surrealiste, No. 11 (March 1928) [see Waldberg, Surrealism, 1966, pp.61-62].

**In the maestro's own words this is a 'spontaneous method of irrational understanding based upon the interpretative critical association of delirious phenomena' (quoted by Waldberg, p.91).
succeeded the others'. But even if one discounts exaggerations such as this, dream is nevertheless clearly very important to Surrealism; for dream escapes the 'normal' world and produces fantasies which illuminate the world of the unconscious rather than the rational world of utility. As Reuben Fine explains, 'One point at which everybody is deprived of the protection of his rationalizations is during sleep; hence Freud referred to dreams as the royal road to the unconscious.'

If dreams are the 'royal road', then perhaps myth and legend are alternative routes leading in the same direction. It was Robert Graves in Poetic Unreason who mentioned 'the similarity of dream and myth'. Myth and legend certainly seem closely allied to dream, at any rate in the Surrealist canon. Clifford Browder points out that 'the surréalité' (which is achieved in dreams) 'is also expressed in myth, and ... age-old legends which Breton, following Freud, sees as projections of the human unconscious meriting the same attention as dreams.' The interest in myth and legend constitutes another attempt to get beyond the logic-bound and materialistic civilisation which is depicted as the arch-enemy in much Surrealist poetry. By returning to an ancient reliance on mythical thought the poet can delve back

*This is little more than an exaggerated transposition into the terms of literature of Freud's remark that 'I am led to regard the dream as a sort of substitute for the thought-processes, full of meaning and emotion' (On Dreams, 1901. In Complete Works Vol. V, Standard Edition [Hogarth Press], 1953, p.640).
beyond rationalism and the spiritual stagnation caused by the 'réflexes conditionnés' of modern civilisation. He can perhaps achieve a freshness of vision which avoids the aridity of 'logical concepts', and which 'holds his experiences by means of clear ... mythical images'.

In addition to this, myths and legends have the power of expressing or symbolizing, and so relieving, typical human emotions. They reflect an unchanging universal realm of human spiritual needs, whose catharsis can be achieved by symbolic presentation. As Mr. Fraser puts it, 'Mythology preserves the memory of ancient rituals, it is concerned with the regular repetitive activities of many people, under a very deep emotional compulsion'. Poetry was itself once an ancient ritual; for 'in the rhythmic dance of words charged with meaning to which the stored secret powers of body and mind respond, our individual faith is renewed in the common life with its ideal interests and values'. By the constant reference to myth and to mythic thinking, the Surrealist tries to restore the ritual element to poetry, to instil a high seriousness of spiritual purpose which, however, owes little or nothing to contemporary Established religion.

In the attempt to plumb what Miss Bodkin refers to as 'the stored secret powers of ... mind', the Surrealist poem itself may become virtually a ritual incantation, whose subject is what Marcel Raymond describes as 'an age-old dream, half-submerged in the unconscious, the dream of a magical universe'. This latter is a
very apposite comment; for magic is another of the constituent themes of Surrealism. Like dream, myth, and legend, what Frank Kermode has called 'the magic assumption'\textsuperscript{43} reflects an element of consciousness not usually accepted by the rational intellect. Magic itself has suffered neglect because of the prevalence of scientific thought. This is, at any rate, the Surrealist's contention; for he claims that 'Notre monde a bien perdu sa magie'.\textsuperscript{44} The poet is once more to be the instrument for righting the balance: he is 'to become a magician whose main aim ... [is] to achieve the complete liberation of mankind'.\textsuperscript{45} At its most extreme, the poet's interest here comes within the bounds of what M. Breton in \textit{Arcane 17} describes as 'la haute magie'\textsuperscript{46}--the arcane realm of alchemy.

Mary Ann Caws writes that 'On even the most superficial level, it would be impossible to avoid the mention of alchemy in any study of ... surrealism.'\textsuperscript{47**} At first it is difficult to see the justification for this comment, until one realises that the alchemical

\textsuperscript{*The 'magic assumption' is 'the assumption that makes so much of dreams', and that assumes 'that the human mind is so constituted as to be able to recognize images of which it can have no perceived knowledge' (Kermode, \textit{Romantic Image}, 1957, p.110).

\textsuperscript{**Certainly the essence of alchemy, a half-art half-science which Jung describes as 'a process of psychic development that expresses itself in symbols' (Alchemical Studies, Collected Works Vol. XIII, 1968, p.27) is appropriate to Surrealism, which concentrates to some extent on the subconscious mind and the exegesis of its workings through poetic imagery and symbol.}
reference seems to hinge on the equation of the base metal with Man, and of the Philosopher's Stone with the poetic imagination. Michel Carrouges explains that 'La nouvelle alchimie qu'a inventée le surréalisme a pris pour matière première l'homme lui-même. La pierre philosophale n'existe pas encore dans le monde, mais elle existe déjà dans cet esprit qui fut capable de le concevoir et qui commence à l'entrevoir dans ces rêveries poétiques.' Hence Surrealists are, in a way, 'magicians, equipped with formulas for changing base lead into gold,' and 'surrealist poetry', like alchemy, allows 'man's imagination to change his entire condition'. Transformation of reality seems to be the common root of Surrealism and alchemy.

A further significance of the allusion to alchemy is that it expresses the Surrealist poets' wish to be 'mystics, of whom a special purity and a constant meditation are required.' That is, they wish to become a sort of priesthood, for whom alchemy will be a substitute religion (since conventional, organised religion is shunned); as well as satisfying their desire for self-dramatisation, alchemy thus represents a spiritual ideal uncontaminated by what the Surrealists see as the debased contemporary world.

Another constituent of Surrealism which is virtually elevated to the status of a spiritual ideal is the conception of some form of universal or collective unconscious. The unconscious, as well as being a favoured area of poetic exploration removed from the conventional everyday world, is revealed as a fund of timeless truths: Mr. Read writes in Surrealism that 'the more we learn
about the unconscious, the more collective it appears to be—in fact, "a body of common sentiments and thoughts ... universal truths".  

This is very useful; for it allows the rebellious individual to align himself with the mass of mankind on terms essentially other than those of organised society. It helps to combat the individual artist's sense of isolation by linking the individual emotive response with the collective emotive response. Hence Mr. Fowlie can describe as 'the supremely surrealistic moment' (in this case specifically concerning the poetry of Baudelaire, but equally applicable to English Surrealist poetry) the time when the poet goes 'so deeply into psychoanalytic exploration that he ... [passes] beyond the personal reminiscence into the universal.' The individual consciousness moves via a personal fantasy towards what Maud Bodkin describes as 'the Collective Unconscious--the life-energy that in its spontaneous movement toward expression generates ... the hero figures of myth and legend' (thus uniting not only the individual and the collective, but also the contemporary and the ancient or primal). Marie-Rose Carre puts the theory into an appropriate pseudo-religious terminology when she speaks of 'the revelation of a universal soul.'

As well as helping to satisfy a religious impulse, the theme of the collective unconscious satisfies a pseudo-political, egalitarian impulse: that is, it enables Surrealism to affirm 'l'égalité totale de tous les êtres humains devant le message subliminal'. This opens the way for demotic poetry, such as
that of the short-lived experiments with 'Mass Observation' in *New Verse* and elsewhere.*

Undoubtedly at this point Surrealist theory also borders on the realms of psychology. The Surrealist poet would almost certainly agree with Laura Riding and Robert Graves that 'poetry is not in a "poetical" period, it is in a psychological period.' The concept of a collective unconscious was originally formulated by a psychologist, Jung; and the Surrealist, by adopting the process described by Stephen Spender in *The Struggle of the Modern* 'of trying to base objective standards on the Jungian hypothesis of there being a shared subjectivity of the collective mind', clearly subscribes to this psychology.

The use of psychology and psychoanalytical reference, though, has other than a purely scientific or clinical significance. It is bound up, in fact, with the more primitive realms of myth and legend. Thus M. Bédouin can speak of psychological exploration in terms of the necessity of discovering 'que les vrais domaines interdits, la source du merveilleux et les terres de légende ne sont nulle part ailleurs qu’en lui-même [in Man himself].' **

*See especially *New Verse*, No. 24 (Feb-March 1937), 1-6, and No. 25 (May 1937), 16-19.
**Miss Riding's and Mr. Graves's contention seems borne out by the psychological terminology of much modern literary theory. Simon O. Lesser, for instance, speaks of fiction as 'a safety valve for humanity's over-repressed instincts' (*Fiction and the Unconscious*, 1960, p.254); and Mr. Read notes that 'An unconscious impulse creates the poem no less than the dream' ('Introduction', *Surrealism*, 1937, p.77).
Anna Balakian indicates something similar when she suggests that 'the folklore legend' may have 'given way to a more appropriate medium for the exploration of the strange, such as simulation of insanity or dreams'.\textsuperscript{59} In this light psychoanalysis virtually becomes, as Mr. Fraser has noted, 'itself a mythology,' whose machinery belongs 'to the world of poetic or religious symbols, not to the true scientific world'.\textsuperscript{60} He adds that 'Freudian theory, from this point of view, is a "myth" ... derived from the Freudian "ritual".'\textsuperscript{60}

It certainly appears that the Surrealist is concerned with psychology as ritual rather than as science. M. Bédouin points out that Surrealism 'n'est pas ... une psychologie, bien que les découvertes et les théories de Freud aient fortement contribué à le mettre sur sa propre voie';\textsuperscript{61} Mr. Hoffman explains, 'the surrealist accepts the findings and will try also to imitate the procedure of the analyst, but refuses to accept the rationale of psychoanalysis or its attachment to psychology as a science.'\textsuperscript{62}

This is important; because science, and especially scientific rationalism, is essentially antipathetic to a Surrealist point of view. Indeed, the Surrealists are among those modern poets whom Mr. Spender describes as being 'threatened by a change in consciousness from organic and concrete thinking [as in myth] to scientific and abstract thinking.'\textsuperscript{63} They are, to continue in Mr. Spender's words, 'cut ... off from a past when poets were intimately and ... immediately in touch with the sacramental, the personal, and the natural forces that were once the ritual of
living.' The result is a feeling that 'modern circumstances have set up a screen between nature and man so that the harmonious relationship realized in organic poetry in which the soul sees itself reflected in the physical environment, is prevented.' This destruction of 'the pre-logical awareness of ... the animistic relation to Nature' causes in the Surrealist 'a profound disillusionment with the quality of industrial civilization,' as a result of which there is a 'reversion to the instinctual life'.

Thus the Surrealist becomes advocate of what Mr. Lesser calls 'a return to primitive animistic thinking'. Primitive animism is reflected in the fact that 'A l'origine de la conception surréaliste du monde et de la vie, il y a une expérience primordiale'. The Surrealist's desire is to bring this expérience primordiale into contemporary existence. Jung describes most succinctly the essence of primitive animism in

*Primarily this is a pseudo-religious impulse, since animism is 'a minimum definition of religion', or even 'the dream-theory of religion' (The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed., 1929); but its significance goes beyond this, for it becomes 'a sort of primitive philosophy which controls not only religion but the whole life of the natural man' (Chambers's Encyclopaedia, 1950). It is closely akin to what Derek Stanford calls the 'pan-theistic sense' (The Freedom of Poetry, 1947, p. 202): he explains this as 'the faculty by which we feel a closeness to nature,' adding that 'This is not merely a case of recognizing the varied phenomena of animate life as belonging to the category of our existence, but of admitting and celebrating our inclusive unity with the inanimate as well' (ibid., p.203). This pantheism is inhibited in modern society by 'The feeling that man has lost a pristine instinct, a gift of communion with his surroundings' (ibid., p.208)--which instinct is still evident in the animal world. It is the desire of the poet of primitive animism to re-discover or re-vivify this 'pristine instinct' in modern Man.
modern literature when he explains, 'The unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious which is best fitted to compensate the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present. The artist seizes on this image, and in raising it from deepest unconsciousness he brings it into relation with conscious values, thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries'. Such a transformation seems to be behind a great deal of Surrealist poetry, in the poet's attempt to compensate the inadequacy of the excessively rational and utilitarian world by referring to an irrational (or, often, pre-logical) and primal, natural world.

These theories may be sound enough, as theories; but to be poetically effective they need to be put into practice in a poetic idiom. This inevitably involves language, which involves a problem, since this language is often rooted in the social practice against which the Surrealist is rebelling.

Ernst Cassirer points out that 'language does not belong exclusively to the realm of myth; it bears within itself ... another power, the power of logic.' Once again an imbalance has been created by the trend of our civilisation: for the mythic power of language has been suppressed, and the logical power promoted. As a result, 'words are reduced more and more to the status of mere conceptual signs.' Language thus becomes an abstract, rational stereotype; and, as M. Raymond realises, 'A stereotyped language in which all freedom is strictly limited imposes upon us the vision of
a stereotyped, hardened, fossilized world, as lifeless as the concepts that are intended to explain it. Consequently, for the Surrealist's purpose, 'words' (as Mr. Lesser points out in his study of Fiction and the Unconscious) become 'a clumsy and recalcitrant medium for making us see an involved sequence of events with hallucinatory vividness.'

The Surrealist, then, is faced with the necessity of an attempt 'to recover the meanings of words'. The attempt is not necessarily directed towards a 'meaning' in the abstract, scientific sense; it is aimed, rather, at the restoration of 'the primitive power of subjective feeling' in which, so Dr. Cassirer assures us, 'speech is rooted'. M. Bédouin claims that the Surrealist is concerned with 'la vie profonde du langage, au point qu'il permet de saisir comme à sa source le libre bouillonnement des associations d'idées qui sont au principe de toute communication humaine.' M. Breton confirms this when he writes that 'Le tout, pour le surréalisme, a été de se convaincre qu'on avait mis la main sur la "matière première" (au sens alchimique) du langage'. A phrase that M. Breton uses elsewhere--'L'alchimie du Verbe'--is particularly appropriate; for, as Mr. Browder notes, 'Primitive expression' is another path to magic and its unified concept of

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*M. Breton, in Point du Jour, asks the rhetorical question, 'La mediocrite de notre univers ne depend-elle pas essentiellement de notre pouvoir d'énonciation?' (Quoted by Caws, Surrealism and the Literary Imagination, 1966, p.54).

**This is presumably the 'matière première' to which M. Breton refers.
the universe';\textsuperscript{78} that is, the significance of language goes far beyond the purely semantic, and into the magical and even spiritual realms. Perhaps Eugene Jolas best sums up the Surrealist attitude to poetic expression when he writes that 'The poet who gives back to language its pre-logical functions, who re-creates it as an orphic sign, makes a spiritual revolt'.\textsuperscript{79}

A preoccupation with the \textit{revitalisation of the word} is at the centre of much Surrealist poetic method. In the attempt to create a suitable vehicle for its theories of rebellion, Surrealism often rebels against conventional methods of expression also.

Undoubtedly the most notorious of such rebellions is that embodied in 'psychic automatism'\textsuperscript{80} or \textit{automatic writing}. However, when the attendant sensationalism is removed, this automatism turns out to be little more than a re-working (possibly in more extreme terms) of the Romantic idea of 'negative capability'\textsuperscript{*} or the ancient concept of inspiration. As Hugh Sykes Davies says, 'It consists in most cases of personal and verbal variations of traditional conceptions of "imagination," "inspiration," "direct intuition," and so on'.\textsuperscript{81}

In the final analysis, the method is more interesting in terms of what it suggests (the liberation of the imagination, and 'an effort to move beyond the usual antinomies and contradictions

\textsuperscript{*}'Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in ... mysteries ... without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (John Keats, \textit{The Letters of John Keats} [ed. Maurice Buxton Forman], 1935, p.72).
which vitiate our thinking and our articulated thought,"\textsuperscript{82} than in terms of what it achieves in actual poetry (often gibberish). "Thus automatism," as Mr. Browder rightly emphasises, "is not an end in itself":\textsuperscript{83} it merely provides a certain amount of potential poetic material.

M. Raymond considers that the ultimate intention of automatism is 'an acceleration in the utterance of words; a feeling that the distance between thought and its expression ... is reduced, that the authenticity of words is increased'.\textsuperscript{84} This is clearly linked with the Surrealist's desire for the restoration of primal vitality to the word, the attempt to lay hold of the 'matière première' while it is still close to its source. It is linked also with the Surrealist's desire for freedom: freedom is now to include language and, through language, the poem itself, so that (following Riding's and Graves's suggestion for the modernist poet) 'instead of telling it [the poem] exactly what to do', the poet is 'encouraging it to do things, even queer things, by itself.'\textsuperscript{85}

The danger here is that liberty may result in anarchy--the 'danger of art resulting from altogether uncontrolled imagination, a surrender of the poet to his perhaps destructive and diabolic fantasies.'\textsuperscript{86} This indeed seems to have happened at times, especially in Surréalisme; such failures of critical integrity led M. Breton to say of 'accounts of dream' and 'automatic writing', 'their interest has been slight, or ... they rather give the effect of being "bravura pieces".'\textsuperscript{87} Mr. Browder is even more cutting in his criticism, pointing out that in pure automatism (assuming that such a thing is possible) 'Rather than some higher synthesis, one finds a bewildering mélange of words and images; instead of primal
unity, chaotic disorder.  

Clearly, some form is necessary within which to contain and order the psychic outpourings. If there is to be form, though, it must not be arbitrary, but organic; what is needed is 'not lack of government, but government from within.' Haskell M. Block sums up admirably when he writes, 'For the surrealist poet, art is a discipline, but a dynamic discipline in which the subject-matter and language of poetry are in a process of perpetual extension. Automatic writing is at best not an end but a means toward an enlargement of the range of poetic expression for the poet or "dreamer awakened."' 

Another celebrated Surrealist method is the creation of a convulsive beauty. To explain briefly, 'the most vital beauty of surrealism is a beauté convulsive, and that beauty includes the elements of tension, shock, lucidity and even cruelty.' Traditional concepts of what is 'beautiful' have very little bearing on this; they are either distorted or negated, for 'the task is always to escape from the traditional vision of things and to take up our residence in that region of the mind where they strike us as strange and incongruous.' Incongruity is to liberate a vital energy which replaces a more conventional aesthetic response to beauty: as Kathleen Raine (paraphrasing

*This idea is prefigured in the writings of Baudelaire, who claimed that 'The beautiful is what is bizarre' (Universal exhibition of 1855, in Aesthetic Curiosities) (quoted in Waldberg, Surrealism, 1966, p.25).
Mr. Read) notes, 'the idea of beauty has been ... replaced by the idea of energy.'

Ingredients of convulsive beauty (or methods of creating energy through incongruity) are humour (often black, satanic humour), grotesque, and the gothic. All are, theoretically, invested with a serious therapeutic purpose. For instance, not only is humour 'une satire corrosive du réel, mais il lui substitue un univers où tout est nouveau pour l'être qui s'y aventure.' Concentration on the satanic aspects of life is part of a 'nettoyage par l'ordure'. Even the gothic mode, playing on 'Cette atmosphère surrêelle des châteaux hantés', carries on the high seriousness of the Surrealist rebellion by extending 'La violence et le sang' characteristic of gothicism into the realm of 'la violence de la pensee'.

All these ingredients, in fact, attempt to precipitate the desired crisis in consciousness by distorting conventional reality in various ways. In the convulsive vision, 'The external object ... [has] broken with its customary surroundings, its component parts ... [are] somehow emancipated from the object in such a way as to set up entirely new relationships with other elements, escaping from the principle of reality while still drawing upon the real plane'. This is reflected in poetic technique in a number of ways.

One such technique is the production of a catalogue-poem, in which apparently random objects, phrases, and sentiments are listed like items in a shopping list; they are often linked only by a common introductory word: an example of this is a poem by Paul Éluard
in Contemporary Poetry and Prose, in which the word 'Between' is used on thirteen consecutive occasions to link twenty-six otherwise disparate items. 99

But the energy produced by this technique is usually slight, since the lists created have a pedestrian rhythm which gives the impression of a cool, detached choice of images. More effective is the technique of rapid juxtaposition, in which what appear to be 'superficially unconnected' ingredients 100 cohere in an alogical manner to produce a total effect (an effect often wholly lacking in catalogue-poetry). The poet here behaves, as Cecil Day Lewis notes, 'Just as a film director' who 'will use a series of superficially unconnected "shots" to express an emotional state or to carry the mind from one dramatic point to another'. 100 The technique is notably appropriate where what is being depicted is some form of transformation—'the notion of substitutions and coexistences, of one thing disappearing or turning into another', 101--as is the case (Elizabeth Sewell suggests) with the world of magic or of the dream.

A technique even more immediate in impact is the use of catachretic imagery. The effect produced hinges on juxtaposition within the individual image itself 'd'une manière brusque et saisissante,' thus creating in each constituent part of the image 'un vigueur qui lui manquait tant qu'il était pris isolément.' 102 M. Breton explains that 'La valeur de l'image dépend de la beauté de l'étincelle obtenue; elle est, par conséquent, fonction de la différence de potentiel entre les deux conducteurs': 103 that is,

*See also Roger Roughton's 'Animal Crackers in Your Croup', Poetry of the Thirties (ed. Robin Skelton), 1967, p.239.
the more disparate the two items in the image are, the greater will be the spark of energy between them, and the more striking, presumably, will be the effect achieved.

The setting up of 'entirely new relationships' between disparate objects in this way virtually constitutes a poetic renewal of environment: from the elements of the old habitual world the poet builds a new and shocking world of illogic. At the same time he is forced to renew his poetic idiom; for, as M. Breton explains in the 'first article' of his 'surrealist program', 'expression must be kept plastique if it is to communicate' effectively the surreality of the poet's vision: this renewal of expression is necessary if poetry is to be saved from becoming a stereotype of the 'lifeless' and 'fossilized world' against which it rebels.

Renewal is indeed an important concern for the Surrealist poet; as Mr. Read affirms in the 'Introduction' to Surrealism, art itself 'is an act of renewal' rather than being straight 'description or "reportage" ': that is, rather than simply mirroring the surface of the external world in journalistic phraseology, 'It renews vision, it renews language'.

This latter statement is significant in that renewal of vision and of language are mentioned side by side; certainly the Surrealists are at some pains to achieve an aesthetic revolution not only in poetic vision and subject-matter but in verse-structure and language too: the methods and techniques outlined above, in fact, are evidence of an attempt to carry the rebellion suggested in the Surrealist ideology into poetic idiom itself.

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In spite of, for instance, Ezra Pound's dismissal of Surrealism as 'The mere flight from and evasion of defined words and historic fact', the themes and methods examined in this chapter do not have evasion as their object. Indeed, the Surrealist would argue that his art is quite the opposite of escapist: M. Peyre firmly emphasises that Surrealism makes 'a resolute attempt to explore a virgin expanse in or under man's mind and to dig into the hidden layers in which the civilized creature cannot dissemble or lie' [my italics].

The high seriousness of Surrealism's aims is shown in the movement's efforts to evolve what one can only describe as a viable framework of communal spiritual response for our modern civilisation.* That such a framework is totally lacking is suggested by Mr. Spender, who speaks of the absence of 'ceremonies, symbols, sacraments, generally accepted by the community'.

The necessity of finding an acceptable 'ritual of living'.
is acknowledged widely throughout Surrealist theory; the Surrealist poet tries to meet the necessity by seeking what he describes as a 'myth': M. Bédouin speaks of the need for 'une mythologie vivante parce que librement et profondément vécue', and M. Breton advocates the creation of 'a "mythe collectif" suitable for our time' [my italics].

Ideally, the myth should make possible a spiritual rapport not only between separate individuals within the community, and between artist and audience, but also (on a larger scale) between Man and what is described as the 'point sublime' which is the living center of the world's unity. This 'point' is, in M. Breton's words, a 'mental vantage point ... from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, past and future, communicable and incommunicable, high and low, will no longer be perceived as

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*The word 'myth' here seems to be used in a rather specialised sense; as Genesius Jones points out, 'Myth in the hands of the artist is a different thing from myth in the hands of the primitive thinker' (Approach to the Purpose, 1964, p.59). Its function is no longer that of explaining external mystery, since 'this function now has been taken over by Science' (anon., 'Notes on the Poverty No. 6', Poetry and Poverty, No. 6 [no date], 3); nor does 'myth' refer simply to the use of old mythologies as poetic material—what Mr. Spender has called 'mere illustration for academic poems' (The Struggle of the Modern, p.97).

Rather, the term 'myth' here indicates a viable framework of beliefs which will take the individual 'beyond the limits of ... personal experience' (Spender, World within World, 1951, p.60) without compromising his spiritual integrity: the Surrealist’s insistence on the collective unconscious clearly represents a first step in this direction.

Further than this, the 'myth' is relevant on a smaller scale to the world of literature itself; that is, it will provide an accepted term of reference as common ground between writer and audience: it will provide a pre-agreed spiritual framework within which to treat poetic experience—what Mr. Jones calls 'a structural control in the dynamic of sensuous forms which is ... [the] artistic creation' (op.cit.,p.59).

Hence 'myth' in the sense used here is a contemporary system of beliefs which will preserve both spiritual and artistic faith from nihilism and anarchy.
contradictories'. The 'point sublime' is, in fact, that ideal point at which is achieved the integration of all these disparate phenomena in an ultimate harmony.*

The **point sublime** is to be approached in practice by the application of a **dialectical method** of synthesis achieved from the fusion of thesis and antithesis. Herbert Read in his introductory essay to *Surrealism* explains the workings of this method in the specific case of Surrealist poetry; he writes,

In dialectical terms we claim that there is a continual state of opposition and interaction between the world of objective fact ... and the world of subjective fantasy. This opposition creates a state of disquietude, a lack of spiritual equilibrium, which it is the business of the artist to resolve. He resolves the contradiction by creating a synthesis, a work of art which combines elements from both these worlds, eliminates others, but which for the moment gives us a qualitatively new experience ....

One can extend this example of the application of dialectical method so that all the oppositions inherent in existence (the theses and antitheses of 'life and death', 'past and future',

*It is important to stress that this vantage point is not, strictly speaking, transcendental; as M. Breton says, 'on the contrary it expresses ... a desire to deepen the foundations of the real, to bring about an ever clearer and at the same time ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses' (*What is Surrealism?*, 1936, p.49): thus the 'point sublime' is envisaged as a 'living center' rather than as an abstract hypothesis.
'high and low', and so on\textsuperscript{112} are subject to the artist's synthesising powers. When one does this, the 'point sublime' appears as the terminus of the progression of syntheses achieved in the work of art; it is the point of ultimate synthesis where thesis and antithesis finally ceased to be opposed: it becomes the goal of Surrealism's attempts at what Hegel had described as 'a recasting and remodelling of reality'.\textsuperscript{114}

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It will have become clear, I hope, that there is more purpose behind Surrealist art than is sometimes acknowledged. Christopher Caudwell points out that its 'phantastic world of poetic ritual' is not, as Mr. Pound suggested, an evasion of reality, but expresses 'a social truth, a truth about the instincts of man as they fare, not in biological or individual experience, but in associated experience.'\textsuperscript{115} As the 'Bureau of Surrealist Enquiries' maintains, the opinion that Surrealists are literary freaks or 'curiosities' can only be justified by 'a genuinely impoverished notion of ...[Surrealism's] intentions'.\textsuperscript{116} Even Mr. Read is prepared to warn readers, 'Do not judge this movement kindly. It is not just another amusing stunt.'\textsuperscript{117}

On close inspection, in fact, Surrealism turns out to be less freakish than superficially seems to be the case; this statement holds good even in the specific terms of literary history: that is, far from being an unprecedented aberration, the movement is only an extension of a long-established tradition. F.L. Lucas is prepared
to give it a place in his study of 'The Romantic Ideal'; he sees Surrealism as a movement which has 'carried the cult of the Unconscious to its limit', as no more than an outré example of a Romanticism which he describes as 'a dream-picture of life' or as 'an attempt to ... liberate the unconscious life'.

Indeed, M. Breton claims a Romantic ancestry in speaking of 'Romanticism--of which we are quite ready to appear historically today as the tail, though in that case an excessively prehensile tail'. Mr. Gascoyne restates the case with reference specifically to English Romanticism when he notes that 'there is a very strong surrealist element in English literature; one need quote only Shakespeare, Marlowe, Swift, Young, Coleridge, Blake, Beddoes, Lear and Carroll to prove this contention.' Mr. Davies even borrows M. Breton's phrase when he writes in Surrealism that 'In general method, in fact, we can claim to be a direct continuation of Coleridge's work--we are its prehensile tail.'

Certainly, Surrealism's technical methods arguably stem from traditional Romanticism. Psychic automatism, for instance, appears to be little more, in effect, than the Keatsian 'negative capability', or than a verbal variation of 'traditional conceptions of "imagination," "inspiration," "direct intuition"'. Catachretic imagery merely represents the latest stage of a definite literary-historical progression: as M. Raymond says, 'the surrealist

*Mr. Lucas does, admittedly, qualify the relationship of Surrealism to Romanticism by saying that 'it stands to it as ultra-violet to violet', and by suggesting as an alternative description of Surrealism the word 'Super-Romanticism' (The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal, 1963, p.132).
catachreses represent the terminal point of a perfectly clear line of development'.\textsuperscript{124} Even the cultivation of convulsive beauty is no more than a promotion of one aspect of Romanticism into a major concern; it only emphasises the presence of what Mr. Lucas calls 'those three attendant evil spirits of Romance, ... Sensationalism, Satanism, Sadism.'\textsuperscript{125} In fact, there is good reason to accept M. Peyre's claim that 'Surrealism must be regarded as a ... Romantic offensive'\textsuperscript{126} in poetry.

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Having covered a great deal of ground in a fairly short space of time, and having also cited most of the important authorities on Surrealism, we must now pause for a moment, to review the main points that have come out of this survey of Surrealist theory and commentary.

Freedom and liberty are clearly crucial concepts for the Surrealist poet; they give rise to a rebellion against convention (both social and literary) in which the right of the individual imagination is upheld to choose its own point of view: hence 'reality' ceases to be an accepted absolute term, and the way is opened for the weird linkages and transitions of catalogue poetry and catachretic imagery. Freedom from the contemporary social norm is often affirmed either by an insistence on the ancient rituals of a pre-logical, pre-scientific, and pre-industrial world in face of what is regarded as an over-rational civilisation, or by an admiration of uncontrollable, anti-social forces (such as
irrepressible instincts, or madness) which disrupt convention. The admiration of disruptive forces is epitomised in the Surrealist desire to achieve a 'crisis in consciousness', in which the typical member of the machine-age civilisation will be shocked from his unthinking acceptance of comfortable social and intellectual conformity into a new awareness of the many forces attacking him: the use in Surrealist art of the shock generated by 'convulsive beauty', black humour, grotesque, and the gothic helps to precipitate the crisis.

Again partly in rebellion against what he feels to be the accepted norm, the Surrealist emphasises the subconscious and unconscious worlds rather than the external material world. Through the individual psyche he hopes to penetrate to a 'collective unconscious' of archetypal symbol and timeless truth: this appears to be the essential object of the experiments with psychic automatism. The way towards the collective unconscious and its symbols lies also through dream, myth, legend, magic, alchemy, and even psychology and psychoanalysis as myth and ritual.

In reaction away from the 'debased' industrial world where these symbols and timeless truths have been obscured, the Surrealist opts for return to a more primitive civilisation in which Man was in intimate contact with these truths, and with the vital forces of natural life: the poet becomes advocate of primitive animism in an attempt to revitalise the stultified spiritual responses of the contemporary world. He tries to increase poetry's efficacy to this end by re-establishing incantatory vigour in language (seeking to achieve 'L'alchimie du Verbe' by reaffirming words' connotative,
ritual, and magic value as opposed to their denotative, logical, and scientific value) and by revitalising poetic imagery through the use of rapid juxtapositions, transformations, and catachreses.

The Surrealist, in fact, claims to be working towards a resolution of the chronic artistic and spiritual difficulties facing modern civilisation. He is seeking a workable framework of ideals (a 'myth' in the rather specialised sense of the word explained earlier) in which both society's prevailing attitudes and his own over-compensated point of view may be reconciled in ultimate unity; in the technical terms of dialectical materialism favoured by the Surrealists, the poet is working for a synthesis out of the thesis and antithesis of society's and his own variant attitudes to 'reality': his ideal is the 'point sublime' where all discrete phenomena and attitudes are to be joined in universal harmony beyond contradiction.

As regards literary history, Surrealism may be seen as the latest addition to Romanticism, exhibiting many Romantic traits, albeit often in an exaggerated form. A Romantic ancestry is detectable throughout. The subject-matter of Surrealism comes largely from what Wordsworth had described as 'the Mind of Man—/My haunt, and the main region of my song.'127 Surrealist method echoes earlier Romantic method, particularly in its insistence on (again Wordsworth's phrase) the 'fear and awe'127 occasioned by confrontation with psychic reality, or in its fascination with the untrammelled individual imagination (resulting in Surrealist 'psychic automatism' instead of Keats's 'negative capability' or Wordsworth's 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings',128). Finally, in its
spiritual aspiration towards a unified world of man with man and Man with Nature, in which art's function is that of continual renewal of wonder and energy, Surrealism exhibits the spirit that pervaded the Romanticism of the early-nineteenth century: the Surrealist movement would claim, on these grounds, to be the rightful heir of an established literary tradition.

Such is the movement in theory. But the efficacy of the theory's translation into actual poetry remains to be seen at a later stage of the thesis.

4. 1966, Vol. XIII.
8. 'André Breton: The Stone Age', *Yale French Studies*, No. 31 (no date), 61.

12 ibid., 372.


14 Quoted in ibid., p. 66.

15 ibid., p. 63.

16 Edward Bullough, quoted by Simon O. Lesser, Fiction and the Unconscious, 1960, p. 82.

17 Modern Man in Search of a Soul, 1941, p. 84.

18 La Poésie Surréaliste, p. 13.

19 Modern Man, p. 76.

20 The Significance of Surrealism', Yale French Studies, I (Fall-Winter 1948), 43.

21 p. 64.

22 Breton, What Is Surrealism?, p. 49.

23 ibid., p. 50.


25 Fowlie, Poetry, XCV, 372.

26 'From Surrealism to "The Apocalypse" ', ELH, XV (June 1948), 164.

27 op. cit., p. 8.

28 Marcel Raymond, From Baudelaire to Surrealism, 1950, p. 348.


30 Aragon and Breton, quoted by Waldberg, p. 62.

31 Quoted in ibid., p. 91.

32 The Modern Writer, p. 326.

33 Quoted by Mary Ann Caws, Surrealism and the Literary Imagination, 1966, p. 32.
34. What Is Surrealism?, p.25.
41. Bodkin, pp.85-86.
42. op.cit., p.9.
44. Antonin Artaud, quoted by Caws, p.39.
46. Quoted by Caws, p.39.
47. ibid., p.37.
48. Quoted in ibid., p.50.
49. ibid., p.39.
50. 1937, p.27.
51. Age of Surrealism, 1950, p.27.
52. ibid., p.26.
53. op.cit., p.20.
54. 'René Crevel: Surrealism and the Individual', Yale French Studies, No. 31 (no date), 80.
57. 1963, p.183.
58. *Vingt Ans de Surréalisme*, p.16.


62. *op.cit.*, 152.


64. *ibid.*, p.44.


66. *ibid.*, 53.


68. Bedouin, *Vingt Ans de Surréalisme*, p.16.


70. *op.cit.*, p.97.

71. *op.cit.*, p.293.


73. Breton, 'The Situation of Surrealism between the Two Wars', *Yale French Studies*, I (Fall-Winter 1948), 72.

74. *op.cit.*, p.35.

75. *La Poésie Surréaliste*, p.22.

76. Quoted in *ibid.*, p.22.

77. Quoted by Caws, p.54.

78. *op.cit.*, p.144.

79. 'Wanted: A New Symbolical Language', *Transition*, No. 21 (March 1932), 284.

'Sympathies with Surrealism', *New Verse*, No. 20 (April-May 1936), 16.


op.cit., p.64.

op.cit., p.262.

op.cit., p.125.

Spender, p.39.

*What Is Surrealism?*, p.77.

op.cit., p.79.

Riding and Graves, p.47.

op.cit., 182.

Caws, p.43.

Raymond, p.225.


Duplessis, p.23.

ibid., p.55.

ibid., p.29.

ibid., p.81.

Breton, quoted by Waldberg, p.83.

No. 1 (May 1936), 22.


Quoted by Caws, p.55.


Manifestes du Surréalisme, p.52.
Quoted by Caws, p.56.

p.90.

'The Coward Surrealists', Contemporary Poetry and Prose, No. 7 (November 1936), 136.

op.cit., 42.

op.cit., p.50.

Vingt Ans de Surréalisme, p.48.

Paraphrased by Caws, p.72.

ibid., p.46.


pp.40-41.


Quoted by Waldberg, p.54.


The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal, 1963, p.127.

ibid., p.35.

ibid., p.42.


A Short Survey of Surrealism, p.132.

'Surrealism at This Time and Place', Surrealism (ed. Read), p.139.

op.cit., p.287.

op.cit., p.130.

op.cit., 48.

PART TWO:

The Twentieth-Century Ancestry of English Surrealism
CHAPTER THREE: Poetry and War.

As we have barbaric chaos disguised as booming peace the sub-conscious preconditions for violence are more propitious than we realize.


Imagination will ... grow profounder, passions and terrors will come in stranger shapes.

--Rupert Brooke, The Prose of Rupert Brooke, 1956, p.82.

It is a current literary-critical commonplace that the poetry of the first part of the present century fell under rather bad influences inherited from the Victorian era. The latter, C.G. Jung describes as 'an age of repression, of a convulsive attempt to keep anaemic ideals artificially alive in a framework of bourgeois respectability by constant moralizings.'\(^1\) The result of this, in terms of poetry in the early-twentieth century, was, Professor C.K. Stead notes, 'a low-charged literary atmosphere in which second-rate men grotesquely assumed the mannerisms considered appropriate to the position of public bard.'\(^2\)

This seems to me to be, in general terms, a perfectly reasonable assessment of the state of poetry in the first years of the century. However there are certain exceptions to the general rule that make it possible to regard the period from the 1890s until roughly the middle of the First World War as the first stage of a move in the native tradition towards poetic modernism; that is, it is a period of a very slow move away from Victorianism, of a slow
breakdown in the established late-Victorian poetic convention as it became progressively outmoded.

In the era around the turn of the century, many poets realised for the first time that they were writing under changed conditions which rendered the hitherto accepted poetic mode unsuitable; as Vivian de Sola Pinto remarks, 'The pretence that humanity was steadily progressing towards the millennium' was becoming more and more obviously an illusion, and poets were being forced 'to recognize that they were living in a new dark age of barbarism and vulgarity.' In 1896 Charles Eliot Norton had written, 'It looks as if the world were entering upon a new stage of experience, unlike anything heretofore, in which there must be a new discipline of suffering to fit men for the new conditions.' Norton was to be vindicated by public events; for, Bernard Bergonzi suggests, 'Traditional England, prosperous, pacific, humane, optimistic,... was sadly undermined in the years that led up to the Great War: attacked by strikers and suffragettes, threatened by military revolt over Ireland, and on the intellectual plane riddled with self-doubt and preoccupied with violence'.

This changing environment put a strain on the prevailing poetic mode, and the Romantic vision of the late-Victorian poets and their descendants began to break up under new pressures. John H. Johnston summarises this effectively when he writes, 'Man and nature no longer seemed "essentially adapted to each other"; political, religious, and economic strife divided the "vast empire of human society"; and science was producing a "material revolution" that would test the
assimilative powers of poetry to a degree Wordsworth had not foreseen. 6

Consequently, poets were faced with the problem of adapting their poetry to suit these changing circumstances. Charles Hamilton Sorley in 1912 evidently realised that poetry was on the point of a major change when he wrote, 'We stand by the watershed of English poetry'. 7 The Egoist, first published on the eve of the Great War, was beginning to exhibit literary interests which one might reasonably describe as 'modern' rather than 'Victorian'.* Indeed, elements of the impending modernism existed before 1914 or 1912, in fact in the much-maligned late-nineteenth century itself, though these elements were at the time obscured rather than overt. Charles Madge (regarding literary history from a modernist viewpoint) describes the 'main streams' of 'Victorian literature' as 'subterranean', in that 'Under cover of Tennyson and Longfellow, a silent revolution took place'; it is a conclusion he reaches after citing from the nineteenth century a number of precursors of literary modernism—Whitman and Hopkins (presumably as regards a 'silent revolution' in techniques), Lear and Lewis Carroll (presumably as regards their choice of subject-matter and method), and Lautréamont and Rimbaud.**

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*For instance, the periodical printed critical discussions on the rival claims of reality and dream, and offered straight dream-narrations as literature; also, it exhibited an interest in modern French poetry—an interest culminating in the intermittent serialisation of one of the chief influences on Surrealisme, Lautréamont's The Songs of Maldoror (from 1 October 1914 to 1 January 1915).

**It is interesting to note that these two latter poets, cited by Mr. Madge as French exponents of the nineteenth-century 'subterranean' element, were both regarded by the Surrealistes as precursors of Surrealisme.
One of the first signs in England of this subterranean element coming to the surface, of the silent revolution being given a voice, was the formation of the 'Rhymers' Club' in the 1890s. The aim of this club was, according to Mr. de Sola Pinto, 'that of Mallarmé: *
to create a new poetic language by means of an intense cultivation of the inner life'. Even if, as was humorously suggested later, most of the poets involved could be 'described as tourists rather than explorers', nevertheless the 'Rhymers' Club', by adopting this aim, were taking a step towards a modernist conception of poetry.

One might say that a similar step was taken by the Georgian poets writing just before, and during, the First World War. It has become common to dismiss these poets as too trivial to deserve attention. Laura Riding and Robert Graves speak of 'a poetry that could rather be praised for what it was not than for what it was', adding that 'Georgianism became principally concerned with Nature and love and leisure and old age and childhood and animals and sleep and other uncontroversial subjects.' The uncontroversial subjects were, apparently, treated in an uncontroversial manner; for, so Mr. de Sola Pinto assures us, 'Poetry is conceived here as the product of a craftsman who should work on traditional lines': consequently 'Innovation is discouraged'.

Yet this was by no means the opinion suggested by at least one contributor to Georgian Poetry, D.H. Lawrence. He saw the anthology as the triumphant culmination of 'years of demolition', as a result of

* Mallarmé, like Lautreamont and Rimbaud, was a Symboliste poet widely accepted as an ancestor of Surréalisme.
which poets were 'waking up after a night of oppressive dreams'; he said, 'now our lungs are full of new air, and our eyes see it is morning'.

It is important, as Professor Stead has remarked, 'to see them [the Georgians] clearly historically.' One would be hard-pressed to justify the claim that their work represented a vital or staggering poetic innovation of any sort. Nevertheless, within their literary-historical context, the Georgians did make a certain move towards modernism. This remains true, even if it was only a small step that was taken when a huge leap was necessary.

However, apart from these intermittent indications of a poetic move away from Victorianism, one is left with a general impression during the first fifteen years of the century of a poetry in which 'every precedent seemed to encourage an attitude and an idiom that can best be designated "bardic"'. Poets, as Professor Stead says, had adopted the 'mannerisms' of 'public bard'; this was clearly an inheritance from the era of Tennyson and Browning, impressive literary figures pontificating to a wide public: it was an extension of a once-strong tradition into an era unsuited to such a tradition, an attenuation of poetic vitality by borrowing or imitating conventions from an outmoded past. Mr. Johnston notices something similar when he writes that 'the war ... brought to trial the fundamental premises of Western civilization' at 'a period of very low vitality' for poetry.

There is no doubt that, in spite of a few intimations of better things to come, the dominant poetic mode of 1914 was one aspect of 'the pitiful inadequacy of the debased tradition of English middle-class
culture to deal with the crisis in European civilization.¹⁷ The imaginative vehicle available, in fact, was not suited to the artistic task with which it was to be faced. 

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The 'huge leap' towards modernism in literature still remained to be made by the majority of native poets, then, at the beginning of the First World War.

Initially, war seemed to give the 'bardic' impulse fresh impetus. Often the poet dramatised himself as heroic spokesman for the patriotic masses, reflecting 'the chief feeling in 1914, ... of extreme and somewhat elevating excitement.'¹⁸ Poets' minds were filled with 'the sentimental fantasies of Henry Newbolt or William Watson or ... [with] the intoxicated vision of national grandeur which A.C. Benson set forth in the words of "Land of hope and glory".'¹⁹

At this time, in general the approach to subject-matter was either grandiose and heroic, or idealistic and pastoral by inclination. Thus Edward Thomas, an excellent minor poet of the pastoral mode, was accepted as a war poet though he did not change his method of approach with the onset of war; and Edmund Blunden in the war situation chose to describe himself as 'a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat.'²⁰ Rather hollow formalised poetic gestures of this kind were usually made even more artificial by the techniques employed to convey them—in the case of the heroic strain by a florid and heavily-adjectival rhetoric, and in the case of the pastoral strain by anachronisms of diction casually slid into the text: an example of the unfelicitous effect created by the latter is a line from one of Siegfried Sassoon's
early poems—'Long since ye garnered in your autumn sheaves'—a line in which is created not rustic charm, but pedestrian rhythm and a contrived tone.

Technique, in fact, (such as it was) obliterated rather than heightened effect, so that, for instance, machine guns became 'The popping maxims' leaden founts', and an enemy aircraft was 'A great transparent dragon-fly'. Poets committed a crime of which Blunden had accused his 'forefathers'—that of using 'the polished phrase' on every occasion, either 'To bury admirals or sell beaver hats'. that is, the popular poetic rhetoric was made to serve all events, high or low. Indiscriminate use of poeticisms was all the more grotesque in that the 'polish' was often too thickly applied; a notable example of this (from a pre-war poem, admittedly, but scarcely more ludicrous than later examples) is Isaac Rosenberg's description of stars 'In the dark heaven as golden pendulous birds,/Whose tremulous wings the wind translates to words': verbal economy is totally lacking.

Eventually, however, the bardic and pastoral approaches fell into disuse; even if, as Blunden emphasised, 'Trenches in the moonlight, in the lulling moonlight/Have had their loveliness', there was much more to the reality of war than such sentimentality in tranquility. Increasingly, poets were subjected to what Robert Nichols has called 'the pressure of necessity' generated by fighting for their lives often in eminently non-heroic, non-pastoral conditions; a direct result of this in poetry was that the crude and

*Admittedly, intermittent use of such imagery could have a felicitous ironic effect, contrasting the brutal power of mechanical weapons with the fragile beauty of natural phenomena. However, in most cases one is left with the impression of a wholly inappropriate poetic approach desperately pursued faute de mieux in unprecedented circumstances.
brutal realities of trench-warfare began to force through the pastoral façade. It is interesting to read Rosenberg's poem 'Spring 1916' in this respect. The poetic theme suggested in the first part of the title here seems to offer the poet the opportunity to indulge his pastoral inclination to the utmost. However, Rosenberg passes up the opportunity and concentrates instead on the description of Spring as a 'ruined Queen' who is 'So altered from her May mien'. 27 Mr. Johnston makes a very apposite comment when he notes how the 'season of renewal and growth has returned, but the unseen presence of war transforms spring into an empty mockery'. 28 War, in fact, is finally admitted as a horrible reality within the once-idealised mode.

Rosenberg was not, of course, the only poet to acknowledge the pernicious aspects of war in his work. Herbert Read was another poet who felt compelled to admit the full horror of trench-life into his verse; though his inclination led him to say, 'I'd rather write one "pastoral" than a book of this realism', nevertheless he appreciated that the war experience meant that instead he must 'be brutal and even ugly' 29 in his portrayal of reality. A similar necessity drove Wilfred Owen to subordinate 'his predilections for a beautiful world to his sense of realism in his poems of war', revealing an artistic 'self-discipline' previously not much in evidence. 30

The fact that many war poets were discarding the idealistic-pastoral approach after some period of actual fighting was only one aspect of a general deflation of ideals. Very few illusions now remained. However, very few positive spiritual qualities
remained either: as Mr. Bergonzi says, 'The collapse of the patriotic myth-patterns of 1914-15 left ... poets of that time disorientated'.

The fine sense of pity and sympathy evident in Owen's 'eternal reciprocity of tears', his desire to voice 'The Philosophy of Many Soldiers', and to be the self-appointed spokesman of 'men, that have no skill/To speak of their distress,' were exceptions. The rule was a cynical pessimism, such as Sorley's when he spoke of being 'purged of all false pity: ... more selfish than before.' The world described by poetry became a desolate one in which 'the blind fight the blind' and in which there was only 'emptiness and drink and power'.

Environmental circumstances undermined not only personal morality, but transcendental values as well. The myths of heroism and patriotism had already been shattered as pseudo-religions. Death (which had earlier been aggrandised and idealised as the epitome of worthy and selfless sacrifice) was now seen in a completely negative light; for Sorley in particular it was merely 'an empty pail, a slate rubbed clean'. Eventually religion itself was called into question; even here the poet was becoming 'myth-destroyer'. In Rosenberg's Moses collection, for instance, the once beneficent God became a bullying oppressor, wielding 'fragments of an old shrunk power': the transcendental being dragged himself down into the 'slugs and mire,' and turned into a 'miasma of a rotting God'. It was therefore impossible even to idealise the war into a religious crusade of right against wrong.

Faced with this loss of ideological backing of any sort, Owen wished to opt out of the conflict: 'Passivity at any price!'
he cried. His passive form of rejection of war was the counterpart of a more common form—the active rejection evident, notably, in the poetry of Sassoon and Rosenberg. As Mr. Welland observes, 'all were, in their own ways, engaged in what the title of Sassoon's 1918 volume of poems called for: Counter-Attack'; he adds, 'Poetry had progressed from rhetorical welcoming of war through passive resignation to an ardent rejection of it'. The result was a literature of angry protest conveyed through savage realism and bitter irony; in Sassoon's words these methods 'were deliberately devised to disturb complacency.'

As the bardic and heroic attitude had changed, so too had the pastoral approach, which was now incapable of containing either this new corrosive satiric anger or the unique war environment itself. Instead of 'natural' life we read of a routine dominated by machines, and of 'the psychological effect of the continual presence of the mechanical', until even 'the world is mechanic force'. This world seemed to be Man's (rather than God's) product—an artefact running out of control, expending 'Mind-wrought, mind-unimagined energies'. Such energy as there was seemed to be directed not towards progress and peaceful unity, but towards destruction and disintegration. So, for instance, in Read's short war poems (suitable vehicles for conveying fragments of experience thrown up by the chance of battle) there was an insistence on smashing, as in 'The Crucifix', in which the poet cries 'Emblem of agony/we have smashed you!' The destruction could be either physical (as in Read's 'Villages Demolis') or mental (as in 'Fear' and 'The Happy

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*One is reminded here of the aim behind the Surrealist 'crisis in consciousness', and behind its 'convulsive beauty'.

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Warrior'\textsuperscript{49}). The result of wholesale destruction was the sort of 'Chaos'\textsuperscript{50} described in Rosenberg's later war poetry—the product of a 'Maniac Earth'\textsuperscript{51} far removed from the idealised contemplative world of the Pastoral. In the new environment, Sorley realised, 'It is easy to be dead'; and it appeared that 'death ... [had] made all his for evermore.'\textsuperscript{52}

This inevitably had its effect on poetic technique. Faced with a subject-matter peculiarly resistant to the bardic and aesthetic approach, Sassoon noted how 'Love chucked his lute away and dropped his crown./Rhyme got sore heels and wanted to fall out.'\textsuperscript{53} The conventions that generally pertained before the Great War were inappropriate and had to be discarded; in order to exist, poetry was being forced to adapt its methods to suit an unprecedented environment.

A change did indeed take place in the work of many poets. Rhetoric was replaced by a more flexible colloquial idiom, as in Owen's 'The Chances'\textsuperscript{54} or Sassoon's 'In the Pink'.\textsuperscript{55} Poetry was thus brought closer to the 'real' world of lived experience not only in content but in technique also; it was purged of bardic floridity by the use of incisive dialect or slang words such as 'Scuppered'.\textsuperscript{56} The formalism of rhyme tended to break down, and Owen even created his own variation—pararhyme. As Mr. Welland says, this half-rhyme 'reflected better than rhyme the disintegration of values in the world around them, ... and at the same time it coincided with the hesitant sense of frustration that his poetry had to communicate.'\textsuperscript{57} It represented a step towards organic form. In 'Strange Meeting',\textsuperscript{58} the technique is especially effective; the poet achieves a formal
control without giving the impression of imposing a rigid and
arbitrary system: by using the odd chiming of 'groined' and 'groaned',
'moan' and 'mourn', and 'friend' and 'frowned', Owen gives an
impression of disjunction without losing control over the flow of
the verse.

Formal changes were accompanied, as I suggested earlier, by a
change of emphasis in poetic content: in keeping with the desire to
bring poetry closer to trench experience was an insistence on
horror (rather than the circumvention of it, as in the bardic
period). J.M. Synge's prediction that 'before verse can be human
again it must learn to be brutal',\textsuperscript{59} was vindicated. What Mr. Bowra
describes as 'The old Italianate ease' had been replaced by 'something
harsher and more irregular',\textsuperscript{60} and poetry was now called on to convey
'a compulsive focus on the obscene details of crude animal needs and
reactions'.\textsuperscript{61} Such a focus is evident in Sassoon's 'Counter-Attack',
in which 'naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair,/Bulged, clotted heads
slept in the plastering slime';\textsuperscript{62} it is also present in Rosenberg's
'Dead Man's Dump', where 'The wheels lurch'd over sprawled dead'
whose 'bones crunched'.\textsuperscript{63}

At its most extreme, indulgence of horrible realism became
almost gothic in intensity. Poetry became filled with descriptions
of 'the storm/The darkness and the thunder',\textsuperscript{64} giving rise to vivid,
grotesque thoughts such as Sassoon's when he wrote, 'If I were there
we'd snowball Death with skulls'.\textsuperscript{65} Owen's vision in 'The Show'
seems to be a gothic surreal vision in which the disembodied poet
'looked down from a vague height with Death,' and saw 'thin
caterpillars, slowly uncoiled', whose 'bitten backs curve, loop,
and straighten'. In fact a reality made up of the grotesque scenes of war—'Hideous landscapes, vile noises, foul language, ... everything unnatural, broken, blasted; the distortion of the dead'—made the gothic an obvious (almost a naturalistic) mode for the poet.

Mr. Bowra speaks of war poets' fascination with 'unusual movements and sudden surprises in an isolated and fantastic world', presumably referring to poems such as Owen's 'Exposure', in which 'Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence' and yet 'nothing happens.' Certainly, estrangement from peace-time routine, long periods of doing nothing, and then the sudden frenetic and apparently meaningless activity of attack and retreat, caused the poet's situation to border on the unreal. This was all the more the case in that madness became an inherent part of one's physical surroundings. Thus an alien vision was created, in which the general divorce from peace-time reality (the general insanity, one might almost say) was typified in individual madness of the sort described in 'Mental Cases'. Neurasthenia conspired to make hysteria a common occurrence rather than an isolated phenomenon. As D.H. Lawrence put it, in the 'utter abnormality' of 'war', 'the uneasy individual can look into the abysmal insanity of the normal masses.'

Consequently the savage realism which had replaced the idealistic approach often reflected 'a reality which passes beyond the barrier of the imaginable to the unimaginable'. The way was paved for surreal vision.

The First World War precipitated the destruction of many pre-war
attitudes which were slowly becoming outmoded before the conflict began. War also seems to have promoted and brought closer to the surface certain 'revolutionary' literary tendencies that had hitherto been 'subterranean'. Some once-valid ideals were undermined, both in spiritual and in literary terms: one might reasonably say that the war gave rise to a period of intellectual iconoclasm.

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The danger of iconoclasm is that Man may be left wholly without beliefs, and this is not far from what happened. The pessimism (and almost nihilism) voiced by many poets during the later war-years was carried over into the first years of peace. Indeed, if anything, pessimism was increased by disappointment at the fact that the habitual framework of everyday life which had been dislocated by war was not immediately restored or replaced by something better; unrest continued: Robert Graves, writing of the immediately post-war situation, mentions 'unemployment all over the country ... ex-service men refused reinstatement in the jobs they had left ... market-rigging, lockouts, and abortive strikes.'

When the pattern of normal existence was eventually restored, it became evident that the huge sacrifices necessitated by war had been largely in vain. John Wain writes that 'it had seemed that the rigid crust of conventional life was cracking from top to bottom ....And behold! everything had somehow drifted back into something like the old shape;' he goes on to describe this aspect of the twentieth century as 'one long tragic swindle.' The hope of better conditions at home, which had kept many intellectuals
fighting long after their nationalistic fervour had disappeared, was not fulfilled: as Read points out, 'The world was not renewed.'

Such changes as war did bring about were by no means wholly beneficial. Although a state of affairs had temporarily been removed in which blind, optimistic, and illusory idealism was acceptable, the alternative—a state of mind in which, Graves suggests, there was 'Nowhere immanence or end', was equally intolerable. Dr. Jung, in the significantly-titled work Modern Man in Search of a Soul, suggests that 'The modern man has lost all the metaphysical certainties of his mediaeval brother' (a generalisation vindicated by the state of affairs in England after the First World War), and that modern civilisation has set up substitute-ideals to make good the loss—'the ideals of material security, general welfare'; but even these latter were undermined by the Great War and its economic aftermath.

What seemed to be totally lacking was a central core, or basic framework, of shared belief of any sort, around which ideals might be moulded. I take this to be the state of affairs to which Mr. Bergonzi alludes when he mentions the creation (as a result of the war) of 'a demythologized world.' The situation was made worse in that the post-war world did not provide an environment in which the deficiency could be dealt with: for the English civilisation of the first decade after the cessation of hostilities seemed to concern itself largely with escaping the crucial spiritual issues, and indulging instead what Muriel Bradbrook has called 'The juvenile naughtiness of the neurotic twenties'. Read, in poems with titles such as 'Penumbra' and 'Lepidoptera', characterised and criticised
the unenlightened and trivial society produced in the twenties as a 'teashop' where 'they seem so violent', but where the only energy expended is wasted in getting 'corybantic for a while.'

Clearly, new principles, ideals, and even transcendentalists were required, to give to life (and to poetry) more than a superficial justification, and to replace the old ideologies that had foundered in the mud of Ypres.

Such new ideals as were posited after the war seemed to spring directly from a reaction to wartime conditions. One new ideal is of particular significance in the light of the present research: C.E.M. Joad, turning Sassoon's Counter-Attack into a Counter Attack from the East, wrote that 'European nations ought to take a leaf out of the book of the East and, instead of perpetually acting, learn to sit back and feel.' In similar vein Major-General Fuller lauded the 'Yogi's maxim', which is to 'Stop thinking and get beyond or behind consciousness and you will discover the meaning of Reality in super-consciousness.' The swing towards the East and towards contemplation suggested here constituted an intellectual rebellion away from the conventions of the Western civilisation that had crippled itself on the battlefields of Europe.

In poetry the rebellion in favour of what Fuller called the

*It is significant that this maxim, suggesting an intellectual rebellion virtually identical to that of Surrealism, should enjoy a certain amount of popularity in the post-war world.
'Yogi's maxim' was increasingly felt after the First World War.* Further than this, since war had employed the mechanical and scientific power of a hyper-civilised world for mere destruction, in reaction poets were often drawn for their creative purposes to a primitive and natural world.** This often involved the adulation of a primal landscape--'a wild land, country of my choice,' which was 'The first land that rose from Chaos and the Flood'.\(^3\) By concentrating on this wild natural scene (and reacting away from a tamed, civilised land of nature 'pledged/To the set shape of things', where there are no longer 'harpies', 'rocs', or 'grythons',\(^4\)) the poet (in this case Graves) hoped to revivify the primitive mystic power of 'Old gods almost dead, malign,/Starved of their ancient dues', and, by their invocation, to purge 'an unclean muse'.\(^5\)

Reaction away from a mechanisation that tended to turn men into machines, and that destroyed individual endeavour,*** created on the

*One might well argue, for instance, that Mr. Graves's *Poetic Unreason* (1925) suggested this 'Yogi's maxim' by its arguments in favour of a poetic reality whose symbolism is 'intimately bound up with a vast number of logical false premises, a defiance of the ordered spatio-temporal structure which the [Western] civilized intellect has built for its habitation' (p. 118).

**Mr. Read suggests this return to basic realities (one might say to agricultural, rather than industrial, civilisation) when he notes, 'A man cultivating the earth—that is the elementary ... fact; and as a poet I am only concerned with elementary facts' (*Poetry and Anarchism*, 1947, p. 9).

***Mr. Nichols notes that 'the "machinery of war" converts the man into a machine' (*Anthology of War Poetry*, 1943, p. 79); Mr. Johnston claims that 'the scientific efficiency of long-distance weapons destroyed the very elements of human individuality' (*English Poetry of the First World War*, 1964, p. 10). Wartime activity did not, of course, itself start the process of turning Man into a machine, nor of destroying his individuality; but it did magnify the ills of mechanisation (which had been less obvious earlier in the century), bringing them more firmly to the poet's attention.
ethical plane a rebellion against the machinery of the State: anti-
Establishmentarianism became a viable poetic principle. Indeed,
Sassoon had already adopted it in his later war poetry—as in
'Fight to a Finish', in which he imagined himself going with his
troops to 'clear those Junkers out of Parliament.' After the war
his anger was partially diverted into the deflation of Establishment
institutions—the universities (as in 'Founder's Feast' and 'Early
Chronology'), national monuments (as in 'In the National Gallery'
and 'The London Museum'), and the Church (as in 'Evensong in
Westminster Abbey'). The positive aspect of this anti-Establishment
satire was the affirmation of what Mr. Read called 'a new individualism.'
The poet, instead of aligning himself with the opinions of the State
(which he blamed for prolonging the war), refused any longer to
succumb to the pressures of conformity: Professor Stead describes
this 'new individualism' as 'the protest of individual men against
the demands put upon them by public sentiment.'

These fresh poetic concerns perhaps had one thing in common: they
were evidence of an attempt at finding some standards of honest
conduct and response (outside the hollow standards imposed by
accepted social convention) through which to give more than a personal
significance to experience and poetic statement.

An earlier poet, whose work became readily available for the first
time in 1918—Gerard Manley Hopkins—had been one of the first 'modern'
poets to appreciate the necessity of creating such standards. As
Mr. de Sola Pinto points out, Hopkins had tried to overcome the
'Crisis in English Poetry' by evolving 'a religion or philosophy
which would be a true modern myth and give the poet a new "unity of life", an integration of spiritual and sensuous experience; and, in order to give adequate poetic expression to the new myth, Hopkins set about 'the adoption of sweeping reforms in technique which would give fresh vitality to the language and metre of English poetry.'

This twofold concern of Hopkins's--creation of 'myth', and of poetic techniques for its exegesis--was to be essentially that also of his post-war heirs.

Most poets realised that without some form of transcendental (or at least pseudo-religious) philosophy, the immediate but only two-dimensional realism of the later war years and after was ultimately as constricting and barren as the poetic convention it had superseded: the poet was too closely involved with the suffering depicted to be able to transform it 'into a universal image.' Consequently, Mr. Read notes, there was a need for 'a synthesis--some higher reality in which the freedom of the mind and the necessity of experience became reconciled.' The retrospective poem, The End of a War, was his most positive attempt at achieving this 'higher reality': he used the specific war incident as 'a focus for feelings and sentiments otherwise diffuse', and aspired 'to present the universal aspects of a particular event.'

An even more impressive attempt at this was David Jones's In Parenthesis. The latter poem works, as Mr. Johnston has pointed out, by the poet's stressing 'the contemporaneity of past and present, his juxtaposition of narrative, lyrical, and dramatic elements, his reliance upon a loosely associative rather than a logical continuity, his projection of a complex sensibility as a medium of development.'
The poem, in fact, as Mr. Bergonzi appreciates, was 'an attempt to place the experience of war in a fresh mythic perspective.'

There remained the problem of 'sweeping reforms in technique'. After the war, there was a considerable increase in the discussion of technical literary matters* (culminating, in its less positive aspects, in 'A war of quite astonishing triviality ... between the ... principal literary camps':100). The destruction of long-established methods left a gap that needed to be filled. Quite the most interesting method suggested at this stage was that outlined in Mr. Graves's book, Poetic Unreason; by this method of 'Unreason' the poet sought to achieve, through 'Broken Images', 'a new understanding of ... [his] confusion'.101 This was a poetic based on 'associative thinking ... or ... homophonic association',102 which aimed at 'developing new sequences of conflict and solution',103 and whose 'symbolism' was 'intimately bound up with a vast number of logical false premises'.104 Francis Scarfe notices 'how easy it is to link up the "poetic unreason" of the Graves school with Surrealism';105 and certainly, there seems to be at least some parallelism of intention between the two here.

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As regards the subject of the present thesis, the significance of the Great War and the post-war decade to native English literature

*Significant items taken at random from A Bibliography of English Language and Literature are, for 1925, Art and the Unconscious (John M. Thorburn) and 'The Creative Spirit and Art' (Mary Austin); and, for 1927, Poetry and Myth (Frederick Clarke Prescott), 'Realism and the Romantic Spirit' (Houghton W. Taylor), and 'Literary Criticism and the Study of the Unconscious' (Maude [sic] Bodkin).
is not in terms of individual accomplishment; nor is it expressly in
terms of a poetic inheritance for future generations, since most of
the poets are 'seldom mentioned' (according to Mr. Johnston in
English Poetry of the First World War) 'as an influence on postwar
verse', possibly because 'the negative aspect' of their work was
such that 'it provided no inspiration' for later poets. It would
be mis-stating the case to suggest that the First World War was in
itself a period of innovation; for, as Mr. Welland observes, 'although
... new conceptions of poetry coincide chronologically with the Great
War they were not necessarily nor in all cases directly occasioned
by it: that several of them originated before the War is a salutary
warning against too facile a dovetailing of literary and social
history.'

It seems to me that the significance of this war is in creating
an environment of disorder and potential change so valuable as
poetic stimulus and material for the experimental writer. The First
World War was a great catalyst for modernism in poetry. Before 1914,
'A man like Pound could make little or no impression on ... [the] closed, self-satisfied community resting ... on the crest of years of peace'. As Derek Stanford comments, 'What the War did was to render' the poetic principles formulated by 'D.H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot' 'more meaningful to the public mind; and this it accomplished by unsettling and shaking so many traditional ways of feeling.' One might say that the war helped to precipitate a crisis in consciousness, as a result of which, 'English poetry of the more traditional and indigenous kind itself underwent a remarkable change, and one which ran parallel to those now more conspicuous.
changes initiated by Pound and Eliot.\footnote*{110}

More specifically relevant to the main subject of the present thesis, World War I virtually paved the way for the growth of Surrealism in the English tradition. It helped to destroy conservative modes inherited from the previous century and put a fresh emphasis on experimental technique, organic form, and on individual response. It underlined the necessity of a 'mythic' method of approach to material, and gave rise to several themes to be adopted by Surrealism—such as irrationality, madness, violence, primitivism, and the anti-mechanistic impulse. It turned reality itself into gothicism and illogic, and inspired aspiration to what Graves (in a poem arising from Lewis Carroll's Alice through the Looking Glass) called 'the rooms beyond' the outward shows of everyday reality,\footnote{111} which are attainable only through the exercise of a 'Poetic Unreason'. These must surely be the reasons behind Haskell M. Block's comment on Surrealism, that 'The crucial event in the history of this phase of modern poetry is not the publication of the Manifeste du Surréalisme in 1924, but the cataclysm of 1914–1918.'\footnote{112}

*The changes instituted by Pound and Eliot (as well as by Yeats) will be examined in the remaining chapters of this part of the work.
1. The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature (Collected Works Vol.XV), 1966, p.34.


8. 'What Is All This Juice?', New Verse, No. 14 (April 1935), 18.

9. op.cit., p.22.

10. ibid., p.27.


12. op.cit., p.150.


14. op.cit., p.81.


16. op.cit., p.3.

17. Pinto, p.159.


20. Undertones of War, 1928, p.266.


23. 'The Prophet', ibid., p.158.


25. 'Illusions', Poems, p.49.
26 op.cit., p. 83.
27 op.cit., p.46.
28 op.cit., p.224.
30 Welland, p.51.
31 op.cit., p.66.
32 'Insensibility', The Poems of Wilfred Owen (ed. Edmund Blunden),
1963, p.65.
33 'À Terre', ibid., p.87.
34 'And I Must Go', ibid., p.100.
35 In a letter of 26 August 1915, op.cit., p.121.
36 'To Germany', ibid., p.73.
37 'A Hundred Thousand Million Mites We Go', ibid., p.74.
38 'Two Sonnets', ibid., p.77.
39 Johnston, p.77.
40 'God', op.cit., p.63.
41 op.cit., p.25.
42 op.cit., p.29.
44 Nichols, p.76.
47 Collected Poems, p.34.
48 ibid., p.34.
49 ibid., p.35.
50 'Lusitania', op.cit., p.71.
51 'Dead Man's Dump', ibid., p.82.
'When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead', *op.cit.*, p.78.

'Conscripts', *Collected Poems*, p.31.

*op.cit.*, p.68.

*Collected Poems*, p.18.

Owen, p.68.

*op.cit.*, p.119.

Owen, pp. 116-17.

Quoted by Bowra, p.32.

*ibid.*, p.32.

Johnston, p.13.

*Collected Poems*, p.68.

*op.cit.*, p.81.

'Sorley, 'To Germany', *op.cit.*, p.73.

'The Investiture', *Collected Poems*, p.81.

*op.cit.*, p.59.

Owen, quoted in Blunden's 'Memoir', *ibid.*, pp.19-20.

*op.cit.*, p.16.

*op.cit.*, p.53.


*Goodbye to All That*, 1967, p.236.

Quoted by Spender, p.261.

'To a Conscript of 1940', *Collected Poems*, p.152.


1941, p.235.

*op.cit.*, p.198.

Collected Poems, p.94.

ibid., p.95.


'An English Wood', ibid., p.25.

'Outlaws', ibid., p.10.

Collected Poems, p.77.

ibid., p.160.

ibid., p.162.

ibid., p.149.

ibid., pp.149-50.

ibid., pp.153-4.

Contrary Experience, p.73.

op.cit., p.90.

op.cit., p.91.

Stead, p.41.


The End of a War, 1933, p.31.

op.cit., p.323.

op.cit., p.200.

Stead, p.111.

Graves, 'In Broken Images', Collected Poems, p.90.

Graves, Poetic Unreason, p.117.

ibid., p.81.

ibid., p.118.

Auden and after, 1942, p.152.
106. p.106.
108. Stead, p.51.
109. Movements in English Poetry, no date, p.l.
111. 'Alice', Collected Poems, p.44.
112. 'Surrealism and Modern Poetry', The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XVIII (December 1959), 177.
CHAPTER FOUR: The Outsiders--I. Introduction

Surrealism, then, (or rather the possibility of the widespread growth of Surrealism in the English tradition) was greatly promoted by the First World War and the post-war environment. But the movement was prefigured in an even more important manner by the work of poets I have here described as 'outsiders'. That is, many of Surrealism's themes, attitudes, and even techniques were suggested in the work of certain poets who stand apart from the native tradition of the years preceding the Great War.

In the last chapter I mentioned one such figure--Hopkins. He was an 'outsider' in that he was cut off from the mainstream of late-Victorian poetic convention by his desire to re-marry form and subject-matter into a new and cohesive whole. He strove for an organic rhythm, mimetic of the increased pressures exerted on the poet by the continued acceleration of a civilisation that constantly threatened to swallow up the 'poetic' world. He wished to come to terms with the 'graceless growth' which had 'confounded/Rural rural keeping--folk, flocks, and flowers.'¹ So he adapted the traditional form of the sonnet, stretching it to accommodate more urgent rhythms. Arguably, he represents the starting point of a modernist avant-garde.

Hopkins's work is an indication of what Charles Madge calls the 'subterranean'² stream of Victorian literature that was to exert an important influence on twentieth-century poetry. This subterranean element was to come to the surface, and to be developed, in the poetry of the three greatest 'outsiders'--Yeats (unmistakably a Celtic poet), Pound, and Eliot (both American by birth, if not by inclination). The following three chapters form an examination of
their poetry, not in general terms, but specifically in order to show aspects of it which contribute to the development of the themes and techniques to be taken up by Surrealism (as outlined in Chapter Two above). I have limited myself as far as possible to the works of these poets written before the appearance of Surrealism in England (in the early thirties), going beyond this chronologically only in so far as it is necessary in order to elucidate more fully elements present in their poetry prior to the thirties.


2 'What Is All This Juice?', New Verse, No. 14 (April 1935), 18.
CHAPTER FIVE: The Outsiders--II. W.B. Yeats.

Yeats described himself as one of 'the last romantics' at a time 'when romanticism was in its final extravagance'. In his earliest poetry this certainly seems to be the case. His work reflects some of the least fortunate aspects of late-Victorian Romanticism. The desire for 'Traditional sanctity and loveliness' at all costs, even if necessitating a wilful disregard of the contemporary world, permeates the poetry. The page swarms with 'The kings of the old time' and their 'deeds', even though the poet is prepared to acknowledge that these kings are irrevocably 'dead', and their deeds inevitably 'dusty'. Along with this cultivation of 'old Eire and the ancient ways' goes a series of outmoded poetic gestures such as that embodied in the poem-title, 'He Mourns for the Change That Has Come upon Him and His Beloved, and Longs for the End of the World'. In the poem of that title another of Yeats's weaknesses in the early period is illustrated. The attempt to create an aura of rustic magic leads to a grotesque labouring of symbolism such as the 'white deer with no horns' and the 'hound with one red ear'. The material here is not completely assimilated by the poet's imagination: it lacks the economy generated by artistic necessity.

However, by the time of his collection, Responsibilities (1914), Yeats had realised that 'Romantic Ireland's dead and gone'. The realisation is reflected in the poet's change of poetic approach. He writes, 'I cast off traditional metaphors and loosened my rhythm'. Having made for his earliest poetry 'a coat' which was 'Covered with embroideries/Out of old mythologies', Yeats now decides
that 'there's more enterprise/In walking naked.' He seeks 'an impression as of cold light' and a sober and critical tone more fitting than his earlier floridity to an examination of the contemporary world, of modern Ireland. Though this change of attitude by no means indicates the total exclusion from his poetry henceforth of his earlier Romantic preoccupations, it signals the beginning of his 'modernism'; after this point, any reference to past ages, either through symbol or myth, usually has some definable relevance to the society in which the poet is writing. Ezra Pound is one of the first to appreciate the change. In a typically colourful review he says, 'There is a new robustness; there is the tooth of satire which is in Mr Yeats' case, too good a tooth to keep hidden.' He adds, 'Mr Yeats is an exultant slaughtermaster when he will but turn from ladies with excessive chevelure appearing in pearl-pale nuances.'

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By turning to the non-ideal world of contemporary experience Yeats sets himself a more difficult task than hitherto; he is now faced (as were the war poets) with fragments rather than a romanticisable whole. He writes that 'A conviction that the world was now but a bundle of fragments possessed me without ceasing.' This is revealed in poems such as 'The Second Coming', in which he states, 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world'. The premise of an ordered civilisation of 'Things' around a firm 'centre' becomes untenable; and there is
instead a retrenchment to the sure ground of poetic individualism. In keeping with this is Yeats's statement that 'there is no truth/ Saving in thine own heart'\textsuperscript{12}--an axiom formulated early in his career, but one to which he adhered throughout. Later, however, he expands the statement to transcend a merely personal vision. He comes to the conclusion 'that revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes ... the child in the womb'; he comes to realise also 'that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind.'\textsuperscript{13} As Professor Stead has noted, 'Yeats ... came to believe ... that great poetry defines states of mind more permanent and universal than those conscious thoughts and feelings which are the expression of a single "personality" in its passage among the accidental and the transient';\textsuperscript{14} this is so, even though that 'personality' is the medium of revelation. Such a belief allows the poet, in a world of flux, to remain on the firm ground of his personal integrity, at the same time escaping the limited, temporal, and often trivial, purely-personal response. Yeats appeals, in fact, to 'a memory of Nature' which reveals through the individual 'events and symbols of distant centuries';\textsuperscript{15} this is what he has elsewhere called 'the Anima Mundi'.\textsuperscript{16} It permits him to give depth to his vision of the modern world through reference to antiquity, without, however, side-stepping the contemporary world altogether; perhaps this is what Professor Henn means when he says that 'the personal experiences of the past' (which made up much of his early poetry) are 'being adjusted to the new integration',\textsuperscript{17} (which is the goal of his later, more social, poetry).

The matrix of this 'new integration' is to be, not wisdom
(since 'Those men that in their writings are most wise/Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts'\textsuperscript{18}), but instead the imagination in its various forms; for 'In dreams begins responsibility.'\textsuperscript{19} D. Hoffman makes a very apposite comment when he speaks of Yeats's 'broad effort to recapture the primacy of the ... imaginative powers latent in our lives.'\textsuperscript{20} The methods employed by the poet to activate these latent powers are those of magic and ritual.

Magic is an integral part of Yeats's poetic vision. In his Autobiographies he speaks, in the same breath, of being 'a magician or a poet',\textsuperscript{21} as if the two were virtually synonymous. Certainly, working through his poetry are three beliefs which have, according to Yeats himself, 'been the foundations of nearly all magical practices.'\textsuperscript{22} These beliefs are:-

(1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.\textsuperscript{22}

Thus, by using the symbols referred to here, the poet may be able to evoke magically the Anima Mundi through his poetry; and poetry itself consequently becomes a form of spiritual or mystic ritual. The poet becomes bardic-priest, and almost theologian in his own right.
Any religious element there may be, though, is not purely orthodox, since Church orthodoxy is one of the 'Things' in modern civilisation which 'fall apart', and its dogma is in any event by no means as ancient as the mysteries to which Yeats is referring; conventional 'holy men and women' (who lie in splendid but bloodless 'tombs of gold and lapis lazuli') seem to have much less glamour and poetic lure for Yeats than the primal, supernatural powers of folklore, such as 'the vampires full of blood' whose 'shrouds are bloody' and whose 'lips are wet.'

So Yeats decides 'to fabricate an individual religion', outside orthodoxy, to satisfy his spiritual needs. T.S. Eliot, with reference to Yeats, in the significantly-titled lecture After Strange Gods, speaks of 'the doctrine ... that Poetry can replace Religion'. This is not without relevance here, for Yeats himself admits that 'deprived ... of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible Church of poetic tradition'. One feels, however, that in Yeats's poetry of Responsibilities and after, poetry is a vehicle for mystery rather than being the mystery itself. The new religion manifested through poetry is, as Mr. Hone explains, 'a mystical philosophy which would combine the doctrines of Christianity with the faiths of a more ancient world'--that is, a spiritual synthesis between modern

*In keeping with his interest in the occult and the arcane in preference to a spiritual orthodoxy is Yeats's prediction of the imminent arrival of 'the Savage God' in poetry (Autobiographies, 1961, p.349). This latter seems to be closely related to the primitive animistic power that the Surrealists later sought to evoke through their poetry.
civilisation and the primitive community in which 'manhood led the dance'.'²⁷

To some extent, the impulse towards a personal and individual religion implies a dissatisfaction with conventional Western spiritual customs and ethics. The dissatisfaction becomes more explicit in the essay 'Gitanjali'; Yeats writes, 'we fight and make money and fill our heads with politics—all dull things in the doing—while Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilisation itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity.'²⁸ The contemplative existence suggested here holds a strong appeal for Yeats; indeed, in the poem 'All Souls' Night', he sees 'meditation' as a necessary stage of the journey towards the supernatural.²⁹ He seems to prefer the inner world of reality to the external one. This comes out strongly in his essay on 'The Mandukya Upanishad'; speaking of the unconscious he says, 'The Indian, upon the other hand, calls it the conscious, because, whereas we are fragmentary, forgetting, remembering, sleeping, waking, ... it is the "unbroken consciousness of the Self" ';³⁰ the aspiration towards the 'unbroken consciousness of the Self' (and its profound relationship with the Anima Mundi) is at the centre of much of Yeats's poetry.

Consequently the analytical, anti-mystic, and impersonal realm of science (which directs itself to external reality, and which seems to be the accepted modus vivendi of the modern Western civilisation) becomes antipathetic to the poet. Professor Henn remarks that 'Science, the "opium of the suburbs" is the enemy, its criticism of myth an indispensable adjunct of its own growth'.³¹
Inevitably, in any opposition in Yeats's vision between science and myth the latter, an imaginative ritual intimately related both to magic and to the Anima Mundi, must gain the ascendancy ... as, indeed, it does.

Myth, as Professor Henn has pointed out, is important to Yeats for a number of reasons. Firstly, 'it could effect the philosophical, religious and political unification of national life': this is myth in terms of 'the new integration'. Secondly, 'it could restore the richness of imaginative life of which the people had been robbed as a result of nineteenth-century materialism': this is myth as instrument of the desire 'to recapture the primacy of the ... imaginative powers'. Finally, 'it might provide the key to the interpretation of history, and therefore to prophecy': this is myth as 'mystical philosophy'. Clearly, myth here goes beyond mere reference to the myths of 'old Eire'. It becomes myth as spiritual and artistic framework; or, as Mr. Hoffman prefers to describe it, it is 'a frame of archetypes' which the poet has 'worked out for himself'. Yeats himself points out the importance of such a frame when he writes that 'No art can conquer the people alone--the people are conquered by an ideal of life upheld by authority'.

Yeats's own 'ideal' (given the authority of the poetic imagination that is intimately in touch with the Anima Mundi) seems to be the achievement of a synthesis of fragmentary modern experience into a significant, and even perfect, whole. It is symbolised, in the poem 'There', by a common archetypal symbol--that of the circle. This circle exists on the mundane physical level, where 'all the barrel-hoops
are knit'; on the philosophical and historical level, where 'all the gyres converge in one'; and on the transcendental level, where 'all the planets drop in the Sun'.

Behind this 'There' is the desire for a physical and spiritual unity beyond contradiction, a perfection not only of the completed circle of hoop or gyre or planetary rotation, but a synthesis also of the states-of-being symbolised by hoops (physical existence), gyres (philosophical and historical existence), and planets (ethereal, heavenly, mystic existence). Hence Yeats's 'There' is arguably an equivalent of what the Surrealists were to call the 'point sublime'; it is the point at which temporal movement is subsumed to universal stillness and harmony, and at which states-of-being at odds with each other in modern civilisation are finally reconciled.

The reconciliation of opposites becomes a prime purpose of the poetry. Professor Henn says of Yeats's poetic use of the sexual act, for instance, 'In it is symbolized the reconciliation of all opposites'.

On another level, the juxtaposition of 'mask' and 'anti-mask' represents the poet's attempts to come to terms with contrasting aspects of the individual personality, as a first step towards a universal integration.

In poetic technique the reconciliatory impulse is reflected in Yeats's desire to yoke diversities within the discipline of a single symbol. Three such symbols are the Rose, Ireland, and the Tower.

On one level the Rose is immortal, idealised, and timeless. Yeats invokes it as one might invoke the Muse--'Red rose,.../
Come near me, while I sing ....'

It is the 'Far-off, most secret,
and inviolate Rose,' existing in a place where it is possible to 'dwell beyond the stir/And tumult of defeated dreams.'\(^{40}\) Its mystic value is in incorporating the spiritual aspiration common to many religions, existing 'In Druid vapour' as well as in the presence of 'the crowned Magi.'\(^{40}\)

On a more concrete level the Rose becomes 'The Rose of the World';\(^{41}\) it is involved in the non-ideal and temporal environment of physical reality. It suffers mortality, just as the Hanged God of folklore and the crucified Jesus had done, becoming 'the Rose upon the Rood of Time.'\(^{39}\)

So, within the symbol of the Rose there are two opposed elements at work: the Rose is the physical as well as the transcendent, the temporal as well as the timeless, the actual as well as the ideal, 'The Rose of Battle'\(^{42}\) as well as 'The Rose of Peace.'\(^{43}\)

Something similar is noticeable in the symbol of Ireland. Just as one element of the Rose symbol is transcendent, so one aspect of the poet's use of Ireland in the poetry revolves around the mythic; that is, the country is presented as ancient, and magic—the home of legendary heroes.

The other facet of the symbol is that of Ireland as part of a modern civilisation; that is, Ireland is presented in the context of a contemporary National Theatre, and in the context of a political movement of nationalism. It is equivalent to the Rose as wordly and temporal symbol. This Eire is peopled, not by Red Hanrahan and Cuchulain, but by Pearse and Maud Gonne. It is real, contemporary, and driven by the forces of politics rather than by the more occult ones of magic. The imaginative energies of the poet are turned more
obviously outwards, towards society; this is reflected in poems with titles such as 'To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it Were Proved the People Wanted Pictures'.

The third symbol within which contrarieties are presented together is that of the Tower. This symbol reveals two contrasting aspects of artistic isolation. On one level, the symbol suggests the propagation of the spiritual Rose, or the mythic Ireland. The withdrawal from the public world facilitates the contemplative flow by which it is possible to recreate Man's contact with the immortal world; for 'In contemplation' 'time' is 'overthrown', and 'dead' ancestors may appear as 'yet flesh and bone'.

On the other level, though, the Tower symbol represents an escape from participation in the environment of the worldly Rose, and in political Ireland. The danger is that a life of artistic contemplation may become so divorced from the world of action as to produce 'Mere images'. As Yeats says, 'meditations upon unknown thought/Make human intercourse grow less and less'.

* * * * * *

Julien Levy quotes André Breton as follows: -

'One must dream,' said Lenin. 'One must act,' said Goethe. Surrealism has never maintained anything else, for practically all its efforts have tended towards the dialectic resolution of this opposition.

A similar opposition is evident in Yeats's poetry, particularly in the contrasting aspects of the Tower symbol (but also in the opposed aspects
of Rose and Ireland). The world of the 'dream', or of the contemplative and spiritual ideal, and that of action, physical or political, are juxtaposed as rival claims on the poet's attention. Synthesis, or a 'dialectic resolution', is only achieved at one ephemeral point——where the 'Romantic Ireland' of his dream lives again in the action of the Civil War, in the 'terrible beauty' that was 'born' out of 'Easter 1916'. Otherwise, the poet seems forced to opt for one or other of apparently mutually exclusive possibilities. His opting for 'The abstract joy' and 'The half-read wisdom of daemonic images' seems to create an imbalance that militates against the ideal of a new integration.*

The only unity which Yeats can find is in the distant past, in his vision of the world of Byzantium. In this ancient civilisation, 'Religious Aesthetic & [sic] Practical Life are One'. Thus the poem 'Sailing to Byzantium' becomes a voyage of rediscovery of 'the unity of all aspects of life, for perhaps the last time in history'. However, this ideal unity has since been disrupted by what seems to be equivalent to Eliot's 'dissociation of sensibility'. At one stage Europe, in Yeats's words, had 'shared one mind and heart'; but in the sixteenth century 'both mind and heart began to break into fragments'.

The result, in terms of modern literature, is that at this further stage of fragmentation poetry has been deprived of the concerted energy of 'mind' and 'heart'. It has degenerated to (in Yeats's words) 'The rattle of pebbles on the shore/Under the receding

*One would be hard-pressed to justify the claim that this imbalance was over-compensatory, as was the case with the emphasis put on the 'dream' aspect of Surrealism.
wave'.56 Left without 'the great song'56 poets have become 'fish that lie gasping on the strand'.57

Even Yeats himself cannot always escape the danger of such a division of poetic energies. He admits to being 'caught between the pull/Of the dark moon and the full',58 that is, between objective (or primary) man and subjective (or antithetical) man.**

It seems to me that the 'dissociation of sensibility' is seldom healed in Yeats's poetry. Indeed, much of his memorable work arises directly from the tension between the opposing loyalties which make demands on his poetic personality, and from the integrity with which he tries to resolve the manifold oppositions--of private and public worlds, of 'Aesthetic & Practical' realms, and of 'heart' and 'mind'. If he seldom achieves a synthesis, seldom gets close to his hypothetical 'There', nevertheless he is consistently aware of the antithetical elements from which synthesis may occur. The self-analysis in depth evident in much of his later poetry marks him off as one of the first of the 'moderns' rather than one of the 'last romantics'1 of the nineteenth century.

* * * * * * * *

In matters of technique Yeats is not particularly avant-garde, especially when compared with Pound or Eliot. The modification of his early Romanticism, though effective in his own poetry, could hardly be regarded as a spectacular or a major innovation for poetry in general.

*This is presumably similar to Eliot's 'high dream' (Selected Essays, 1961, p.262)--a spiritual purpose which emphasises the high seriousness that poetry should attempt to attain, a 'great song' possible only when 'Religious' and 'Aesthetic' lives 'are One'.

**These terms are further explored in diagram form by Professor Henn in The Lonely Tower, 1965, p.177.
However, arising from his poetic philosophy and materials are certain technical concerns and methods which seem to look forward to the more extreme examples of Surrealism.

For instance, Yeats speaks of 'recalling words to their ancient sovereignty', much as the Surrealists, who were to attempt 'L'alchimie du Verbe', might speak of rediscovering the 'matière première' of primitive expression.

To take another point, Yeats might almost be justifying the theory of 'convulsive beauty' when he writes that 'there is no "excellent beauty without strangeness."' His desire 'to be some queer man's companion', his claim that 'I have always deliberately left out ... explaining', and his assertion that 'Intensity is all' also possibly suggest Surrealism's penchant for the unconventional and the strange, its antipathy to exhaustive logical chains of argument, and its insistence on the emotive element in vision and language.

Though interesting, these are perhaps only superficial similarities. But there is at least one similarity which is more important--the concern with the workings of the imagination through archetypal symbol and dream, and with methods of achieving an organic form suitable to their depiction. In order adequately to accommodate in his verse the symbols of a dream world which (as Professor Henn sees Yeats's contention) are 'symbols ... linked to the "ancestral memory"' and are 'to be recognized as "standard" components of mythology', Yeats seeks out 'those ... meditative organic rhythms,

*Though Yeats's comment is made in the specific context of theatrical ritual, one feels that its significance extends beyond this limited area, and could be applied to poetry in general.
which are the embodiment of the imagination'. One feels that Yeats's interest here in a collective imagination which works beyond the everyday temporal world (since 'it has done with time' is very close to the Surrealists' interest in a shared unconscious mind. This feeling is strengthened by the fact that, in I.A. Richards's words, Yeats adopts 'as a technique of inspiration the use of trance'; one might possibly draw a parallel here between Yeats's use of trance and the Surrealists' use of 'psychic automatism' as a method of obtaining poetic material from the occulted world of the unconscious.

* * * *

Yeats's significance to Surrealism, however, remains largely in terms of the themes he treats, rather than in terms of the techniques he uses. His interest in the 'spontaneity' of the 'soul', in 'the unbroken consciousness of the Self' (or the unconscious), in mystic trances, dream, magic, the Anima Mundi (which appears to be only a verbal variation of the Collective Unconscious), and myth as synthesis of disparate experience, prefigure the Surrealists' interest in the same themes. The aspiration towards a point where wholeness of experience is achieved beyond contradictory states-of-being, and the insistence on the individual imagination as probe of the inner life, also suggest spiritual affinities between Yeats and the Surrealists.

In the final analysis I agree with Thomas Blackburn when he writes that 'Yeats seems to me a great contemporary poet of ... [the] inward

*It is interesting that Mr. de Sola Pinto, when quoting this passage by Yeats, links the theory with that of an important Surrealiste precursor, noting that this is 'Mallarme's conception of "pure" poetry' (Crisis in English Poetry, 1963, p.107).
world, and if, as I suspect, the further discovery of man by himself is the special concern of our age, then he has a key position in modern poetry. 65


2 Autobiographies, 1961, p.431.


4 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time', ibid., p.35.

5 ibid., p.68.

6 'September 1913', ibid., p.121.

7 Autobiographies, p.74.

8 'A Coat', Collected Poems, p.142.


10 Autobiographies, p.189.


12 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd', ibid., p.8.

13 Autobiographies, p.272.


15 Essays and Introductions, 1961, p.46.

16 Autobiographies, p.262.

17 op.cit., p.59.

18 'Ego Dominus Tuus', Collected Poems, p.182.

19 'Old Play', quoted by Yeats as foreword to Responsibilities.

In Collected Poems, p.112.

Magic', Essays and Introductions, p.28.

'Oil and Blood', Collected Poems, p.270.

T.S. Eliot, After Strange Gods, 1934, p.44.

Autobiographies, pp.115-16.

Quoted by Henn, p.72.


Essays and Introductions, pp.393-4.

Collected Poems, p.259.

Essays and Introductions, p.480.

op.cit., p.213.

Henn, p.171.

ibid., pp.171-2.

ibid., p.172.

op.cit., p.viii.

Autobiographies, p.491.

Collected Poems, p.329.

op.cit., p.103.

'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time', Collected Poems, p.35.

'The Secret Rose', ibid., p.77.

ibid., p.41.

ibid., p.42.

ibid., p.41.

ibid., p.119.

The Double Vision of Michael Robartes', ibid., p.194.
46. 'The Phases of the Moon', ibid., p.184.
47. 'All Souls' Night', ibid., p.258.
51. Quoted by Henn, p.200.
53. Henn, p.223.
55. Autobiographies, p.191.
56. 'The Nineteenth Century and after', Collected Poems, p.271.
57. 'Three Movements', ibid., p.271.
58. 'The Double Vision of Michael Robartes', ibid., p.194.
59. Quoted by Henn, p.81.
60. Essays and Introductions, p.207.
62. Henn, p.159.
64. Quoted in After Strange Gods, p.46.
65. The Price of an Eye, 1961, p.34.
CHAPTER SIX: The Outsiders—III. Ezra Pound.

He has enabled a few persons, including myself, to improve their verse sense; so that he has improved poetry through other men as well as by himself.

—T.S. Eliot, 'Isolated Superiority', The Dial, January 1928.1

Yeats's modernism is possibly ambiguous inasmuch as he straddled the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reflecting in his poetry aspects of each. This is not so to the same extent of Ezra Pound's poetry, which is more clearly 'modernist', not only in subject-matter, but particularly in technique. It is true that in Pound's early work the spirit of the nineties is often in evidence; it is even arguable that the interest shown in his early poems in the age of troubadours is similar to Yeats's interest in mythic Ireland, or that Pound's melopoeia* is equivalent to the Irishman's aestheticism. Yet there is an essential distinction to be made; the two poets' respective allegiances to the past century were scarcely of the same strength:** for whereas the nineties

*As G.S. Fraser notes of many of Pound's early poems, 'The quality ... is what Pound himself calls melopoeia, or music, melody-making' (Ezra Pound, 1960, p.37).

**Yeats had been historically a late-nineteenth-century poet, whereas Pound had not; by the turn of the century the former had already produced Crossways (1889), The Rose (1893), and The Wind among the Reeds (1899), whereas the latter poets first published collection of poetry was Personae of 1909. Yeats had grown towards poetic maturity through the last part of the century, whereas Pound's literary experience of the nineties must have been largely at second hand; Pound remains, in fact, clearly a twentieth-century poet.
elements were pronounced in Yeats's early work, and recurred in one form or another (albeit with a different emphasis) virtually throughout,* in Pound's work they were more superficial and were quickly forced out, mainly by the pressure of external, contemporary affairs.

The culmination of these external forces acting on the 'poetic' world was the outbreak of war, creating a situation in which soldiers 'walked eye-deep in hell/believing in old men's lies'. Henceforward Pound became increasingly preoccupied with the 'old lies and new infamy' of this contemporary public world, and with the debasement of life caused by 'usury age-old and age-thick/and liars in public places'. G.S. Fraser points out that Hugh Selwyn Mauberley enacts the transition in the poet's attitude. He explains, 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley can be seen ... as Pound's farewell, at once wistful and ironic, to a purely "aesthetic" attitude to poetry': this 'aestheticism' Mr. Fraser describes as 'the idea that one can make a cult of "beauty," and in a minor degree of "love" and of "pleasure," in indifference to, or in quiet defiance of, a greedily competitive and in the end violently self-destructive society'. Indeed, it was not merely the 'self-destructive society' which was now to form the basis of Pound's poetic exploration, but the 'old bitch gone in the teeth'--'a botched civilization' as a whole--which was to be the kernel of his Cantos.

* * * * * * * * *

The themes of Pound's later poetry do not, of course, suddenly spring up without notice; it is possible to trace many of the key preoccupations of the Cantos as they grow through his earlier poetry, to find the 'old bitch gone in the teeth' at many points in his Personae.* In these poems up to 1915 the terms of the discussion are posited.

At the centre of the 'botched civilization' of the earlier poems lies the 'Fourmillante cité'¹⁴—a hell of which Pound writes, 'Now do I know that I am mad,/For here are a million people surly with traffic'.⁵ The city with its frenetic yet purposeless activity reveals that 'Empty are the ways of this land'⁶—an emptiness evident in the people themselves, who are 'dying piece-meal/of a sort of emotional anaemia'.⁷ Such a state of affairs is the result of the refinement and sophistication of social mores to an extreme where all vitality is negated: it is 'the end of breeding', which creates a 'boredom' at once both 'exquisite and excessive'.⁷

In the city-bound society there is no room for the primal energies of the natural world; as Pound says, to all intents and purposes, 'Pan is dead. Great Pan is dead.'⁸ In this civilisation, 'There is no summer in the leaves,/And withered are the sedges'⁹; the natural life force is deprived of sustenance. It is an acute problem for men, since (Pound argues) 'their consciousness is "germinal"': that is, 'Their thoughts

*This is Personae: Collected Shorter Poems (1952), containing Personae (1908, 1909, 1910), Ripostes (1912), Lustra (1916?), 'Cathay' (no date), 'Poems from Blast' (1914), and 'Poems from Lustra' (1915).
are in them as the thought of the tree is in the seed, or in the grass, or the grain, or the blossom'. Without this 'germinal' quality, Man's world becomes one beset by 'emotional [one might almost say 'spiritual'] anaemia'.

In Pound's hellish city the machinery of religion organised for the spiritual guidance of the people does not help to alleviate the difficulty; for State religion as he sees it has perverted its original purpose, which was 'to stimulate a sort of confidence in the life-force': instead we have only 'dogma or propaganda'--the 'British Empire type' of religion 'where someone, having to keep a troublesome rabble in order, invents and scares them with a disagreeable bogie, which he calls god'.

Consequently the only hope of spiritual salvation, of a renewal of the life-force, seems to lie in the individual who denies the 'botched civilization'. The gesture of the courtier towards courtly life in 'La Faisne'--'I have put aside this folly'--becomes the only valid response of the modern individual also, to his own civilisation. Pound certainly sympathises with the spokesman of 'La Faisne', who says, 'the yoke/Of the old ways of men have I cast aside'. He is like the courtier of the poem in seeking, in place of the existing society, a community in which the human individual is brought closer to the vital forces of nature. Essentially he desires to return to a life ordered by, or at least incorporating, some animistic principle. The primitive-religious undertones of the poem 'The Tree' voice this desire--'I stood still and was a tree amid the wood,/Knowing the truth of things unseen before'. Pound's wish (and in this he is not far
removed from Yeats) seems to be for a de-civilisation of the consciousness. In his essay on 'The Tradition' he says, 'A return to origins invigorates because it is a return to nature and reason'; he adds, 'The man who returns to origins does so because he wishes to behave in the eternally sensible manner. That is to say, naturally,... intuitively'.

The prime symbol of the human being returning to origins is the heroine of the poem 'A Girl', who makes herself receptive to the surging forces of natural growth, so that 'The tree has entered my hands,/The sap has ascended my arms'. Even though 'all this is folly to the world', the perfect simplicity and serenity of the poem are in notable contrast to the tortured and rushed rhythms of the industrial city of 'N.Y.'; if animism is indeed 'folly', then Pound seems to be opting for it anyway, since the modern city is indulging its own form of folly in the 'million people surly with traffic': one might almost say that the poet is preferring natural madness to civilised madness.

So far I have limited myself to exemplification of key themes from Pound's shorter, earlier poems. But the above themes are continued and expanded in his Cantos.

The 'folly' of the mad city in Personae becomes, in the Cantos, the commercial life cut off from the reality of natural existence and concentrating on the unnatural world of business and monetary transactions. This is represented in the poet's
The concept of 'usura'. Donald Davie sums up as follows:

If the only reliable symbol of true wealth is the grain which the earth may be made to yield, a national currency can be a true register of wealth only when the amount of money in circulation corresponds to the wealth of the natural resources known to exist in that nation's lands. To create money out of nothing, in excess of natural wealth, to buy and sell money, to set money chasing after money--this is the way of the molder and the brickmaker, not the way of stonemason and ploughman. And this is what Pound means by 'usura.'

The concept of usura goes beyond the reference to the system of economics formulated by Major Douglas, however. It has moral overtones in that Pound seems to equate 'the perverts' of 'money-lust' with 'those who had lied for hire;' further than this, and more relevant to the discussion of poetry, the equation includes not only financial perverts, but also 'the perverters of language'.

The clearest indication of all the ills Pound categorises

*Pound prefers the 'ploughman' to 'the molder and the brickmaker' because the former he regards as carrying out a basic and necessary occupation; whereas the latter are engaged only in secondary occupations; he would agree with Herbert Read's statement that 'A man cultivating the earth--that is the elementary economic fact; and as a poet I am only concerned with elementary facts' (Poetry and Anarchism, 1947, p.9).

**In his attention to usura Pound seems to fall into André Breton's category of 'ceux qui continuent à militer pour la transformation du monde en la faisant dépendre ... du bouleversement radical de ses condition [sic, presumably 'conditions'] économiques' (Manifestes du Surréalisme, 1962, p.344).
under the term of usura is given in 'Canto XLV', in which we read
no picture is made to endure nor to live with
but it is made to sell and sell quickly [NO TRUE ART]
with usura, sin against nature, [NO NATURAL EXISTENCE]

with usura is no clear demarcation [NO CHENG MING]*

They have brought whores for Eleusis [NO PURE RELIGIOUS
Corpses are set to banquet [NO LIVING AND SENSUOUS MYSTERY]
PLEASURE]
At behest of usura. 17

Another crucial aspect of usura is that it progressively
removes life from the concrete and leads it towards the abstract.
In overt economic terms this is shown in the move from corn-barter
to the creation of symbolic money and Western capitalism.** But,
once more, its significance goes beyond the basic economic
reference. Usura is operating whenever 'we leave principles and
clear propositions/and wander into construction'; when we do
this, 'we wander into a wilderness'. 18

Pound tries to combat what he regards as deleterious abstraction
by bringing abstractions back into closer contact with the concrete

* A Chinese term, whose significance to Pound's work is in
symbolizing the clarity of thought and language which allows
one to govern properly the inner world of personal conscious-
ness and thus the outer state of society. As Pound himself
describes it, it is "the total sincerity, the precise
** Cantos 'LXXXVIII' and 'LXXXIX' (Cantos, pp.623 ff.) explore
the abuse of currency, and the setting up of State mints
after 'Money was now made of brass' ("Canto LVI", ibid.,
p.317), as a result of which 'Every citizen' was 'now more
or less cheated' ("Canto LXXXIX", ibid., p.631).
world from which they sprang. His vision of Paradise, for example, is not necessarily as a transcendental continuum cut off from the material side of existence, but as a joy that has its access ways in the most unexpected sensuous experiences; thus 'it exists only in fragments unexpected excellent sausage,/the smell of mint, for example': 19 these things, perhaps, have in them 'that passionate simplicity which is beyond the precisions of the intellect'. 20

The 'precisions of the intellect' in the perverted society of usura result in a science which is 'from the watching of shadows'. 21* Pound's advice is to ignore the science that is only an extension of Man's 'vanity', and to 'Learn of the green world what can be thy place'. 22 In a similar vein, when addressing the Great Earth Mother, 'GEA TERRA', he claims, 'Wisdom lies next thee': 23 the claim typifies the animistic impulse of the earlier poems which is carried on in the Cantos.

This animism Mr. Fraser prefers to call 'Pound's semi-paganism,' which he sees as centring on the figure of Bacchus: he writes, 'Bacchus represents Pound's semi-paganism, his belief in the deus loci, in a supernatural world very near to us in nature: when he introduces the gods, for instance, he often also introduces the Mediterranean sky or sea or landscapes with olive trees, a sense of natural magic'. 24 The poet's reference to Bacchus represents, Mr. Fraser continues, 'the longing of modern man to regain touch with the deep sources of life, however fierce and dangerous these may

*Pound's reason for this opinion is that science seems to adopt an increasingly 'abstract thought' which, as Mr. Fraser points out, Pound considers 'as on the whole corrupting' (Ezra Pound, 1960, p.68).
prove, however "immoral" by the standards of law-abiding urban civilisation'.

The longing stirs in Pound an adulation of the life risen from 'GEA TERRA', and provokes him to the apparently eccentric claim that 'The strength of men is in grain'.

He seems tempted to back-track beyond the usura phase of civilisation, beyond the merchant (and brickmaker) to the ploughman, to the time when Man simply tilled the soil; for 'There is worship in plowing'.

This is presumably the worship of Gea Tera in the 'grain rite', the object of which, so Pound informs us, is 'That the goddess turn crystal within her'.

The curious vision of the grain principle turning into crystal seems to combine Pound's interest in the natural force that produces life from the soil with his desire for the clarity and precision of Cheng Ming (see footnote * to p.108 above). For the grain goddess herself becomes the 'Light & [sic] the flowing crystal', one of the deities 'moving in crystal' (the clarity and the clean geometric lines of the crystal presumably symbolising at once 'passionate simplicity' and 'precise definition').

This vision, perhaps, represents Pound's 'point sublime', the equivalent of Yeats's 'There'; or, to transpose the suggestion into the terms of Pound's favourite Confucianism, the vision represents 'The Unwobbling Pivot', the 'centre' of 'The master man' who 'does not waver'.

It is to be approached by a de-civilisation of the society of usura, by a clarification and a concretion of consciousness in the face of nebulous, scientific abstraction, and a
consequent rapprochement of Man with Bacchus (or Pan) and Gea Terra.

* * * * * * * * * *

However one regards Pound's rather esoteric philosophising, on one point there can be no doubt—that is, the high seriousness with which he regards the artistic, and particularly the poetic, vocation.* He has no time for those who deny the existence of 'The Serious Artist'. In the essay of that title he berates 'The people' who 'would rather have patent medicines than scientific treatment',** In 1916 he suggests, hopefully, that 'The art of the stupid, by the stupid, for the stupid is not all sufficient' any longer; for, 'After an intolerable generation' we find an 'awakening'* of the critical intelligence in poetry.

In his Imagist period this critical intelligence manifests itself in a formal credo; Mr. de Sola Pinto conveniently tabulates:—

Their aims as expressed in Some Imagist Poets (1915) can be summarized as follows:

(1) To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word.

*This is in spite of the fact that one of the ills associated with usura (that of producing art solely for money) seems to have raised its ugly head even in Pound's own mind; for the concern shown in such comments as, 'As far as the collectors go, the value of the book will be only higher' (The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1951, p.258), or 'Yr. best ad is the quiet statement that at auction recently a copy of Mr. P's A Lume Spento published in 1908 at $1.00 (one dollar) was sold for $52.50' (ibid., p.259), is scarcely an artistic one!

**This 'scientific' treatment does not, of course, suggest the logical abstraction of which Pound is so wary; rather, it implies precision of thought and language. It is in this sense that 'The arts, literature, poesy, are a science, just as chemistry is a science' (Pound, Literary Essays, 1954, p.42).
(2) To produce poetry that is hard and clear, and not to deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous.

(3) To create new rhythms* and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. 34

The manifesto marks a high point in the literary trend which Alfred Alvarez has described as 'the wakening of the active poetic intelligence after the poeticizing 'nineties.' 35

Certainly, Pound is critical of the lack of precision of much late-nineteenth-century verse, calling the era 'a rather blurry, messy sort of a period, a rather sentimentalistic, mannerish sort of a period'. 36 The criticism includes the work of the early Yeats; in an essay of 1914 Pound writes, 'I've not a word against the glamour as it appears in Yeats's early poems, but we have had so many other pseudo-glamours and glamourlets and mists and fogs since the nineties that one is about ready for hard light'. 37

Even the "Georgian Anthology" is dismissed as adhering to a 'style Victorien'. 38 Consequently, Pound is able to define the 'break with tradition' as being no more than to 'desert the more obvious imbecilities of one's immediate elders'. 39 He sees himself not as heir to the effete poetic convention alluded to here, but as descendant of Walt Whitman, the man who broke the pentameter; he writes in a poem dedicated to Whitman, 'It was you that broke the new wood,/Now is a time for carving'. 40

But carving demands sharp tools. The poet's tools—words—

*As Pound writes in a letter of 1915, 'Rhythm MUST have meaning' (Letters of Ezra Pound, 1951, p.91).
have been blunted by misuse; they have been used 'to conceal meaning, used to blur meaning, to produce the complete and utter inferno of the past century ... against which, SOLELY a care for language, for accurate registration by language avails'. Poetic diction needs to be resharpened, Pound claims, and this can only be achieved by the carefully controlled use of incisive words to draw an image with hard, clear outlines; there 'must be no clichés, set phrases, stereotyped journalesse': the 'only escape from such is by precision'—hence the Imagist manifesto. In pursuit of precision Pound is even drawn to experiment with non-Western forms, using the haiku (or hokku) and the tanka, traditional Japanese poem-forms of seventeen and thirty-one syllables respectively. They are particularly suited to Pound's purpose, in that (Mr. Fraser informs us) they 'are extremely concise, allusive, and elliptical; they present, they do not comment; they work by images, not concepts'. In fact, they are, according to Mr. Fraser, 'at the root of ... Imagism'.

Pound's predominant method of approach in his earlier work—his desire to create a precise, concrete, non-discursive poetry with mimetic rhythm and organic form—is carried on in the Cantos. The almost obsessive interest in 'exact definition' centres, in the Cantos, on the ideograph* of Cheng (or Ch'ing) Ming. This ideograph embodies the ideal of linguistic and conceptual precision, but expands the concept as it appeared in the earlier poetry to include

* 'Ideograph' is merely a verbal variation of what Pound terms 'ideogram'. I use the former throughout as being the commoner, and more authoritative, form.
precision not only of single words and images, but of whole clusters of images. Each constituent image in a cluster may give off more connotations than are strictly required for the effect sought; to combat this, the relevance of each image is delimited by its juxtaposition with other images in the group. So the earlier concept, as included in Imagism, is here expanded in scope.

Similarly the haiku, an important weapon in the Imagist battery, takes on a wider significance in the ideographic method often employed in the Cantos. Hugh Kenner explains that 'Hokku deals in "perspective by incongruity"'; this makes it ideal for ideographic method, which achieves incongruity through unexpected changes in what Mr. Kenner has called the 'trajectory' of the poem. Ideograph is simply a method of concrete representation—that is, representation by picture or pictorial-symbol rather than by words or sound-symbol. It is adapted in practice in the poetry of the Cantos into a technique which relies upon juxtaposition of visual images rather than upon expanded explanation, upon connotation rather than upon denotation, and upon intuited links rather than upon rationally-achieved links. The method works on the assumption that 'From seeing things set in relation we intuit, or at least learn to intuit, the dynamics of that relation.' A very simple example of ideographic technique is that occurring in 'Canto XVI', where we are initially presented with an image of a scene 'before Hell mouth', changing suddenly to a setting evocative of the First World War, and then without warning to an incident in the Russian Revolution: thus, from being given these three juxtaposed pictures, we are invited to evolve some relationship between the three
to extend the suggestion of hell to apply to the hellish conditions of the wars most recently in memory (at that time). Mr. Kenner draws a very apt parallel when he suggests that the technique 'corresponds to cinematic montage, the succession of ... shots'. He later speaks of the 'electric juxtaposition' of 'otherwise mute particulars'.

There is an interesting similarity here between Mr. Kenner's electricity and M. Breton's 'étincelle' when speaking of the juxtapositions that create the convulsive beauty of catachresis: both techniques clearly stem from the same concept—that of what Christopher Caudwell called the 'affective association of ideas'.

Ideograph seems to me to be a form which perfectly reflects the turmoil and sudden vital energy of the fragmentary experience with which Pound deals; like no other previous form, it enables the creation of what Pound calls varying 'planes in relation'. One might reasonably say that it constitutes the technical framework upon which Eliot was to build The Waste Land.

The ideographic method is certainly Pound's most effective attempt to 'Make it new'. He was quick to realise that, in

*One is strongly reminded here of Breton's suggestion (quoted by David Gascoyne in his 'Premier Manifeste Anglais du Surrealisme') that poetic juxtaposition creates in each of the 'termes mis en rapport' a 'vigueur qui lui manquait tant qu'il était pris isolément' (Cahiers d'Art, X [1935], 106).

**One remembers that Breton states, 'La valeur de l'image depend ... de l'étincelle obtenue' between 'les deux conducteurs' (Manifestes du Surrealisme, 1962, p.52).
the first years of the present century, a new poetic approach and technique had become necessary. He set about formulating these, even if his effort was directed only towards the manipulation of fragments—a technique in which, to use Mr. Fraser's words, 'total images are analysed, fragmented, put together to look different'.

By his own efforts to 'Make it new' Pound influenced others, consciously setting himself up, in fact, as protector of the avant-garde. He wrote, in a letter of 1915, 'My problem is to keep alive a certain group of advancing poets, to set the arts in their rightful place as the acknowledged guide and lamp of civilization'. Without question, Pound was an inveterate champion of progressive poetic technique, even admitting to purveying 'propaganda for what some may consider "novelty in excess"'. Robert Graves evidently baulked at aspects of the poet's 'novelty', even accusing Pound of tea-chest plagiarism.**

On a more serious critical note, though, F.R. Leavis makes a valid comment when he speaks of 'the cultivation of ... exquisite eclecticism', which in Pound's poetry sometimes (by any reasonable standards) passes beyond acceptable bounds. Mr. Alvarez makes a similar point when he argues that 'weighing against his artistic concentration is Pound's inveterate garrulosity'. The effect is sometimes lost in, rather than sharpened by, multiple reference drawn

*Speaking of the effects sought by Surrealism, Breton explained how the poet treated 'The external object' so that 'its component parts' were 'somehow emancipated from the object in such a way as to set up entirely new relationships with other elements' (quoted by Patrick Waldberg, Surrealism, 1966, p.83); once again there is a staggering similarity here between Pound's and Surrealism's theories of technique.

**He spoke of 'Pound's sprawling, ignorant, indecent, unmelodious, seldom metrical Cantos, embellished with

[cont'd. overleaf]
from abstruse sources."

Therefore, though Pound's technical innovations are of the utmost importance to the avant-garde of twentieth-century English poetry, paradoxically, they are often failures in practice, in the hands of their inventor. Instead of disparate reference, often he creates only verbal anarchy. In the final analysis one is perhaps drawn to the conclusion that it is Eliot rather than Pound who is 'il migliore fabbro'.\(^{59}\)

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Pound realised that, both in spiritual and artistic terms, 'If a race neglects to create its own gods, it gets the bump'.\(^{60}\) By borrowing or inheriting these ruling principles, he argued, 'naturally you end in slavery and in moral ... degradation'.\(^{60}\) Consequently he set about the fulfilment of the need to 'Make it new' by seeking new ideals. Being, in Mr. Fraser's estimation, 'a man bitterly and exactly sensitive to the pressures in a democratic society that kill instinctual life',\(^{61}\) he tended in his search to react away from such a society, and towards the gods of a more natural community, Bacchus and Gea Terra.

On a more specifically literary level, he was largely responsible for 'the wakening of the active poetic intelligence after the poetizing 'nineties', insisting on 'the difficulty of making verse' in the new century, and drawing poets' attention to

[continued from previous page] esoteric Chinese ideographs--for all I know, they may have been traced from the nearest tea-chest' \(\text{(The Crowning Privilege, 1955, p.123).}\)  
*One is perhaps surprised to read Mr. Kenner's bland statement that 'The encyclopaedia will clear up small points' \(\text{(The Poetry of Ezra Pound, 1951, p.217).}\)
'the range and depth of the whole tradition of European civilization'. His interest went even beyond the European world; Pound wrote to an early poem, 'I will get you a green coat out of China', and indeed he often made good use of the oriental clothes in which he dressed his comments on the 'botched civilization' of the Occident.

In addition to this cosmopolitanism, Pound took a wide view of art in general; that is, he regarded as artificial the rigid conventional boundaries separating the various art forms from each other, and attempted 'a sort of poetry where painting or sculpture seems as it were "just coming over into speech."'

This latter point prefigures the interest shown by the Surrealists in the relationship between the various arts. Pound, in fact, seems, in many ways, to be a very important ancestor of English Surrealism. Mr. Davie suggests something of this ancestry when he goes as far as to say that 'the vorticist movement' corresponds to Dadaism across the Channel'. Perhaps this is to overstate the case; nevertheless the similarities between Pound's theories and those of Surrealism are undeniable. The emphasis in Pound's poetry on an individual reaction away from what is presented as a debased Western society, and from the predominant scientific ethos of the 'precisions of the intellect', which fails to accommodate the urge towards primitive animism, seems to spring from the same spirit as that which motivates the Surrealists. Further than this, and more important, the ideograph as Pound develops it in English poetry seems to embody in

*This movement, with which Pound was intimately involved, developed a rather more extreme statement of the Imagist credo.
advance the essence of Surrealism's theories on technique; ideographic method combines non-logical connotation, concretion, 'electric' juxtaposition, and an organic form which shapes 'verse cadences, and verse pauses, to the impression or emotion; instead of, as it were, feeding the impression of the emotion into a predetermined verse form'.

If Yeats is an ancestor of Surrealism largely on account of thematic parallels, then Pound, while sharing the thematic parallels, is perhaps an ancestor more on account of this technical innovation, and of his revitalisation of an avant-garde spirit in modern poetry.

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1 Quoted by F.R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry, 1950, p.133.
2 'E.P. Ode pour l'Election de son Sepulchre' [sic--i.e. no acute accents], Personae: Collected Shorter Poems, 1952, p.200.
3 Ezra Pound, 1960, p.53.
5 'N.Y.', Collected Shorter Poems, p.74.
6 "Ione, Dead the Long Year" ', ibid., p.122.
7 'The Garden', ibid., p.93.
8 'Pan Is Dead', ibid., p.83.
10 ibid., p.95.
11 Collected Shorter Poems, p.18.
12 ibid., p.17.
14 Collected Shorter Poems, p.75.
17 ibid., pp.239-40.
18 'Canto LXIV', ibid., p.376.
19 'Canto LXXIV', ibid., p.465.
20 Pound, Literary Essays, p.53.
21 'Canto LXXXV', p.579.
22 'Canto LXXII', ibid., p.556.
23 'Canto LXXXII', ibid., p.561.
24 op. cit., p.74.
25 ibid., p.75.
26 'Canto CVI', Cantos, p.777.
27 'Canto XCIX', ibid., p.740.
28 'Canto CVI', ibid., p.778.
29 'Canto XCI', ibid., p.645.
30 'Canto LXXVII', ibid., p.498.
31 Confucius, tr. Pound. Quoted in Hugh Kenner, The Poetry of
Ezra Pound, 1951, p.295.
32 Literary Essays, p.48.
36 Literary Essays, p.11.
37 ibid., p.380.
38 Note to 'Our Contemporaries', Collected Shorter Poems, p.129.
Quoted by Kenner, p. 66.

'A Pact', Collected Shorter Poems, p. 98.

Pound, Literary Essays, p. 77.


op. cit., p. 13.

Kenner, p. 37.

Ibid., p. 62.

Ibid., p. 64.

Ibid., p. 204.

Cantos, p. 72.

Ibid., p. 75.

Ibid., p. 79.

op. cit., p. 236.

Illusion and Reality, 1937, p. 239.

Quoted by Davie, p. 55.


op. cit., p. 51.

Letters, p. 90.

op. cit., p. 141.

op. cit., p. 62.


op. cit., p. 113.


'Further Instructions', Collected Shorter Poems, p. 103.

Pound, quoted by Davie, p. 55.

Ibid., p. 146.

Fraser, p. 44.

In the third year of the War came the most revolutionary man in poetry during my lifetime,... T.S. Eliot ....

--W.B. Yeats, 'Modern Poetry' (1936),

Essays and Introductions, 1961, p. 499.

Ezra Pound might be regarded in some ways as an eccentric innovator in poetic technique; in a very real sense he was an 'outsider', often wilfully putting himself 'beyond the pale' of a conservative tradition which he regarded as 'the more obvious imbecilities of one's immediate elders'. Yet his achievements in technique have had a profound influence on the poetic tradition, both on the modernist element as a whole, and, more specifically, on a poet whose insistence on tradition has become a literary commonplace.

T.S. Eliot came to England via La Sorbonne in 1915. Being a travelled expatriate possibly saved him from the insularity rife in English poetry at that time. In any event, he was aware of the influence of a tradition outside the English one. In the appendix to Notes towards the Definition of Culture he wrote, 'in the second half of the nineteenth century the greatest contribution to European poetry was certainly made in France'. The tradition in France to which Eliot was referring was that 'which starts with Baudelaire, and culminates in Paul Valéry': it was, in fact, the Symboliste tradition, without which, so Eliot assures us, 'the work of three poets in other languages ... I refer to W.B. Yeats, to Rainer Maria
Rilke, and, if I may, to myself—would hardly be conceivable'.

This is very interesting in the light of the present study, in that Symbolisme prefigured and contributed to Surréalisme, just as it contributed, Eliot admitted, to the poetry of Yeats and of himself. There does at least seem to be a common root here shared by Surréalisme and the poetry of the 'outsiders'.

The concept of poetic tradition (which in this case goes beyond national barriers and becomes a European tradition) is a guiding principle in Eliot's poetic vision; but unlike the English poets of the Great War or even Ezra Pound, who tended to ignore or rebel against the tradition, equating it with late-Victorian poetic convention, Eliot took the native tradition and extended it. To put it another way, whereas the native poets tended to see individuality

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*This influence has not gone unnoticed in the criticism of French poetry. Anthony Hartley speaks of Laforgue's 'great influence on English and American poetry', pointing out that 'J. Alfred Prufrock attests his influence, not to mention such early poems of Eliot as Conversation Galante [sic—i.e. italicised, not in quotation marks], which are pure Laforgue pastiche' ('Introduction', The Penguin Book of French Verse: 3, 1963, pp.xxxvi-xxxvii).

**It is not hard to find symbolist elements in the work of Yeats and Eliot. Genesius Jones writes of the Symbolistes, 'Attention was concentrated on the inner world, which automatically suggests the subjective and inchoate. But within that dim expanse of consciousness was an undiscovered world of objective truth' (Approach to the Purpose, 1964, p.43): this is an area of subject-matter common also to Yeats and Eliot. Moreover, the 'objective truth' was to be conveyed in Symbolisme (in Mr. Jones's words) not through denotation, but through connotation, which would yield 'a clearly outlined but alogical meaning' (ibid., p.37): this seems to be a similar method to Pound's ideographic method. Thus Symbolisme (the forerunner of the French movement which was to have a great deal of influence on English Surrealism) is clearly akin to aspects of the work of Yeats, Pound, and Eliot.
and tradition as opposed, Eliot considered that tradition modifies, and is modified by, the individual talent. For him, 'a tradition is ... a way of feeling and acting which characterises a group throughout generations; and ... it must largely be ... unconscious':³ that is, it is an ingredient of the inner life rather than something imposed from outside by the rational will. He even went so far as to describe 'tradition' as 'the collective personality, so to speak, realized in the literature of the past'. ⁴

Such reasoning brings poetry close to the psychological concept of Jung's 'collective unconscious'.⁵ Eliot carried on the psychological reference (also echoing the Surrealists' description of psychic automatism) when he spoke of poetry being generated by 'the pressure of some rude unknown psychic material' which 'directs the poet' rather than vice-versa.⁶ This statement amounts to a denial of personal volition in the inception of poetry, similar to that suggested in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in the metaphor of the poet as catalyst. The 'extinction of personality'⁷ here, as Professor Stead has pointed out, 'is not an escape from the self, but an escape further into the self'—an escape which manifests 'that desire already observed in Yeats to release the poet from his own rational will'.⁸ In addition to aiding the fulfilment of this desire, participation in a tradition which is the 'collective personality' helps (as Eliot wished) 'to re-establish a vital connexion between the individual and the race'.⁹ It also creates a connection between the present of the individual and the past of the tradition, between the poet's particular experience and the universal fund of experience
residing in tradition.* Such connections, as we shall see in the ensuing examination, are often made (or at least referred to) in Eliot's poetry.

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Professor Henn's comment on the necessity of 'analysis and disintegration as a prior condition of synthesis'¹⁰ is notably applicable to Eliot's work; for in the latter's earlier poetry** the emphasis is on analysis of the modern urban civilisation, and on diagnosis of its spiritual ills.

The symbol of this civilisation for Eliot, as for Baudelaire before him, is the 'Fourmillante cité'—the industrial and commercial capital such as New York (Pound's 'N.Y.'), Baudelaire's Paris, or Eliot's own London, and the complex psychological forces at work within the environment.

In exploring these forces Eliot uses the same 'scepticism and uncynical disillusion'¹¹ which he attributes to Francis Herbert Bradley (author of the late-nineteenth-century examinations, Ethical Studies, Principles of Logic, and Appearance and Reality), and which he considers 'are a useful equipment for religious understanding'.¹¹

Such equipment is very relevant to Eliot's purpose, in that the examination of religion itself, and of its spiritual failure

*As Pound put it, 'Art does not avoid universals, it strikes at them all the harder in that it strikes through particulars' (Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, 1954, p.420).

**In practice I shall be using examples taken from Eliot's work outside Four Quartets in pursuit of his diagnostic strain (and, very occasionally I use material from Four Quartets as illustration of earlier preoccupations); thus by 'earlier poetry' here I mean poetry (centring in The Waste Land of 1922) from 1917 (Faulkner) to 1934 ('Choruses from "The Rock"').
within the modern city, occupies a key place in the poet's diagnosis.

He explains that 'Any religion ... is for ever in danger of petrifaction'. This is, in fact, what seems to have happened to the Church described in the earlier poetry; it has become devitalised, retaining only its outer forms—the 'forme précise de Byzance'; without the spiritual sanctity supposedly corresponding to the outer forms, the Church has become the 'Vieille usine désaffectée de Dieu'.

It is founded on the 'rock', certainly, but the rock which is part of the desert, of the dry desert of moral and spiritual accidie, and which is kin to the 'broken column' and 'stone images' of 'The Hollow Men'. The 'True Church' is no longer transcendental, but 'remains below/Wrapt in the old miasmal mist'. This is revealed in the reference to the Scriptures in the early poetry; for instance, the beautiful and moving Ecclesiastes iii.1.* has become involved with the relatively trivial everyday world of appointments to be kept and façades to be set up: 'There will be time, there will be time/To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet'. A similar point is made in 'The Hollow Men', when a line from the Lord's Prayer becomes less and less articulate and more and more fragmented as the parody of 'Here we go round the mulberry bush' impinges on it: 'For Thine is the/This is the way the world ends'. Implicit in this juxtaposition is an ironic contrast between a time when faith was alive and whole, and now, when it has become for the poet, at best, 'fragments ... shored against ... ruins'.

* To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted' (iii.1.-2.); there is much reference in Eliot's poetry to this particular book of the Bible, notably to Ecclesiastes xii.
The 'Word' which was 'In the beginning' in John i.1. has become a mute cipher; it is 'The word within a word, unable to speak a word'. This 'word' is no longer the divine *logos* imbued with life-giving faith, but merely a verbal symbol; it is a hollow semantic device used only for the sake of its impressive sound, such as the 'Polyphiloprogenitive' of Eliot's 'Sunday Morning Service' in the 'wilderness'.

These latter references to the 'word' make it clear that, as in Pound's poetry, words have (or should have) a significance far beyond a purely semantic one. So, when they 'Decay with imprecision', there are moral and spiritual overtones. If renewal is not achieved after this 'Decay', civilisation as a whole will be left with an outmoded vehicle of communication, 'For last year's words belong to last year's language/And next year's words await another voice'. Thus, language that remains static, instead of achieving harmonious community through its communicative ability, in effect only increases alienation and stagnation: it degenerates to 'The word within a word, unable to speak a word'.

Science does not help; for its round of 'Endless invention, endless experiment' brings only 'Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word'. That is, science guides Man's energies in the wrong direction, towards 'Knowledge of speech, but not of silence', towards 'knowledge of motion, but not of stillness'. By seeking to explain physical reality, using words of a logical and rational nature, scientific thought conspires to neglect or even obscure the spiritual reality—'the Word' of God, and the 'silence' and 'stillness' of Eliot's 'still point of the turning world'. The more everyday
life is concentrated on material wellbeing (with the aid of scientific advancement), the more it seems to become divorced from the spiritual energies of ancient faith.

Hence, in one sense, ours is 'an age which advances progressively backwards': it constitutes a spiritual retrogression. In his essay, 'Marie Lloyd', Eliot describes a Melanesian tribe in which the introduction of Western civilisation has resulted in a widespread 'dying from pure boredom'; as comment on this story he adds that, when science has created an artefact to replace every conceivable natural power, 'it will not be surprising if the population of the entire civilized world rapidly follows the fate of the Melanesians.' Science, then, by maintaining a firm grip on the physical world and by subordinating everything to what Genesius Jones in his book on Eliot has called 'the semantic of number', produces lack of spiritual and mental vitality, which results in a 'spastic state'. This is the symbolic waste land of Eliot's sceptical vision of modern civilisation.

The diagnostic aspect of Eliot's poetry centres most forcefully, and is most concerted, in the description of the society of The Waste Land.

This society is, from the outset, depicted as one held together only by communal fear—fear of the natural (but alien) vitality of the cruel month of April, fear of the 'handful of dust' which society has made of its life, and fear of salvation through purgatorial suffering, of 'death by water.'

The threat of death is carried through the poem by what one
might call a skeletal reference, an insistence on 'rats' alley/Where
the dead men lost their bones',\(^{30}\) and on 'bones cast in a little low
dry garret'.\(^{31}\) At its most extreme such description turns into a
gothic evocation of the 'Unreal City',\(^{32}\) with the hellish vision of
'hooded hordes swarming/Over endless plains'.\(^{33}\)

In this civilisation of the earlier poetry, all is debasement
and pollution, both on the physical, elemental level, and on the
spiritual level.

The earth has become the 'cracked earth'\(^{34}\) of the desert. The
air is tainted with 'the smoke coming down above the housetops'.\(^{35}\)
Fire is the 'Burning burning burning burning',\(^{36}\) of the city's mental
and physical hell; it gives rise to a light which is not the pure
light of revelation, but of a moon blighted with 'smallpox',\(^{37}\) and
diffused through the 'miasmal mist'.\(^{16}\) Even water, which is in any
event out of place in this city desert, is polluted; in the hellish
urban environment it brings only 'Fear' of 'death',\(^{29}\) and its life-
giving properties are poisoned by 'Oil and tar'.\(^{38}\)

The environmental circumstances are reflected in the people
themselves: for 'The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to
you,/The desert is in the heart of your brother.'\(^{39}\)

Thus human erotic love (in an environment which is the desert
rather than the earthly Garden of Delights) has degenerated to the

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\(^{*}\)One is particularly reminded of Bosch's hell (as depicted on
the upper half of the right-hand panel of his Garden of

\(^{**}\)Elliot's description of the city here is also reminiscent of
Wordsworth's 'blank confusion: true epitome/Of what the mighty
City is herself' (The Prelude, Book VII, 11.722-3). It is easy
to see why Frederick J. Hoffman speaks of Elliot's scene at this
point as 'transformed into an almost surrealist hallucination'
--In Wilhelm Fränge's *The Millennium of Hieronymus*

*Bosch*, 1952, p. 74 facing.

Unreal City,

I had not thought death had undone so many.

--T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', 11.60/63,

typist with 'Her drying combinations', or to the grotesque, mechanical, physical contortions of 'Sweeney Erect' and Mrs. Porter.

Human brotherly love, of which Eliot writes, 'What life have you if you have not life together? There is no life that is not in community,' is similarly debased. The ritual of communal food-sharing (Agape)* is now only 'the taking of a toast and tea' amid 'a hundred indecisions,' or a drink in the 'pub', amid rowdy conversation about adulteries and abortion. The religious aspect of this food-sharing (as revealed in the Eucharist Pageant which Eliot considers as belonging 'to the world of ... the high dream') is also tainted by 'the low dream', of which alone 'the modern world seems capable'. For 'Christ the tiger' is tamed by social convention until he is 'To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk/ Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero', the rather effeminate man with 'caressing hands'.

Community and harmony, in fact, are no longer evident in this social waste land. Harmony, once symbolised by the divine music of the spheres, is here parodied in the imagery of man-made music. The best example occurs in 'Portrait of a Lady'; in this poem the music image is a progressing one, becoming more fractured and out of tune as the human relationship unfolds, and more mechanical as the seasons move round. Initially, music is the 'attenuated tones of violins/Mingled with remote cornets'; then it becomes 'the insistent out-of-tune/Of a broken violin', finally degenerating to the sound of a 'street-piano, mechanical and tired'.

*For the terminology here I am indebted to Mr. Jones, who divides Eliot's spiritual exploration into three parts—the examination of Eros (human, sensual love), Agape (human love of community), and Charis (divine love); see Approach to the Purpose, 1964, pp.88 ff.
Dr. Leavis notes the multiple reference, in the earlier poetry, to ancient manifestations of universal harmony and community, writing that 'Vegetation cults, fertility ritual, with their sympathetic magic, represent a harmony of human culture with the natural environment, and express an extreme sense of the unity of life.'\(^4\)\(^9\) The purpose of this reference, as he suggests, is that of 'ironical contrast,' emphasising 'The remoteness of the civilisation celebrated in The Waste Land from the natural rhythms'.\(^5\)\(^0\) In that civilisation, lilacs—the blooms of natural life—are now merely a decoration for the rather passe society woman of 'Portrait of a Lady', who has 'a bowl of lilacs in her room/And twists one in her fingers while she talks.'\(^5\)\(^1\)* Also, the ritual dance around the magic fertility totem (of the mulberry bush) has deadened to a procession around the relatively arid life that has sprung from the desert—'Here we go round the prickly pear'.\(^5\)\(^2\) In our civilisation, in fact, (at least as it appears to Eliot at this stage) it is the cactus which seems to be 'At the still point of the turning world.'\(^5\)\(^3\)

Such is the 'analysis' and diagnosis; the 'synthesis',\(^1\)\(^0\) remains to be made.

Eliot seems to consider that the best way of moving towards synthesis of a unified vision is to re-establish spiritual contact

*Lilacs in their natural state are often associated with the fertility festival of the May; but according to popular superstition, 'it is said to be unlucky to bring lilacs into the house' (Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend [1949-50], II, p.622).
with what Mr. Jones calls the 'mysterious reality' moving behind 'theological concepts'. The poet seeks to evoke this spiritual reality in all its primitive vitality, in spite of the superstructure of the 'Polyphiloprogenitive' Church.

He realises that a religion which has suffered 'petrifaction' is 'only renewed and refreshed by an awakening of feeling and fresh devotion'. Indeed, increasingly in his poetry there appears a desire to revitalise the orthodoxy, in the breathing space provided by the 'years that walk between'. Working, in the poetry, from nature religions, through reference to ancient mythologies and fertility rites, he seeks to progress from the stylised formalities of the sterile 'usine désaffectée de Dieu' to a new synthesis of ancient and modern faiths, and to a combination of temporal and transcendental states. His goal is a living Christianity, vital as well as sacrosanct, and still in contact (as is 'Christ the tiger' of the poem 'Gerontion') with the primal origins on which it is superimposed—'depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas'.

A similar therapy seems to be advocated for the arts. In The Criterion in 1924 Eliot asks, 'Is it possible and justifiable for art ... to persist indefinitely without its primitive purpose?' The installation of such a 'primitive purpose' into poetry might help 'To purify the dialect of the tribe': that is, it might

*It is interesting to note how close such a scheme is to what I suggested in Chapter Two as a basic Surrealist preoccupation -- the bringing to contemporary significance of a 'primordial image' (C.G. Jung, The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature, 1966, p.82) which is at the root of a primitive animistic philosophy.

**Eliot here borrows Mallarme's words from 'Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe'—'Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu' (Stéphane Mallarme, Poesies [Gallimard], 1952, p.94).
achieve a necessary 'refreshment of poetic diction'\textsuperscript{59} which would resolve the impasse of the stagnant 'word within a word, unable to speak a word'.\textsuperscript{20} Thus the paralysis occasioned by the semantic of number, and its abstraction from the word of all connotative power, would be overcome. This would have a profound spiritual significance in that, as Mr. Hoffman points out, Man would be led beyond the scientific examination of his material environment, beyond the logic of things 'available to scientific proof': he would 'penetrate beneath the surface of objects' and would 'recover the capacity to believe in "the higher dream."'\textsuperscript{60}

These spiritual therapies are put into poetic practice mainly in the \textit{Four Quartets}, by an invocation of primitive religious rituals within the context of modern civilisation. For instance, 'Burnt Norton' seems to be built up of circles of time, music, and words, expressed mimetically through the dance as ritual. The dance celebrates the fertile sap rising as it strives to 'Ascend to summer in the tree', the movement of the blood in the veins with its 'dance along the artery', and the circle of celestial movement as figured in 'the drift of stars'.\textsuperscript{61} Finally the dance is enacted at the goal of Eliot's spiritual quest--the ultimate truth of the transcendental stillness beyond movement; as he puts it, 'at the still point, there the dance is'.\textsuperscript{61}

The advantage of being able to link such discrete material in the single figure of the dance is that it affirms a unity of life. It helps to explain 'both a new world/And the old made explicit,'\textsuperscript{62} being a pattern for both. It affirms a link between the temporal reality of 'the kingfisher's wing' and the spiritual
reality of the light which flows 'At the still point of the turning world.' At the same time the dance, with its ritual sympathetic magic, accommodates Man's temporal movement (which is 'The detail of the pattern') within the pattern of universal movement and with the ultimate immobility at the 'still point', where it becomes 'Timeless, and undesiring'.

In 'The Dry Salvages', the ritualised animistic impulse is conveyed more in terms of overt reference to primitive gods; for example, 'the river/Is a strong brown god', and 'The river is within us, the sea is all about us': that the river god is within us is evidence of Man's kinship with what Eliot calls the 'daemonic, chthonic/Powers,' which turn the circle of the spheres.

These last poems clearly take Eliot to what he describes as the 'frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist.' They take him to his 'still point of the turning world' which is beyond 'invention' and 'experiment', beyond scientific 'knowledge of motion', 'knowledge of speech', and 'knowledge of words'. This is the area of Pound's 'Unwobbling Pivot', Yeats's 'There', and the Surrealists' 'point sublime': as Eliot himself puts it, 'Here the impossible union/Of spheres of existence is actual'.

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In matters of poetic technique, Eliot obviously owes a great deal to 'il miglior fabbro', Ezra Pound. What I shall refer to as Eliot's 'mythic method' is virtually only a more effective adaptation of Pound's ideographic method.
Like Pound and Yeats before him, Eliot is faced with a poetic material consisting in the main of fragments of experience. In the poem, 'Hysteria', he realises that the most the poet can hope to achieve is the collection of 'fragments of the afternoon'. The problem is to find an acceptable framework or form within which to contain these. What is required is, in Eliot's words, a technique which carries on the 'revolt against dead form,' without resulting in the anarchy of total 'liberation from form.' Eliot is searching, in fact, for a method which will allow his verse to be 'formal without being regularized.' Pound's poetic method, with its careful control over words and images, but distaste for the 'dead form' and rhythm of much conventional verse at the time, meets these requirements.

Like Yeats and Pound, Eliot is searching for what Mr. Jones has called an 'organic pattern' in disparate experience. He is aware that 'poetic originality is largely an original way of assembling the most disparate and unlikely material to make a new whole'; he is also aware that even if tensions exist between elements within the new whole, these tensions (as Mr. Jones points out) 'are found to constitute an organic harmony: "harmony in contrariety".' Eliot explains this poetic phenomenon in his preface to St. J. Perse's Anabase, writing that 'at the end a total effect is produced. Such a selection of images has nothing chaotic about it. There is a logic of imagination as well as a logic of concepts.' It is precisely this 'logic of imagination' which gives coherence both to 'The Love

*It is impossible not to note the similarity here to the catachretic imagery of Surrealism's convulsive beauty.
Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (a poem depending on 'consistency of feeling, not on a fixed sequence of idea or event',75), and to The Waste Land (which 'is composed of a series of projections of "states of feeling", having no fixed centre but their common origin in the depths of one man's mind',76).

It is, in both of these poems, the 'mythic method' which is at work. This is not merely the use of myth as referent; it is, rather, the creation once more of a spiritual and poetic myth within which to frame experience. Mythic method is the application to poetic form of what Mr. Jones has called 'mythical thinking', which 'sees homogeneity in the most heterogeneous things: in dream and reality, in wish and fulfilment, in image and thing.'77 Eliot himself explains, 'It is simply a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.'78 He adds that 'Psychology ... ethnology and The Golden Bough have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago': that is, 'Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method.'79 As a result of using the method, Eliot creates in his poetry (according to Mr. Jones) 'an organ of consciousness which embodies the alogical, the alchemic, the magical and the cosmogonous in a sensuous form; an organ which has none the less its own ruling order, and which is the matrix of the abstract, the logical, the scientific, the religious and the historical.'80 It enables the poet to encompass 'the One in the Many,' and 'unity in contrariety.'81 Put in another way, it permits 'a resolution of the immense cosmic and spiritual dialectic which has been objectified'82 in Eliot's poetry: as do the methods
of Surrealism, it aspires to the still centre of harmony in contrarieties, the ultimate synthesis of heterogeneous elements into a cohesive whole.

* * * * * * * * *

Eliot's importance to Surrealism is manifold. His espousal of the Symboliste tradition put the French precursors of Surréalisme within the reach of the English poetic tradition. In addition, he was, as Howard Sergeant suggests, preoccupied with those 'currents of the [native] tradition which had been "flowing underground"', and which mark the inception of poetic modernism.

He pointed the way for future poetic explorers by his study of the inner life in wider terms within the 'Fourmillante cité'. This study took him over much of the ground later to be covered by the Surrealists—the diagnosis of the spiritual ills of Western civilisation, dissatisfaction with the dogma of the Spiritual Establishment, and with the undue faith placed in the scientific rationale, the desire for a rapprochement between Man and nature (manifested both in a primitive animism and in the hope of restoring art's 'primitive purpose'), a desire for the refreshment of poetic diction, an insistence on a tradition which approximates to Jung's Collective Unconscious, and an aspiration towards the 'point sublime'.

His creation (following Pound's lead) of a new poetic out of juxtaposed fragments prefigures basic Surrealist method. What Miss Bodkin has called 'the re-entrance into myth and legend achieved through phantasmagoria' is not only 'an art-form characteristic ... of Eliot's poetry', but one that is to characterise Surrealism also.
For these reasons I consider Eliot to be the most important modern fore-runner of Surrealism in England.

1 Quoted by Hugh Kenner, The Poetry of Ezra Pound, 1951, p.66.
2 1948, p.112.
5 The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature (Collected Works Vol. XV), 1966, p.80.
7 Selected Essays, 1961, p.17.
10 The Lonely Tower, 1965, p.70.
12 ibid., p.475.
14 'The Hipposotamus', ibid., p.51.
15 ibid., p.90.
16 'The Hipposotamus', ibid., p.52.
18 ibid., p.92.
19 'The Waste Land', 1.430, ibid., p.79.
20 'Gerontion', ibid., p.39.
21 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service', ibid., p.57.
22. 'Burnt Norton', ibid., p.194.
23. 'Little Gidding', ibid., p.218.
25. ibid., VII, p.178.
29. ibid., l.55, p.64.
30. ibid., ll.115-16, p.67.
31. ibid., l.194, p.70.
32. ibid., l.60, p.65.
33. ibid., ll.368-9, p.77.
34. ibid., l.369, p.77.
35. 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', ibid., p.22.
37. 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', ibid., p.27.
38. 'The Waste Land', l.267, ibid., p.73.
39. 'Choruses from "The Rock" ', I, ibid., p.163.
41. ibid., pp.44-45.
42. 'Choruses from "The Rock" ', II, ibid., p.168.
44. 'The Waste Land', ibid., p.68.
45. Selected Essays, p.262.
47. ibid., p.18.
48. ibid., p.20.

ibid., p.92.


The Hollow Men', ibid., p.91.

Coriolan', ibid., p.140 [also as note 22 above].

op.cit., p.176.

Ash-Wednesday', Collected Poems, p.100.

Gerontion', ibid., p.39.

Quoted by Jones, p.65.


Collected Poems, p.191.

ibid., p.192.

ibid., p.195.

ibid., p.205.

ibid., p.213.


Collected Poems, p.61.

ibid., p.34.


op.cit., p.17.


op.cit., p.84.

Quoted by Vivian de Sola Pinto, Crisis in English Poetry, 1963, p.184.
75 Stead, p. 151.
76 ibid., p. 150.
77 op. cit., p. 330.
78 The Dial, LXXV, 5 (November 1923), 483. Quoted by Jones, p. 58.
80 ibid., p. 60.
81 ibid., p. 127.
82 ibid., p. 141.
84 Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, 1963, p. 308.
CHAPTER EIGHT: The Outsiders—V. Conclusion.

Yeats, Pound, and Eliot were 'outsiders' principally because they introduced from outside foreign elements into the native tradition. Indicative in this respect are Yeats's interest in Tagore and the Mandukya Upanishad* and in Nōh plays, or Pound's Confucianism and ideograph. But the most important foreign element introduced by all three poets came from awareness of a 'European poetry'—from the Symboliste tradition of French poetry. This French movement's influence is particularly marked in Pound and Eliot, in their examination of the 'Fourmillante cité' where, in Louis Aragon's words, 'Paradis tout est dispersé C'est l'heure/Où plus personne ne peut dire le nom de celui qu'il touche', where civilisation revolves around Jean-Louis Bédouin's 'affreuse cour grise de ciment gris/Où l'on assassine un arbre'.

Dr. Leavis said of Eliot in 1932, 'He was more aware of the

*See especially Essays and Introductions, 1961, pp.393-4 and p.480.

**An even more striking parallel between the French and English descendants of Symbolisme occurs when André Breton, the arch-Surréaliste, writes:-

Du fond du pacte millénaire qui dans l'angoisse a pour objet de maintenir l'intégrité du verbe
Des plus lointaines ondes de l'echo qu'éveille le pied frappant imperieusement le sol pour sceller l'alliance avec les puissances qui font lever la graine


The echo here of Pound's interest in grain rite, in the search for clarity (integrity) of verbal definition, and in a pervasive primal animistic impulse, is unmistakable.

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general plight than his contemporaries, and more articulate: he made himself ... the consciousness of his age'.

Eliot was aided in his articulation of the spiritual plight of the city-civilisation by the poetic experiments of Pound. The latter 'reconstituted diction and syntax to denote the true movement of feeling, and so redeemed the style of modern poetry from an exhausted language'. Without doubt, Eliot and Pound 'together represent a decisive re-ordering of the tradition of English poetry.'

The 're-ordering', for which Yeats also might claim a share of the credit, involved a complex exploration of 'the individual imagination' and what Mr. Spender describes as its 'miracle-producing resources'. In the course of their exploration of the imagination, and of the whole inner life, Yeats, Pound, and Eliot prefigured virtually all of the important Surrealist themes, methods, and poetic techniques, as set out in Chapter Two above. It would not be stretching the meaning of the word too far to call elements of their work 'surrealist': they exhibited 'l'esprit' of what was to become 'la lettre' of Surrealism. This suggests that what appears at first glance to be Surrealism's sensational novelty, as it springs up in the thirties, is a superficiality, and that the essential surrealism below this exhibitionist façade is the continuation of new growth found in the work of the 'outsider' poets of the first thirty years of the century.

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3. 'Les Beaux Draps', ibid., p.66.


PART THREE:

The Thirties.

... Marx and Freud,

The figure-heads of our transition.


Surrealism is a typical city-delirium movement, a violent explosion of urban claustrophobia ....

--Palinurus (pseudonym for Cyril Connolly), The Unquiet Grave (1951), p.35.

Nous estimons que, devant le surréalisme, s'ouvre en Angleterre un vast champ d'action poétique, plastique, philosophique, etc. [sic]

CHAPTER NINE: Introduction.

We were a 'new generation', but it took me some time to appreciate the meaning of this phrase. It amounted to meaning that we had begun to write in circumstances strikingly different from those of our immediate predecessors and that a consciousness of this was shown in our writing.... The 1920's were a generation to themselves. We were the 1930's.


The thirties was the decade in which (amongst other things) the overt outbreak of Surrealism occurred in England. At the time, as Mr. Spender's above comment reveals, it seemed to be a period in which literary fashions were decisively changing.

Some younger poets saw themselves as a 'new generation' growing away from the influence of the dominant literary figures of the twenties. Indeed, some of the younger literary generation seemed to think that Eliot had deserted the cause of progressive writing; hence Gavin Ewart could write in 1933 that Eliot (having opened the way for a responsible modern movement in poetry in that 'He gave us a voice, straightened each limb') had 'left us to our own devices'; hence also Robin Skelton's comment in Poetry of the Thirties on the 'lament for a lost leader', and Francis Scarfe's comment on Eliot's withdrawal 'blushing into the queasy bosom of Anglo-Catholicism'.

If one looks back at the thirties from the present, it is obvious that both Eliot and Pound were at the height of their poetic
powers during the decade, and that their influence (not only, of course, in the restricted area of Surrealism, but on the poetry of the decade as a whole) was still considerable. Nevertheless, at the time, among certain younger poets there occurred what one might almost call a trahison des élèves, revealed in the opinion that the mentors of the previous generation were no longer qualified to pronounce on the expected new age. Geoffrey Grigson, for instance, wrote in 1933 that 'Mr. Eliot and Mr. Pound have restored the understanding of verse and have been good teachers'; but he qualified this remark by adding that 'Yet in as far as they have paradoxically written most original poems which are valuable products of the beginning of a new or at least a transitional art-age somewhat in terms of a dead or dying age ... they should by other poets be left alone.'

Rather more extreme was L.M.'s comment that 'Future historians may well lump in Eliot with the nineteenth century', with the codicil that 'The century has at last turned and we are in for something much more primitive and healthy.'

Surrealism was to take its place in this primitive new age, this rebellion away from the unhealthiness of the old century. It was to

*The ambivalence in attitude here was carried on in an article in the periodical New Verse, entitled 'In Memoriam T.S.E.'.
Geoffrey Grigson (editor of New Verse) apparently suggested to Charles Madge that the latter should write an obituary notice for Eliot; Madge complied, though he admitted, 'I found a peculiar irony in being asked thus to dispose of the only living poet' (New Verse, Nos. 31-32 [Autumn 1938], 18).

**This is presumably Louis MacNeice, since he is the only reviewer with these initials mentioned in the table of contents.

***Ezra Pound was dismissed, with rather less reverence, as 'The slap-dash old Yankee culture-alchemist on the trapeze' (anon., New Verse, No. 24 [Feb-March 1937], 24), or as 'amateur economist, anthology king, poet, admirer of Mussolini' (Roger Roughton?, Contemporary Poetry and Prose, No. 7 [November 1936], 136n).
make its own attempt at finding new values to replace old ones which no longer seemed efficacious.

There is some justification for Mr. de Spens's remarks that 'The history of Surrealism is, in a sense, the history of the whole interwar period' and that 'its development under the stress of world events ... constitutes a microcosm of the dilemma with which intellectuals everywhere were faced during those crucial and formative years'; for the impending 'revolution' in literature, of which Surrealism was a part, was only one aspect of a wider revolution. As Jung wrote in 1934, 'It is not a matter of a single thrust aimed at one definite spot, but of an almost universal "restratification" of modern man, who is in the process of shaking off a world that has become obsolete.' Julian Symons, in his excellent survey of the thirties, speaks of the belief at the time that 'the rebirth of Britain must come through chaos and catastrophe'; he adds that 'This idea, with sometimes the chaos and catastrophe stressed, sometimes the rebirth, was the basis of the art of the Thirties': in every sphere of life, in literature as well as in politics, revolution was in the air.

The hypothetical revolution (as it was reflected in the literature of the thirties) was presaged in three areas--in the world of natural forces in which 'the time of earthquakes ... [was] at hand', in the external human world of 'New styles of architecture', and in the inner human world of 'a change of heart.'

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*The upheaval in the natural world was most often used as a symbol of the latter 'revolutions'; it was with these two latter that poets were mainly concerned.
The idea of revolution seemed to be operant on two levels. The first of these was the overt political and physical level—the 'order and trumpet and anger and drum'\(^{11}\) of proletarian revolt, with its slogans such as 'Power is built on fear and empty bellies:'\(^{12}\) hence the political explorer, Marx, is figure-head.

The second level was the less tangible spiritual or ethical one. A re-orientation of consciousness was expected, in which one should 'Bother less over the spirits from the sky/Than the spirits from the earth',\(^{13}\) so that a rapport might be re-established with the neglected chthonic powers, and 'The secret of the soil' might grow 'through the eye'.\(^{14}\) This revolution in metaphysics looked to a time, in Dylan Thomas's words, 'When logics die,'\(^{15}\) and when, as Louis MacNeice put it, 'the park' would become 'a jungle/In the alchemy of night':\(^{16}\) hence the explorer of the irrational, Freud, is also figure-head.

The imminence of revolution was seen by many as imposing a definite duty on the poet. Humphrey Jennings, for instance, pointed out that 'society is in far too muddled a state for its poets to afford to waste their energies in the pleasantly limited worlds of clean fun and self-torture.'\(^{17}\) Such 'pleasantly limited worlds' were cultivated, in the time of approaching crisis, only by 'The Non-Interveners',\(^{18}\) who were regarded with contempt since they were side-stepping the crucial issues with which poetry was faced. Commitment, in fact, seemed to be a prerequisite among the young for the writing of poetry.

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\(^{*}\)This is the title of a poem overtly about English non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War; the poem goes beyond the temporal political issue, however, suggesting the wider moral implications of the cowardice involved in the act of opting out in general.
in this decade: as C. Day Lewis wrote, 'It is becoming now to declare my allegiance'.

Poets who did not face the revolution were escaping into 'illusion': for, according to Herbert Read, 'the notion of an art divorced from the general process of social development, is an illusion'. Such an escape was all the more deplorable in that, Mr. Spender maintained, 'Literature is one of the few strongholds where it is still possible to retain a sense of values and apply those values to the world.' He continued, 'It is worth remembering that in such a world, truth is a land mine deeply tunnelled under every position and wherever it is struck, there is an explosion.'

The problem for the poet became that of finding the best method of detonating the mine. He was faced with two necessities: these were the physical and political one, of operating on a society whose material inequalities had produced 'slums as big as doom', and the spiritual one, of evolving 'new values to replace old supports'.

Thirties poets discussed today are usually classified into one of two groups, as Social Realist or non Social Realist poets. This is a rather arbitrary classification which nevertheless has a certain validity in general terms; I shall adopt it here, speaking of the young activist poets in the decade (as opposed to 'The Non-Interveners', with whom I am not concerned in the present study) as either Social Realist or Surrealist poets.* Using this nomenclature, one might say

*This is a convenient critical shorthand only, since the existence of formal groups, either of Social Realists or of Surrealists, is highly debatable; rather, 'Social Realist' and 'Surrealist' are adjectives that might be applied to

[continued on next page]
that in general terms the Social Realist poets in the thirties tended to attempt the political detonation of Mr. Spender's mine of truth, whereas the Surrealists tended to seek a means of setting off a spiritual explosion (one might say, a crisis in consciousness).

Of course, the division between the two poetic approaches was neither clear-cut nor absolute. Indeed, Mr. Skelton suggests in *Poetry of the Thirties* that 'the propagandist and the poet, the mass observer and the introvert, are all (apart from the word surrealists) in agreement':²⁴ such difference as existed between the two poetic groups in the thirties was often, as he says, no more than a 'difference of emphasis.'²⁵

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Christopher Caudwell wrote in his book *Illusion and Reality* that 'The conflict between man's instincts and environmental reality is precisely what life is, and all the products of society— ... art, science, ... ethics and political organisation—are adaptations evolved to moderate and cure that conflict.'²⁶ It was this conflict which, in general terms, highlighted the difference of emphasis between Social Realist and Surrealist conceptions of poetry. The former urged the primacy of 'environmental reality', whereas the latter urged the promotion of 'man's instincts'; both were concerned with the solution 'in society' of 'a conflict between phantasy and reality',²⁷ but attacked the problem from different sides.

[continued from previous page] certain aspects of the work of certain individual poets: thus Auden, for instance, would be described most often as a 'Social Realist', but occasionally could plausibly be called a 'Surrealist' (as in the wayward scene-shifting of the weird charade 'Paid on Both Sides' [*Poems, 1948*, pp.9ff.] or in the narrative method used in *The Orators*).
Thus Day Lewis, in a Social Realist mood, wrote, 'Keep to the pithead, then, nor pry/Beyond what meets the eye,' since here were to be found the 'certainties' of 'household stuff, stone walls, mountains and trees'. In this conception of poetry any form of speculative mysticism—'the Sabbath of witches', 'the prayer to the sunset/And the adoration of madmen'—was relegated to 'Yesterday', where it could not blur the certainties of the issues involved in the coming political 'struggle'.

By contrast the Surrealists voiced opinions such as those of Mr. Caudwell when he wrote that 'Art is the consciousness of the necessity of the instincts.' By mysticising the instinctual and the unconscious impulses into a pseudo-religion, they claimed to be pursuing 'not flight into the unreal or into dream, but an attempt to penetrate into what has more reality than the logical and objective universe.' Believing, as did D.H. Lawrence, 'that we are pot-bound in our consciousness', they saw this as the major challenge to be met by poetry, even at the cost of subordinating the pressing temporal necessity of the political 'struggle': as Lawrence had put it as early as 1918, 'We have roots, and our roots are in the sensual, instinctive and intuitive body, and it is here we need fresh air of open consciousness.' Unlike the Social Realists, then, the Surrealists opted for a move away from the safety of 'the pithead', in an effort

*In the light of such a pronouncement as this, one can see the justification for Frederick J. Hoffman's comment on Lawrence, that 'outside the surrealist group, he nevertheless worked and argued for the cause' ('From Surrealism to "The Apocalypse" ', ELH, XV [June 1948], 149).
to revitalise poetic consciousness; they favoured the rather sensational 'step into the grisly dark, which is for ever dangerous and wonderful', considering that a more important truth (a psychic one) might be found here than in the utilitarian vision.

The response to machinery and machine-products in either 'school' was indicative of their different approaches to reality. The Social Realists accepted the machine into their poetry, so that 'a grain-/ Elevator in the Ukraine plain' was made to correspond to an ideal of 'Beauty' which 'breaks ground ... in strange places.' At its most extreme this impulse could result in such absurdities as Day Lewis's claim that 'God is an electrician'; but it could also be put to good effect as in Spender's poem, 'The Pylons'. The utilitarian object was, in fact, accommodated within the poetic mode.

On the other hand, the Surrealists tended to rebel against the machine, as being a symbol of Man's estrangement from the chthonic

* D.H. Lawrence wrote that 'Nothing is wonderful unless it is dangerous' (Phoenix, 1961, p.524); possibly there is a suggestion here of what André Breton was later to call convulsive beauty.

** It would be inaccurate to regard the attempted assimilation of the machine into poetry as a peculiarly thirties phenomenon. Arthur H. Clough, for instance, as early as 1853 had spoken of the use of 'continual images drawn from the busy seats of industry' (quoted by W.K. Wimsatt, jr. in 'Prufrock and Maud', Yale French Studies, No. 9 [no date], 88); or, more recently, as Wallace Fowlie points out, 'Apollinaire accentuates an urban magic, the new poetic force visible in bridges and machines, in automobiles and airplanes' (Age of Surrealism, 1950, p.92).
powers, 'an idol' which had become 'the object of his self-adoration.'\textsuperscript{38} Alternatively they regarded it as an emanation of a ruthless and almost totalitarian rationalism, and shouted, 'Give us back our dreams' in the face of 'the menace of the machine-men and their machine-guns.'\textsuperscript{39} An alternative to this total rejection of the machine (and of what it symbolised for the Surrealists) was the imaginative transformation of the machine-culture, so that mass-produced 'pitchforks' were turned into a non-utilitarian 'rubber',\textsuperscript{40} and factories were made to produce nothing more useful than 'ant-eaters' skiing-shoes'.\textsuperscript{41} The concept of utility was ridiculed in an attempt to transcend the stereotyped and habitual patterns of response, the 'weedgrown stupors',\textsuperscript{40} of Man in the Machine Age.

The use of Freud and Marx (and their 'technique of unsettlement')\textsuperscript{42} in thirties poetry also revealed the difference of approach between the two groups.

For the Social Realists Freud was a scientific explorer, whose techniques of psychoanalysis provided useful referents in contemporary poetry: thus Louis MacNeice could speak of 'fantasies' as 'Matter for the analyst'.\textsuperscript{43}

For the Surrealists Freud was the man who had taken the first 'step into the grisly dark',\textsuperscript{34} and had made possible an 'art based on psychoanalysis' which depended on 'a large number of parallels between dreams, primitive myths and rituals, and civilised art'.\textsuperscript{44} A.J.M. Smith wrote in 1934, 'I regard Freud (as I do also Frazer and Marx) as the creator of a myth which furnishes a body of dogma of immense use to the contemporary artist'; he added, significantly, 'One is not concerned

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with its scientific truth: its poetic truth is beyond reproach.\textsuperscript{45}

The Surrealist would simulate a psychological disorder rather than merely referring to it. Thus, in contrast to the Social Realists, as Mr. Skelton points out, 'The note of urbanity is replaced by a form of controlled hysteria; the ordered delineation of a disintegrating society is replaced by a deliberate distortion, expressive, rather than descriptive, of social and moral disorder.'\textsuperscript{46}

The Surrealists, in fact, tended to regard psychology and psycho-analysis as instrumental in creating an art-form of the unconscious rather than regarding them as the methods of clinical science.

Similarly, Marx for the Social Realists was specifically the figure-head of physical, proletarian revolution. Day Lewis, himself for some time a member of the Communist party, gave the call to arms when he wrote that 'Hammer is poised and sickle/Sharpned. I cannot stay.'\textsuperscript{47} He awaited 'Charging of barricades, bloodshed in city'.\textsuperscript{48} Marx presided, in this context, as political philosopher over a 'poetry' which (so the prefatory note to New Signatures assures us) 'is here turned to propaganda'.\textsuperscript{49}

The Surrealists used Marx in a different manner. He became, as A.J.M. Smith noted, 'the creator of a myth'.\textsuperscript{45} His political significance was subsumed under a wider revolutionary significance. This was reflected in André Breton's remark in 1930 that 'Le problème de l'action sociale n'est, je tiens à y revenir et j'y insiste, qu'une des formes d'un problème plus général que le surréalisme s'est mis en devoir de soulever et qui est celui de l'expression humaine sous toutes ses formes.'\textsuperscript{50} Thus Marxism was upheld by the Surrealists as a revolution in 'human expression' in the widest possible sense,
rather than as a purely political programme.

Ultimately, these differences resolved into a difference of response to the poetic vocation itself. The Social Realists considered that, in Auden's words, the poet must be 'more than a bit of a reporting journalist.' They accepted a 'journalistic immediacy ... imposed by the immediate tensions of the time'. Perhaps 'journalistic' is not a very fortunate word to use here in view of its connotations of sensationalism and fact-bending. What I take it to indicate in this case is a factual, concise, carefully controlled, and impersonal style—in Mr. Spender's words, a 'Clinical Detachment'. This is also Day Lewis's 'careful art', or Christopher Isherwood's 'strict and adult pen' (as described by Auden)—an art form which leads its audience 'to make a rational and moral choice'.

By contrast the Surrealists believed that 'The poet is distinct from the reporter (who is rather the scientist, in so far as the scientist makes use of words)': that is, 'the poet is a man who creates his own myths'. Thus, for them, 'The world of literary art is the world of tribal mythology become sophisticated rather than being a factual and purely-contemporary world. The poetic effect was expansive' rather than concise and carefully controlled. Instead of achieving impersonality, Surrealism reflected, if I may borrow Mr. Skelton's description, 'individual fulfilment' carried to

*Philip O'Connor, for instance, considered that 'there is room for everything and ... everything has a place' ('Useful Letter', Poetry of the Thirties [ed. Skelton], 1967, p.234).
'its logical extreme'. The audience (if one was countenanced at all) was encouraged to make a choice often both irrational and amoral: for, as Mr. Spender sees it, 'Surrealism was the attempt to liberate among the sane the forces of insanity, to construct a world after the pattern of man's most hidden dreams and desires.'

* * * * * * * * * *

Surrealism and Social Realism, then, were at opposite ends of the same spectrum of response in the thirties. To put this in slightly different terms, they were the thesis and antithesis generated out of what was basically the same poetic material. Thus Surrealism, while being an integral part of the decade as regards literature, was still only one aspect of it. It was one of several facets of what Mr. Symons has called 'the Thirties dream'.

For the purposes of the present thesis, there is no need to acknowledge the Social Realist impulse in the thirties any further than has already been done above. However, its exclusion henceforward does not represent a value judgement on my part; Social Realism is simply no longer relevant to the discussion in hand, though it has here served the useful purpose of putting Surrealism into a correct perspective within the decade.

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1 'Phallus in Wonderland', New Verse, No. 3 (May 1933), 7.
2 1967, p.27.
Auden and after, 1942, p.12.

'The Methodism of Ezra Pound', New Verse, No. 5 (October 1933), 22.

'Poems by Edwin Muir', ibid., No. 9 (June 1934), 18n.


The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature (Collected Works Vol. XV), 1966, p.119.

The Thirties, 1960, p.8.

David Gascoyne, 'And the Seventh Dream Is the Dream of Isis', New Verse, No. 5 (October 1933), 10.


'Auden, 'Song for the New Year', ibid., p.49.

Michael Roberts, 'In Our Time', ibid., p.53.

Geoffrey Grigson, 'Three Evils', ibid., p.223.


ibid., p.221.

'London Rain', ibid., p.278.

'Eliot and Auden and Shakespeare', New Verse, No. 18 (December 1935), 7.

Title of a poem by Geoffrey Grigson, in Poetry of the Thirties, pp.142-3.


Quoted by Roger Roughton, in 'Surrealism and Communism', Contemporary Poetry and Prose, Nos. 4-5 (Aug-Sept 1936), 74.

'The Left Wing Orthodoxy', New Verse, Nos. 31-32 (Autumn 1938), 16.
22. Spender, 'An Elementary School Class Room in a Slum', 
   Poetry of the Thirties, p.51.
24. p.33.
25. ibid., p.32.
26. 1937, p.188.
27. ibid., p.297.
30. op.cit., p.172.
31. Ferdinand Alquié, The Philosophy of Surrealism (tr. Bernard 
   Waldrop), 1965, p.84.
32. Review of A Second Contemporary Verse Anthology. In Phoenix, 
   1961, p.325.
33. 'Introduction to Pansies', The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence
34. Lawrence, Phoenix, p.324.
38. Eugene Jolas quoting Waldo Frank in 'The Machine and Mystic 
   America', Transition, Nos. 19-20 (June 1930), 381.
39. Stuart Gilbert, 'Art and Intuition', ibid., No. 21 (March 1932), 
   220-1.
42 Auden, 'In Memory of Sigmund Freud', Another Time, 1940, p. 117.

43 'Autumn Journal', III, Poetry of the Thirties, p. 46.

44 Hugh Sykes Davies, 'Sympathies with Surrealism', New Verse, No. 20 (April-May 1936), 20.

45 Answer to 'An Enquiry', ibid., No. 11 (October 1934), 9-10.

46 op. cit., p. 32.

47 'The Magnetic Mountain', 18, op. cit., p. 130.

48 'From Feathers to Iron', XXVII, ibid., p. 93.

49 Michael Roberts, 1932, p. 19.


52 G.S. Fraser, The Modern Writer and His World, 1964, p. 299.

53 World within World, p. 54.

54 'Self-Criticism and Answer', Overtures to Death, 1946, p. 61.

55 'To a Writer on His Birthday', Poetry of the Thirties, p. 169.


57 Herbert Read, 'Myth, Dream, and Poem', Transition, No. 27 (April-May 1938), 177.

58 Caudwell, p. 30.

59 op. cit., p. 30.


61 op. cit., p. 70.
CHAPTER TEN: Auden, Spender, and MacNeice.

Robin Skelton in *Poetry of the Thirties* speaks of W.H. Auden as 'the clear Master of the Period', noting that 'His sovereignty is never seriously in doubt'.¹ These seem to me to be perfectly reasonable statements, if one takes a general view of the poetry of the decade as a whole. By the same token, if one attempts an unbiased assessment, Frederick Grubb's comment that in 1934 Dylan Thomas (of all people) 'bid fair to overthrow Auden's school with surrealism',² is in excess of the literary-historical facts, as they appear in retrospect. Auden, in fact, as Mr. Skelton emphasises, 'dominates' the thirties 'from first to last'³ This is a necessary caveat to make before examining 'Auden's school' here; for Auden, Spender, and MacNeice must take a subordinate role in our view of the decade, since they concern us only in as far as they touch Surrealism.

* * * * * * * *

Auden, like most other poets of the thirties, is neither purely Social Realist nor Surrealist. While taking an interest in 'the installation of dynamos and turbines,/The construction of railways',³ and even in the 'civilised' 'drawing-room',⁴ he realises that 'the crack in the tea-cup opens/A lane to the land of the dead.'⁵ That is, in his poetry, a continual and undeniable threat is lurking beneath the surface of external appearance; for, 'Behind each sociable home-loving eye/The private massacres are taking place'.⁶
Poem 'XXIX' ('Consider this and in our time') of Auden's 1930 collection gives a good indication of Man's condition as Auden sees it. The material world which Man has built for himself appears to be grinding to a halt; transport and communications are at a standstill, industrial sites are deserted, and agriculture has been swallowed up: the poet describes 'silted harbours, derelict works,/ ... strangled orchards'.

Society (or at least the people in the middle and upper strata of society with whom Auden seems to be particularly concerned, and who should be setting an example for others) is also in a serious plight. 'The game is up', Auden warns, for those who 'pace in slippers on the lawns/Of College Quad or Cathedral Close,' and for those who support an educational system in which only 'the ruined boys' get 'prizes'.

The society in this poem is that criticised widely throughout his thirties poetry: it is juxtaposed in poem 'XXII' ('Get there if you can and see the land ...') with the derelict material world of 'Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves and choked canals'--the implication being that the social organism is in a chronic condition similar to that of the paralysed industry Auden here describes. People wile away their time 'At the theatre, playing tennis, driving motor cars' instead of taking steps to heal the illness at the core of civilisation. They have allowed themselves to be lured by the 'compelling logic' of pessimistic philosophers and poets, while the true literary 'healers'--such as 'Lawrence' and 'Blake'--have died and are beyond recall. The most powerful force in this society, as Auden seems to suggest in poem 'XXIX', is that wielded by 'the ill', by the throng of 'handsome and diseased
youngsters'; it is sickness which has most authority.

Man is consequently portrayed in the poem ('XXIX') not as the confident monarch of a healthy world, but as a being 'Seized with immeasurable neurotic dread.' In his situation there appear to be two possibilities: civilisation may either 'disintegrate on an instant in the explosion of mania', or it may 'lapse for ever into a classic fatigue.'

It is the first of these which, Auden predicts, is to occur: for, as he emphasises in poem 'XVI' ('It was Easter as I walked ...'), 'It is time for the destruction of error' and 'This is the dragon's day, the devourer's'. It seems that a crisis in consciousness is imminent, in which (to borrow phrases from other poems in the collection) 'the powerful forces latent/In soils' will be mobilised again, and the 'archaic imagery' of the emotions may be restored. The atmosphere here is strikingly similar to that which pervades much Surrealist poetry.

However, there is a difference. One feels that Auden is relying, in place of the magical imagination, on the rational will: that is, his poetry is all on a more conscious, more clinical, level than that of Surrealism. This is reflected in his verse's overt political content, its use of Leninism (as in 'To hunger, work illegally,/And

*Auden's description of Man's society, in fact, seems to coincide with Freud's hypothetical 'diagnosis' that 'many systems of civilization have become "neurotic" under the pressure of the civilizing trends' (quoted by Reuben Fine in Freud, 1963, p.179).
be anonymous*14*), and its planned and rational Revolution of 'We made all possible preparations'.15

In the introductory quotation to *Look, Stranger!* of 1936, Auden asks the rhetorical question, 'What can truth treasure, or heart bless,/But a narrow strictness?'.16 One feels that perhaps he uses the political reference in his poetry to achieve such a 'narrow strictness': it is a discipline which 'truth' must 'treasure' in the face of 'the external disorder, and extravagant lies,/The baroque frontiers, the surrealist police'.16 The 'narrow' vision imposed by the exigencies of the temporal thirties situation, of course, leaves the poet no space to do more than mention in passing the 'Trolls' who run 'Starving through the leafless wood';17 attention to these neglected yet implacable demonic emanations from Man's unconscious must be subordinated to the immediate necessity of making 'love' work 'His public spirit'.18

Even so, Auden continues to be aware that, in spite of all Man's rational plans (his 'possible preparations'), the 'Trolls' continue to exist as a threat beyond the jurisdiction of the will. Man, after all, remains 'Uncertain and afraid';19 he is like a child 'afraid of the night', a child 'Lost in a haunted wood'.20 Auden is similar to the Surrealists in realising that the 'chthonic' powers of 'Night and the rivers' may be the 'Destroyer of cities and the daylight order'.21

*Monroe K. Spears writes that 'No one seems to have noticed that ... [this] is a quotation from Lenin, who says that one must "go hungry, work illegally and be anonymous" '; Mr. Spears also notes that 'Auden quoted these passages in his 1934 essay on T.E. Lawrence' (The Poetry of W.H. Auden, 1963, p.161).
As a result he is aware that supreme confidence in this 'daylight order' is a delusion: for 'the mirrors where our worlds are made' are 'warped', foiling the attempt at objective reportage in the clear light of the rational will.

This is by no means to suggest, of course, that Auden is in any way a member of the thirties Surrealist group. For it becomes clear that whereas the Surrealists (while using both public and private spheres in their poetry) set more store by the private and personal world of imagination, Auden's poetry (while also using both worlds) is orientated outwards, towards the public world that universalises the specific illness of the individual mind: 'thus England as a whole becomes a sick nation--'this country of ours where nobody is well'.

A more easily discernible distinction is one of tone and structure. The Surrealists are likely to employ a structure mimetic of the unseen, chaotic forces depicted in their poetry. In the effort for organic form, they tend to immerse structure in the violent flux to which they are prone to succumb. Auden, on the other hand, uses a carefully controlled structure, and a tone which is both measured and diagnostic in his treatment of 'the life' which is 'Lightly buried' in the 'Personal Unconscious'. That is, Auden's verse reflects the scientific and detached examination of psychosomatic

*Mr. de Sola Pinto remarks that the poetry of Auden and his associates 'can be described as a new attempt to make the Voyage Without while retaining the gains of the Voyage Within which has been achieved by such explorers as Eliot and Lawrence' (Crisis in English Poetry, 1963, p.219).
illness rather than the involved imitation of hysteria: hence Dylan Thomas could say, 'I sometimes think of Mr. Auden's poetry as a hygiene,... a sanitary science'. 25 Auden remains, in fact, the poet-scientist rather than the poet-alchemist.

At most, then, one might reasonably say that there are certain affinities between aspects of Auden's poetry in the thirties and aspects of Surrealism. Mr. Skelton notices that the 'new generation of poets' 26 mentioned in A Hope for Poetry* have in common with Auden (and MacNeice) an approach which is not 'straight-forwardly didactic', which uses 'the form of the fable',** and which sometimes exploits 'a taste for the grotesque'. 27 A similar 'esprit' seems to be at work at times in Auden and in Surrealism.

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The same is arguably true of Stephen Spender's poetry. As is Auden, Spender is aware 'of a fear/And the memory of chaos,' which lies 'Beneath the land's will'. 28*** He is also aware that 'man behind his mask still wears a child.' 28 Such recognitions reveal that

*These poets are those most closely associated with Surrealism in the thirties; Mr. Day Lewis mentions 'George Barker, Dylan Thomas,... David Gascoyne', and Mr. Skelton adds the names 'Ruthven Todd, Roy Fuller,... and Kenneth Allott' (Poetry of the Thirties, 1967, p.31).

**This is a form eminently noticeable in some of Auden's plays, such as The Dance of Death, 1933, and The Dog Beneath the Skin (with Christopher Isherwood), 1935.

***He realises that irrational, or at any rate non-civilised, elements continue to exert pressure on Man's façade of material wellbeing (pace the hunger marchers), in spite of the apparent triumph of Man's 'tempered will' ('New Year', Poems, 1933, p.65) in industry.
the poet is drawn to penetrate beneath the surface. This penetrating vision is possibly part of what Mr. Spender calls *The New Realism.* In the pamphlet of that title he writes, 'The greatest achievements of contemporary art are all by people who have refused to interpret life at this [the purely physical and mundane] level; the artist has become subjective, introspective, abstract, fantastic, surrealist, mad, all of these things sooner than reflect a kind of life lived by people who do not seem to live, who have no philosophy, no view of life at all except what is imposed on them by their ... possessions.' In this statement he seems to be closer to Surrealism than to Social Realism.

In his late-thirties poetry Spender himself tends to deny the primacy of external reality. He reacts away from 'the necessity of sweeping and immediate action' which was the first concern of the political Social Realists and which conspires 'to dwarf the experience of the individual.' Instead he turns towards 'a kind of writing which is more personal,' and which includes 'fantasy and illusion.'

One of the results of the more personal approach is that the poet's own 'body' becomes synonymous with 'The World' in which 'the dark and light' are bound together, as in the poem 'Darkness and Light'; the poet is made aware of the 'lucid day' and 'the chaos of ...

*Mr. Spender aptly illustrates this when he suggests the essential difference between Auden's poetic approach and his own: he explains, 'Auden was a highly intellectual poet, an arranger of his world into intellectual patterns,... As for me, I was an autobiographer restlessly searching for forms in which to express the stages of my development' (*World within World*, 1951, p.138).
darkness' existing within himself: both the rational and irrational elements of his personality are acknowledged, with the possibility of a future reconciliation. This future reconciliation of the opposites of dark and light possibly reminds one of the Surrealists' 'point sublime' at which opposites are reconciled in universal peace and harmony. Indeed, Spender has his own version of the 'point' in what he calls 'the still centre'; it appears to be virtually identical to Eliot's 'still point'—a place of (in Spender's words) 'peace' in the centre of 'the world's circular terror,' where 'love' is released at last from 'the will's error.'

Once again, without in any way subscribing to 'la lettre' of Surrealism, this poetry sometimes suggests 'l'esprit' of surrealism.

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One impulse in Louis MacNeice's poetry also seems to be towards surrealism: that is, he sometimes exhibits an unreason that has similarities with Surrealism.

At one point he claims to have left behind 'The cautious clause' and 'The laws of the over-rational mind', further stating that 'I will not bother/Any more with proof'. He is lured and fascinated instead by what he calls the 'immutably alien'. He desires the

*This is evidently an important concept for Spender, since it forms the title of his 1939 collection of poems. However, it is important to note that, in the poem to which I specifically refer above ('The Separation'), the 'still centre' is posited in highly personal rather than in philosophical terms: that is, it is seen primarily as the point at which an ideal reconciliation may occur between the poetic spokesman and a loved one from whom he is separated (though there is a suggestion of a wider, less personal significance in the grandeur of the language used—'the world's circular terror' and the 'tender birth of life').
primal, natural power of 'a woman with haunches out of the jungle' who has 'the brute swagger of the sea', and whose love will be 'the drop/From the cliff of my dream'. 36 Later he amplifies this desire when he cries, 'Only give us the courage of our instinct'. 37

The lure of the non-rational world is suggested in the imagery of his poetry. Often the imagery is only mildly unreasonable, as in the description of a road which 'swings round my head like a lasso/Looping wider and wider tracts of darkness', 38 or in the description of a girl 'Whose hair is twined in all my waterfalls'. 39

Occasionally this imagery becomes more weird, as is the case with the description of 'The Preacher' who wraps himself up in a ball of black string which represents 'His faith and his despair'. 40

Backing up the imagery are other effects calculated to disturb normal logical sequences of thought. The time scale may be distorted, so that 'Salome' can walk into a modern 'Night Club', 'bearing/The head of God knows whom.' 41 The distance between appearance and reality may be telescoped so that the two become indistinguishable; this happens in the poem 'Christina', when the broken doll Christina and the lady Christina blend into a single figure.

The culmination of such a poetry of unreason in MacNeice's work occurs in isolated instances such as the poem 'The Dowser', when the scene created becomes wholly fantastic; in this poem we read:

A well? A mistake somewhere ...

More of a tomb ... Anyway we backed away
From the geyser suddenly of light that erupted, sprayed
Rocketing over the sky azaleas and gladioli. 43
With such disjointed, vivid, and unreal pictorial effects MacNeice's poetry seems to come, on occasions, close to Surrealism.

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It would clearly be unwise to over-emphasise the surrealist content, either of MacNeice's poetry, or of that of Auden or Spender; for it only constitutes one small element of a considerable poetic output which reveals a variety of approaches and themes.

However, examination of the work of these three important poets of the thirties does at least show what one might reasonably describe as a surrealist spirit intermittently at work in poetry usually classified as Social Realist. This suggests that the Surrealism of the thirties is not merely an isolated aberration divorced from poetic tradition at the time, but in fact springs from impulses widespread among poets during the decade; as Mr. Scarfe is prepared to admit at the end of the thirties, in the light of his own poetic experiences, 'We are all Surrealists sometimes.'

2 _A Vision of Reality_, 1965, p.179.
3 'Spain', _Poetry of the Thirties_, p.133.
4 'VIII' ('It's farewell to the drawing-room's civilised cry,'), _Another Time_, 1940, p.26.
5 'XXVI' ('As I walked out one evening,'), ibid., p.56.
6 With Christopher Isherwood, 'In Time of War', XIV, _Journey to a War_, 1939, p.272.
7. 'XXIX' ('Consider this and in our time'), Poems, 1948, p.87.
8. ibid., p.88.
9. 'XXII' ('Get there if you can and see the land ...'), ibid., p.73.
10. ibid., p.74.
11. ibid., p.75.
12. 'XVI' ('It was Easter as I walked ...'), ibid., p.65.
13. 'XX' ('The strings' excitement, the applauding drum'), ibid., p.70.
14. 'III' ('Our hunting fathers told the story'), Look, Stranger!, 1936, p.17.
15. 'XII' ('We made all possible preparations'), Poems, p.57.
17. 'VIII' ('Now the leaves are falling fast'), ibid., p.24.
18. 'XXI' (' Easily, my dear, you move, ...'), ibid., p.51.
19. 'Occasional Poems', IV ('September 1, 1939'), Another Time, p.112.
20. ibid., p.113.
22. 'In Sickness and in Health', ibid., p.46.
24. 'Lighter Poems', I ('Sharp and silent ...'), Another Time, p.68.
27. Skelton, p.32.
28. 'View from a Train', The Still Centre, 1939, p.46.
29 1939, p. 10.

30 Introduction to The Still Centre, pp. 10-11.

31 ibid., p. 11.

32 'Darkness and Light', ibid., pp. 77-78.

33 'The Separation', ibid., p. 85.

34 From 'Out of the Picture', II, Collected Poems, 1949, p. 98.

35 'Autumn Journal', XI, ibid., p. 143.

36 'Eclogue between the Motherless', ibid., p. 38.

37 'Autumn Journal', XXI, ibid., p. 165.

38 ibid., XIV, p. 148.

39 ibid., IV, p. 126.

40 'Novelettes', VI, ibid., p. 198.

41 'Entered in the Minutes', III, ibid., p. 209.

42 'Novelettes', IV, ibid., pp. 196-7.

43 ibid., p. 211.

44 Auden and after, 1942, p. 190.
CHAPTER ELEVEN: The Surrealists.

Stephen Spender speaks of the mid-thirties as 'a time when fashions were becoming surrealistic'. The comment is certainly justified as regards literature, in that the earlier literary symptoms of irrationalism* became Surrealism itself in the first half of the decade.

Francis Scarfe explains that 'until about 1930 Surrealism had received but scant, or derisory, attention in this country.' He continues, 'It was my own generation, nourished on Freud and Marx, and heartily dissatisfied with the state of modern life, who took the plunge, backed by some sympathetic writers of the older generation, especially Herbert Read.' This dissatisfaction, which had been accumulating from the latter half of the Great War and through the twenties, reached its peak 'after the great financial crisis of 1931, which profoundly moved the younger generation,... seeing the two million unemployed and the rapid disintegration of the European system'.

The hunger marchers on English roads obtruded the crisis upon a nation in which, Mr. Scarfe argues, 'the worst effects of the war' had been 'less felt' than in Europe (scene of all the war's battlefields). After the oblivious and 'juvenile naughtiness of the neurotic twenties', the thirties generation suddenly came alive

*Such symptoms were, as Mr. Scarfe suggests, 'the new sexual-emotional doctrine of Lawrence (with a self-made psychology and personal "philosophy")' or 'the ghosts and dragons of Robert Graves, author of "Poetic Unreason"'; Mr. Scarfe considered these to have arisen from the same impulse which had produced Dadaism and Surrealisme on the continent—movements he described as 'signs of a psychological illness in society, resulting from the horrors and irrationalism of war' (Auden and after, 1942, p. 145).
to the dimensions of the dilemma.

Often, Revolution seemed imminent, as the only effective means of shaking off mass apathy, and of ameliorating the undermined socio-economic structure in England. This was of great significance to Surrealism: for, as David Gascoyne suggests in his preface to Hölderlin's Madness, 'periods of change in the direction of society, periods of revolution' are often accompanied by 'a sudden upsurge of lyricism and of man's unconscious thought', both of which are important elements in Surrealist poetry.*

The impulses contributing to Surrealism cohered and were 'officially' formulated in the middle years of the thirties. Charles Madge wrote in 1935, 'Surrealism is now in its academic period--the period of explanations and anthologies--the wider public.' The crucial critical documents of this period were (from the younger generation) Gascoyne's A Short Survey of Surrealism (1935) and his translation of M. Breton's What Is Surrealism? (1936), and (from the older generation) an anthology edited by Herbert Read and entitled Surrealism (1936).**

*André Breton speaks of the importance of 'a lyrical element that conditions for one part the psychological and moral structure of human society,' an element which, so he assures us, Surrealism is prepared to champion in the face of a 'capitalist society' (What Is Surrealism?, 1936, p.87).

**This English publication contained essays by Read, Breton, Hugh Sykes Davies, Paul Éluard, and Georges Hugnet, and a large number of photographs of Surrealist paintings and objects, but no poetry (with the exception of some Surréaliste poetry quoted by Hugnet in his essay): it remains, therefore, a document of value as regards theory rather than as regards practice.
However, it is important to realise that this 'official' documentation (which has formed the core of Surrealist theory as outlined in Chapter Two above) came, not from an 'iron-disciplined élite', 8 such as existed in France at the time of the first Manifeste (1924), but from what Roger Roughton described as 'the loosely-constituted English Surrealist Group'. 9 The prophet-and-disciples organisation of the French movement was never much in evidence in England: there was no 'noisy expulsion and excommunication', 8 no assumption (in such critical pronouncements as were diffidently offered) of an 'ex cathedra infallibility.' 10 There was no close equivalent in England to the militant French literary periodicals, La Révolution Surréaliste and Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution; there was no official organ or mouthpiece, nor indeed very much formal organisation at all.

Quite a large amount of Surrealist theory and poetry was published in the periodical, New Verse; but the editor was emphatic about the fact that 'We have not entered into any bloc with the French—or the English—Surrealists.' 11 The most strongly Surrealist-orientated periodical in the thirties in England was Contemporary Poetry and Prose. But even here the editor, Roger Roughton, maintained that it was 'in no way an official Surrealist magazine;' he supported this contention by pointing out that 'of the fifty-odd contributors to Volume One, only about twenty are or were surrealists in any sense of the word.' 8

The fact remains, then, that Surrealism was scarcely an official school of poetry at all in England, but was, rather, 'a state of mind,' 12 which found its voice in a number of poets who were writing
in independent rather than partisan periodicals.

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Hugh Sykes Davies, airing his 'Sympathies with Surrealism' in 1936, complained that 'the theory is of a poor quality';¹³ but I would say that, in spite of certain weaknesses and idiosyncracies, there was very little wrong with it as theory (in the form in which it existed in England): it was the poetry written under the auspices of Surrealism in the thirties which was in general of a poor quality.

Most frequent success seemed to be achieved through weird or outrageous humorous effects, as in John Collier's 'Possibly a Banana',¹⁴ or Philip O'Connell's peculiar series of 'Poems'.¹⁵

Often, however, one feels that Surrealism itself was in danger of deteriorating into a joke, of becoming a philosophy wilfully 'played for laughs'. O'Connell and Roger Roughton were the worst culprits in this direction. O'Connell, for instance, wrote, 'Yes, I have an intuition/(and this only when I am in a dark room with my private African Congo tribe rioting around)';¹⁶ or Roughton began a catalogue-poem sequence with 'Tomorrow the palmist will lunch on his crystal/Tomorrow REVOLT will be written in human hair':¹⁷ such examples of frivolous Surrealist writing are themselves close to pastiche, undermining the philosophy's avowed serious intentions of

*Unfortunately, such judgements are often rather difficult to defend by quotation, since the effect (assuming that there is one) is usually dependent on accumulation. However, the last seven of O'Connell's 'Poems' (which may be taken as fairly representative of the Surrealist humorous grotesque) are readily available in Mr. Skelton's Poetry of the Thirties, 1967, pp.242 ff.*

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treat the intuitive imagination, primitivism, mysticism, and human revolt. Mr. Skelton notes that in thirties poetry 'it is often hard to tell whether a poem is to be condemned for undergraduate and narcissistic posturing, or praised as a truly witty impersonation of the Zeitgeist made more subtle by ironic overtones.'\textsuperscript{18} The difficulty certainly exists in these quotations.

However serious their intentions, poets such as O'Connor and Roughton attracted the attention of the satirist. Surrealism thus became the easily-hit target of merciless (and often amusing) pastiches. A good example is a series of prose-poems in \textit{New Verse}, which is advertised on the contents-page of that periodical as 'A TERRIBLE BATTLE FOUGHT ON THE FIFTY-TWELFTH DAY OF ROTTEN STICKS, and other documents from the same id.'\textsuperscript{19} These pieces are, apparently, 'admirable results of surrealist method unconsciously used', and 'written by an ex-regular soldier, and used to advertise his boot and shoe business.'\textsuperscript{20*} They certainly seem to bear out Julian Symons's comment that 'It is possible to take a quite different view of the Thirties from that which sees the period as one of breast-beating earnestness, and to maintain that it is marked by an excessive regard for the trivial and the flippant.'\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{flushright}
In fact, the Surrealists too often fell short, not only of
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\begin{quote}
"Though a long-established, respectable and respected philosophy would be able to withstand the assault of pastiche, Surrealism I would suggest, was in danger of being undermined; once it was regarded as a trivial laughing-stock, its audience would tend to become prejudiced against any suggestion of serious purpose behind the apparent freakishness of Surrealism's poetic vision."
\end{quote}

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'breast-beating earnestness,' but of any serious purpose whatsoever. Mr. Symons writes that 'Great literature can be made out of any myth,... but it is a prime requisite that the myth must correspond to something which the artist takes with the deepest, most reverent seriousness.' In the frequent absence of this 'prime requisite' from Surrealist literature, the poetic output became incommensurate with the avowed high seriousness behind the theory. Good effects such as that created by O'Connor's vision of 'The people' dragging 'a train of ancient monsters,' the 'cumbersome shadows with banners/of factory hours and weekly wage', were not much in evidence. The marriage of fantastic and social impulses in this quotation approaches a Surrealist ideal; but this was only an isolated example.

Instead of the desired ideal of 'the evocation of the instinctive personal and collective universe', or 'the attempt to define the new man in relation to his primal consciousness', or 'the revolution of the word' in Surrealist poetry, more often we have only arbitrary (and soon boring) strings of repetitive images. As M. Breton had already discovered, there turns out to be 'an evident pattern' in the imagery drawn from the subconscious via automatic writing and dreams--a pattern which, he admits, has 'greatly hampered the species of conversion we had hoped to bring about'. Moreover, these images seem to be the product of intellection and will as much as of untrammelled imagination. Marcel Raymond makes an

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*That is, in the quotation O'Connor attempts the incorporation of *la surrealisme* with the 'real' in 'un ensemble plus vaste, plus complexe,... plus veridique, qui n'est autre que la Realite, une et multiple' (J-L. Bédouin, *Vingt Ans de Surrealisme*, 1961, p.17).
important point when he writes that 'surrealist texts ... are ultimately revealed to be products of culture, and of the most advanced culture—by no means resulting from the free exercise of a faculty or verbal invention shared more or less equally by all men.'

Where we should feel (when reading Surrealist poetry) 'the primal experience' as 'a most powerful intuition that would like to become expression', we get a slack poetic-prose in which there is neither economy nor poetic tension in the verbal texture; apparently, 'there is room for everything and ... everything has a place.'

The Surrealist 'perversion of sense into nonsense, of beauty into ugliness' often did not live up to Jung's ideal of a 'creative achievement' in which 'nonsense almost makes sense and ugliness has a provocative beauty'. Rather, the 'perversion' or distortion appeared as simply novelty for novelty's sake. It was a result of the 'conflict with the mass of superstition and social prejudice commonly attached to the name of literature', perhaps; but it was often carried to such lengths that literature was forgotten completely. The concentration of energy on becoming 'adepts at painting gothic letters on screens' and on 'tying up parcels with pieces of grass' turned out to be a perversion of, rather than an application of, creative effort. The cultivation of irrational

*As J.B. points out in New Verse, where one has no poetic tension, 'the lack of pressure leaves you material without form' ('Honest Doubt', New Verse, No. 21 [June-July 1936], 15).
actions that lead to disorder was frequently pushed to such an extreme that, as Clifford Browder says, 'disorder may represent a Surrealist wonderland, but even a wonderland can be monotonous, if its phenomena flow endlessly without offering a foothold to interpretation.'

Charles Madge spoke of Surrealism in theory as 'a method of dealing with the irrational without sacrificing a rational point of view.' But, in practice, a 'point of view' often seemed in danger of disappearing altogether. As O'Connor wrote, 'there is no formula for disruption of pink plaster'; that is, the distortion and disruption depicted threatened to become so anarchic as to preclude any shaping influence on the poet's part: not only was he thus forced to sacrifice his artistic duty of moulding his raw material into a cogent vision, but his technique, instead of being a 'dynamic discipline', became swamped and sometimes virtually ceased to exist.

Alternatively, the poet might take the easy way out, and borrow a point of view if he could not achieve one of his own. Mr. Sykes Davies noted that 'some young poets have attempted to transfer into English words the material of surrealist visual art.' Here, the images were apparently ready-made for the poet; the work of art already had shape, and all that was required was exegesis through a straightforward descriptive process. However, the result was a total lack once more of imaginative pressure and tension, since a point of view was merely transcribed: a copy never seems to have the immediacy of impact of an original. Gascoyne's poem 'The Very Image', significantly dedicated to a painter (René Magritte),
reveals the weaknesses of Surrealist poetry as art-copy; the poet, in a flat tone and rhythm, attempts to present a series of pictures: he is taking on the painter in the world of visual art, and inevitably failing. The opening stanza of the poem presents the image of a woman's head hung upside down from a cloud, which is transfixed on a far-away steeple. Comparison with the English Surrealist painter's, Roland Penrose's, 'The Invisible Isle'*(completed in 1936, the same year as Gascoyne's publication of 'The Very Image'), is inevitable. Mr. Penrose's image, though, is heightened in effect by colour, texture, and perspective; whereas Gascoyne's image is supported neither by these, nor by any of poetry's technical machinery--mimetic rhythm, significant rhyme or half-rhyme, or other aural or visual effects. The dramatic vitality of Surrealism's convulsive beauty is wholly absent, in fact, from the poem.

Often, then, one finds among the English Surrealists a mis-application, distortion, or misunderstanding of Surrealism's theories when they were put into poetic practice. The superficial sensationalm of the movement was often cultivated without any attendant depth of purpose to back it up on close scrutiny; the result was a flimsy, artificial poetry devoid of precisely that vitality which Surrealism sought to achieve. The reason for this seems to me to have been partly dilettantism in treating this unusual avant-garde method of writing, to a lesser extent weaknesses in the theory itself, but in the main simply bad writing on the part of the poets.

*See p.181A, below.
In Surrealism
(ed. Patrick Waldberg), 1966, plate 90.

her head appearing upside-down upon a cloud
the cloud transfixed on the steeple

far away

--David Gascoyne, 'The Very Image',
interested in Surrealism.*

Certainly, on such evidence as I have cited above, one would be tempted to agree with Mr. Skelton when he says that 'surrealism made its contribution more in terms of translations than in original English poems.' 37

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There was, however, better Surrealist material produced by English poets in the thirties than that which has so far been mentioned. Though Surrealism possibly attracted more than its fair share of ineptitude, nevertheless it inspired some very effective poetry too. A fairly representative (and readily available) selection of good and bad Surrealism is embodied in the 'When Logics Die' section of Mr. Skelton's Poetry of the Thirties. 38**

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One of the poets who made good use of Surrealism, though his poetic output was small, was Hugh Sykes Davies. His essays on Surrealist theory included 'Surrealism at This Time and Place', 39 (in which he classified himself with the Surrealists), and 'Sympathies with Surrealism' 40 (in which he preferred to regard himself as an uncommitted sympathiser).

*As Louis Aragon had pointed out, 'Si vous écrivez, suivant une méthode surrealiste, de tristes imbécillités, ce sont de tristes imbécillités' (quoted by J-L Bédouin in La Poesie Surrealiste, 1964, p.11): that is, it was not necessarily the fault of the theory that so much Surrealist poetry was so poor.

**Though one regrets Mr. Skelton's omission of such fine poems as 'Quicksilver' (New Verse, No. 20 [April-May 1936], 7-8) and 'Birds are blown to the light ...' (ibid., No. 22 [Aug-Sept 1936], 4-6) by Kenneth Allott, or Gascoyne's 'The Truth Is Blind ...' (ibid., No. 18 [December 1933], 14-15).
Theory was put into practice in a few short poems, and in the long, narrative prose-poem, *Petron*, of 1935.* This latter is the most protracted attempt at a Surrealist fable attempted in England, being some seventy-six pages long. It is, according to Mr. Gascoyne, 'cousin to Chirico's *Hebdamoros* [sic, presumably *Hebdemeros*], and second-cousin-twice-removed to Lautréamont's *Maldoror*.'

One of the typical Surrealist devices that Davies uses in the poem is the positing of several possible 'real' images, so that the determination of a fixed standard of reality becomes impossible. This is particularly successfully employed when he amasses reflection upon reflection, mirror-image upon mirror-image; thus one reads:—

... in his own eye, the reflection of the cranes and the moon was caught from the pool. (For the eye, besides seeing, reflects on its own surface that which it is supposed to see.) While from his eye, the much diminished image was again reflected in the reflection of his eye that lay in the pool. This eye again, containing its minute depiction of the cranes and moon, was minutely reflected in his real eye, and so on.

*This was also published in New Directions in Prose and Poetry, No. 3 (1938), 210 ff., as the work of 'one of the important members of the English Surrealist movement' (ibid., ix).*
in an infinity of waning images. 42*

This 'chinese box' sort of vision easily gives rise to the amazing dream-like plasticity of objects and experience on which the structure of Petron depends. The struggle to grasp an experience that is in a continuous state of flux is reflected in passages depicting elusive and rapid changes:

Searching among the rubble, he finds a battered toy that was once his own, but even as he holds it, it stirs in his hand and becomes a grasshopper, then an old man, a monstrous spider, a woman's breast, a bunch of faded grass, a little heap of bones, and so to a lizard which eludes his grasp, and darts away among the sunlit stones. 43

*This is a favourite device of Davies. A slight variant sometimes employed is a technique which has affinities with the folk-ballad method of incremental repetition. The basic series of images is drawn, and then in successive stanzas, these images are presented again, in a slightly different perspective, and with one additional element. A good example is the 'Poem' by Davies printed in Poetry of the Thirties, 1967, pp.227-8. In this poem, stanza two reads as follows [printed in this manner—as prose, with virgules for line divisions]:—

in the stumps of old trees, where the hearts have rotted out, / there are holes the length of a man's arm, and dank pools at the/bottom where the rain gathers and old leaves turn to lace, and the/beak of a dead bird gapes like a trap. But do not put your/hand down to see, because ....

Stanza three then follows on directly thus:—

in the stumps of old trees with rotten hearts, where the rain/gathers and the laced leaves and the dead bird like a trap, there/are holes the length of a man's arm, and in every crevice of the/rotten wood grow weasel's eyes like molluscs, their lids open/and shut with the tide. But do not put your hand down to see, because ....

The protracted effect of this technique is similar to that of Futurist paintings of the dynamism of certain actions, such as the movement of a dog walking at the end of a lead; (see p.184A, below) or, to draw a perhaps more familiar analogy, it is similar to the cinematographic use of movie-film slowed down so as to produce separate frames which overlap to give the completed action.
The basic series of images is drawn, and then in successive stanzas, these images are presented again, in a slightly different perspective ....

One is immediately reminded of the *Surréaliste* poet Paul Éluard's statement that 'the relationships between things fade as soon as they are established, to give place to other relationships just as fugitive.'

Such a technique creates an uncertainty and an uneasiness which goes beyond the merely narrative and visual. When a murder takes place, for instance, the multiple shows of reality, the undermining of external appearance, lead everyone in the fable to distrust not only the tangible objects and people with which they are surrounded, but themselves as well. Consequently the narrative enacts hidden guilts and fears which undermine self-confidence in mental stability, and which threaten to precipitate a crisis in consciousness; hence, 'worse, far worse, than the suspicion of one man against another was the suspicion of each man against himself': for 'Only too well did each man know, deep in his heart, that what had been done might be his own doing save for the deed itself.'

The poet is here using the work of art as a catalyst to evoke the hidden psychic reality dormant in his readers. His hero, Petron, seems to have a prior relationship with each member of his audience: for, as Davies points out, 'Much about him you already know, better than I could hope to tell you.' Petron is a 'mutual friend' between poet and poetry-reader; and 'his adventures, all his sufferings flash before you at the mention of his name, as do the events of your own life when you fall down the cliffs.' All that the poem *Petron* can be is a device for creating 'the vertigo, the falling, the precipitate descent itself.' Thus the poem becomes
the means to the end of greater insight into the individual's inner life; the bizarre landscapes and situations of the poem represent in symbolic form the forces lying in the imagination and in the subconscious world; and the protagonist's journey constitutes an exploration of a shared psychic realm.

The question of whether Davies was subscribing to, or merely using, Surrealism in this poem seems to me to be a nice point, discussion of which will not contribute anything positive to my thesis. Certainly, Petron appears to be Surrealist in its subject-matter, its weird and disjointed visual imagery, and its evident intention--sufficiently so to justify its inclusion in any discussion of English Surrealism in the thirties.

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A more prolific Surrealist, and one whose Surreality (at any rate in the avowedly Surrealist poems in his corpus) has never been questioned, is David Gascoyne.

Apart from many translations (including poems in New Verse by Éluard, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Hans Arp, and Alberto Giacometti; Benjamin Péret's collection, Remove Your Hat;* and M. Breton's critical essay, What Is Surrealism?) there were several original poems. Many of these appear in Gascoyne's collection of 1936, Man's Life Is This Meat.**

* Translated with Humphrey Jennings, for Contemporary Poetry and Prose Editions.
** These poems are also conveniently available in Collected Poems, 1966, pp.7-24. Surrealist poems from Man's Life omitted from the Collected Poems are 'Direct Response', 'Reflected Vehemence', 'The End Is Near the Beginning', 'Lost Wisdom', and, more
They reveal some of the more serious aspects of the Surrealist philosophy.

The fantasy vision in Gascoyne's Surrealism, which Thomas Blackburn has described as 'Gascoyne's mescaline glare', appears as a necessary and efficacious method of coping with melting external realities as they are thrown up by the near-neurotic imagination, the tangled web of crowding sense-impressions that assail the distorted consciousness:

Our eyes lose one another, autumn splutters
On the sidewalks houses eat the afternoon
Soft outline of the leaves upon the wall
Foliage blown by the wind
Streams into the memory of hair.

Where there is 'dislocation of sensibility in Gascoyne's early poems,' it usually serves the functional purpose, as Mr. Skelton says, of being 'expressive of a deeply moral perception.' That is, dislocation and distortion are utilised in the attempt to get 'Beyond that ... pretence of knowledge/Beyond that posture of oblivious dream' which have been cultivated by a civilised society equated in this poetry with an 'ornate birdcage'.

[continued from previous page] surprisingly omitted, 'And the Seventh Dream Is the Dream of Isis' (which is, however, readily available in Mr. Skelton's Poetry of the Thirties, 1967, pp.229-32).

*Mr. Blackburn is possibly thinking of scenes such as those in the poem 'Phantasmagoria', which are lit by 'the tensely sensational glare of the naphtha torch' (Collected Poems, p.29).
In order to break out of the birdcage, and to reach a new and authentic vision of reality, the poet must undermine the utilitarianism which is, in his eyes, the 'impure breathing' of 'The fevered breath of logic',\textsuperscript{50} and which is upheld by those who 'bake all their illusions/In an oven of dirty globes and weedgrown stupors'.\textsuperscript{52} Gascoyne does this by transforming external reality 'in the conjuror's musical-box'\textsuperscript{53} of his poetry, so that the 'sewing-machine' is elevated on a 'pillar', the 'windmill' is given a 'halo', 'pitchforks' are made out of 'rubber',\textsuperscript{52} and 'factories' are made to produce 'canonical wastepaper-baskets'.\textsuperscript{53}

In defiance of a purely utilitarian vision, Gascoyne asserts the right to use his individual imagination, by creating bizarre and 'unreal' pictures of such things as 'An arrow with lips of cheese ... caught by a floating hair'.\textsuperscript{52} The underlying aim is once more to strip Man of his sheltering façade of ordinary habit and domesticity, and to precipitate the desired crisis in consciousness.

In some ways, then, the poet becomes iconoclast, or 'sower of disturbances',\textsuperscript{54} in whose 'head', as Gascoyne puts it, 'The worlds are breaking'.\textsuperscript{55} He is seeking to destroy a comfortable materialism, in order to open the way for a profound truth beyond the 'pretence of knowledge'—a truth which he suspects may be found in 'the divided terrain of anguish',\textsuperscript{50} revealed when Man's illusory mental stability is undermined.

The effort takes Gascoyne to the borders of madness and frenzy, to 'Hysteria upon the staircase/Hair torn out by the roots'.\textsuperscript{56}
He seems fascinated by the subject, as were the French Surréalistes, who regarded hysteria as 'a supreme means of expression',\textsuperscript{57} simulation of which would help the poet to escape from normal perspectives imposed by rationalism and from a conventional utilitarian view of reality.* Gascoyne's poems often present a scene bathed in a weird light which reveals what he himself calls 'paroxysms of vision' flowing from the hidden, silent depths of the psyche--'out of the heart of darkness' of 'man's unspoken continent'.\textsuperscript{58} In one poem he goes as far as to celebrate 'The Rites of Hysteria',\textsuperscript{59} by presenting a disjointed series of outrageous surreal imagery whose collective effect is an uneasy feeling of approaching mental chaos.

In his poetic world, even the 'rain' becomes 'hysterical',\textsuperscript{55} and a 'screen of hysteria' turns the eye beneath its 'feathery eyelids' into a 'volcanoe's mouth.'\textsuperscript{60} To quote one last example, 'Full-blossoming hysterias' are seen 'Lavishly scattering their stained veined petals' in another crucial area of psychic search--'In sleep'.\textsuperscript{61}

Dream is, of course, the main tool for probing this latter area. The narration or simulation of dream is a way of exploring and bringing to light that hidden part of the consciousness which gives rise during

\*Hence Gascoyne, in the poem 'Antennae' (a title possibly based on Ezra Pound's comment that 'Artists are the antennae of the race' [Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, 1954, p.58]), imagines himself 'suspended above life' (Man's Life Is This Meat, 1936, p.34): the perspective is changed to aid the escape from stereotyped response. Possibly Wilfred Owen had something similar in mind when he imagined himself looking down on the First World War battlefield 'from a vague height' ('The Show', The Poems of Wilfred Owen, 1963, p.59).
sleep to all manner of strange fantasies: in Gascoyne's own words, 'dream is 'the nocturnal expedition' in which 'all the chimæras' are 'Climbing in at the window'. It may serve both an aesthetic and a spiritual purpose, in that it can reveal both the night-time beauty of 'superb nocturnal swans', and 'the nadir of a mystery in the closet of a dream'.

Consequently the poet focuses his vision on the dark world of sleep, and on 'the homeless night', a mysterious, occult region unhampered by society's daylight domesticity (in that it is 'homeless' like a prowling wild animal). In a very powerful image in the poem 'The Truth Is Blind' Gascoyne emphasises night's proximity to the violent natural world by describing it as growing 'like a savage plant/With daggers for its leaves': this is the primal, dangerous, and yet vital 'prehistoric Night' which surrounds Man's civilisation, laughing like a waiting hyena 'on all sides'.

The prehistoric Night exists also within the individual psyche, as 'A dim world uttering a voiceless cry/Spinning helpless between sleep and waking'. It is Gascoyne's concern to give this cry (which is presumably some inarticulate unconscious force) a voice, to bring it up from the borders of sleep. In order to do this, he has to descend into the inner life, in the process of which he moves from a superficial and physical knowledge to a deep, psychic knowledge: hence he can speak of 'Descending from knowledge to knowledge'.

*This perhaps explains why Gascoyne speaks of 'the nadir of a mystery' ('The Rites of Hysteria', Man's Life Is This Meat, 1936, p.39) rather than the zenith of one; the aspiration is not towards a disembodied ideal, but to an ideal existing deep within the actual world: that is, in symbolic terms we have here aspiration not towards the sky, but into the earth.
In the 'dim world' of the inner existence the poet may be brought closer to the vital forces of the natural universe, so that he is 'Breathing ... mottled petals/Out across the circling seas'. The animistic kinship of the kind suggested here between Man, petals, and seas is accentuated in the poem 'The Truth Is Blind', when the poetic spokesman notices two human figures silhouetted in such a way that 'He raised his eyes and saw the river's source/Between their legs—he saw the flaming sun': the sun and the river are here suggested by implication as akin to the human genital force.

The poet through his vision, in fact, attempts to evoke an obscured or forgotten kinship between Man (who is sailing aimlessly on 'foaming oceans of disintegration') and the natural order of the cosmos (with its purposive organic movement of tides—'circling seas'—and its universal 'cycle of return and change'). Of great interest in terms of this kinship is a poem first printed in Hölderlin's Madness, entitled 'Figure in a Landscape'. The title is misleading, for the human 'Figure' in the poem is always subordinate to the 'Landscape' in which it is set (as is often the case in Gascoyne's Surrealism); when the human being appears, he is described as 'Infinitely small among the infinitely huge' and as

*Man seems to move in more or less straight lines, following the 'certain routes' (Gascoyne, 'Unspoken', Man's Life Is This Meat, 1936, p.24) evolved by a logical system of navigation, and yet his travel ultimately proves without meaning; by contrast, nature's motion may seem purposeless, but ultimately it resolves into timeless circles, achieving a harmonious continuum. By evoking the kinship between Man and nature, Gascoyne is presumably trying to put Man in his place in this continuum, to give his linear journeying some purpose.
'Exposed and naked': thus a more appropriate title would be 'Landscape with Figure'. At first the human protagonist cannot be seen at all; we are presented with an idealised description of a harmonious natural environment in which all is verdure, light, and flowing water: 'The verdant valleys' are 'full of rivers' which sing 'We flow/Like light' as a 'newly-risen sun' dawns. Then, in sharp contrast to this pleasant pastoral, Gascoyne describes the unleashing of the power immanent in the natural scene; a storm occurs in which sun and sea appear tormented, and the earth claws at the sky with mountain peaks 'like gnarled imploring hands'. The storm might be the herald of the human protagonist's arrival, for in the next section of the poem a human being is seen approaching. He is presented as a stranger wandering through a hostile and convulsed, Dali-esque landscape of 'agonizing land', in which 'the landscape's limbs' are described as 'the limbs/Of a vast denuded body torn and vanquished from within'. Man and nature are here at odds: the man flings 'The last curse of regret against Omnipotence', and in reply 'lightning struck his face'. However, after this showdown, in which Man's self-pride seems to have been defeated by the natural force, peace is restored (in the last section of the poem) as the 'milk of love' and the 'music of ... light' flow over the landscape. Verdur, light, and flowing water once more appear, with the difference that now the human being is present, and the 'Unseen' 'Presences'

**cf. Dali's 'Premonition of Civil War': see p.192A, below.
... the limbs
Of a vast denuded body torn and vanquished from within

--David Gascoyne, 'Figure in a Landscape',
presiding over the natural world 'pass through' him instead of attacking him: this appears to be a description of the ideal state of unity celebrated in primitive animism.

But there is a further element in the poem which I have hitherto passed over. The stranger wandering through the landscape meets somebody there:--

Between the opposition of the night and day
Between the opposition of the earth and sky
Between the opposition of the sea and land
Between the opposition of the landscape and the road
A traveller came
And met himself half-way. 68

It seems to me that the best explanation of this phenomenon lies in regarding the landscape of the poem as 'man's unspoken continent', as the hidden world of his unconscious existence. Then the traveller would be the questing, conscious ego searching for 'the nadir of a mystery', and the 'self' he meets would be the symbolic psychic self. If interpreted in this way, the poem enacts a crisis in consciousness and its result. At the outset we are shown the undisturbed and idealised unconscious world of potentially fertile forces, which erupts suddenly into self-destructive and ugly violence (as the landscape is 'torn and vanquished from within'). The poet, exploring the inner world, seems to be endangered, but his journey does at least make it possible for him to come to terms with his

*It is worth bearing in mind that the poem is written by a Surrealist fascinated by hysteria (Gascoyne), in honour of a Romantic poet who went mad (Hölderlin); in such a context the interpretation offered here seems to me to be a highly possible one.
hidden self. It takes him to a point where reconciliation is possible, a point between multiple oppositions---between 'night' and 'day' (or perhaps one might say between the dark passions of the id and the light of the rational intellect), between the chthonic powers of 'earth' and the idealised gods of the 'sky', between the fluid state of the 'sea' and the solid state of the 'land', and between the natural life suggested by the 'landscape' and Man's manufacturing urge which has made the 'road'. One feels that the 'point sublime' must be close. But violence erupts, in which the conscious element (the traveller) attempts to reject the unconscious element (the omnipotent power of the landscape) and is overwhelmed by it: this is the crisis in consciousness, in which the civilised self is routed by the undeniable elemental powers of the unconscious world. The final section of the poem describes the post-crisis situation, the ideal (or 'point sublime') of harmonious existence beyond contradiction and strife in which both conscious and unconscious elements may live together.

Thus 'Figure in a Landscape' arguably provides an illustration of two Surrealist ideals pursued in Gascoyne's poetry---those of primitive animism and of the 'point sublime'.

These Surrealist themes were accompanied by the usual concerns with artistic method.

Of prime importance was the interest in poetic expression itself. In the poem 'No Solution' Gascoyne describes the movement of time in terms of a fire spreading quickly through a paper fan; he points out that if poetic expression becomes static, then 'The words of poems'