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will themselves (like the paper on which they are written) become victims of this rapid burning, and will exist only 'curling among the ashes' of a spent fire. The language of poetry must therefore be kept in motion at all costs; 'Speech' must be kept 'flowing away like water/With its undertow of violence and darkness', even if some 'words' are lost as they go 'Slipping between the cracks' of experience.

The necessary verbal movement and plasticity are accomplished by the vigorous description of rapid transformations, as projected through the flow of images from the poetic imagination. These images reflect a 'reality' of 'Migrating towns and fluid boundaries', in which suddenly and without warning 'The armchair' may turn 'into a palace' and 'the carpet' may become 'a bank of withered flowers'.

Such is Gascoyne's 'alchimie du Verbe': the poet-magician uses his 'alchemical' powers to metamorphose external appearance, and devises an idiom of weird poetic imagery suitable to such transformation. The latter part of the poem 'The Truth Is Blind' provides an effective illustration of the poetic metamorphosis of subject-matter. Having told a story in which a conjuror pulled from his bag of tricks 'a winsome young woman,' Gascoyne takes this same woman as the subject of his own (poetic) conjuring trick, first making her vanish 'in thin air', next setting her in the urban environment of 'the restless traffic of the quays', and finally turning her into a 'statue' made of 'sugar'. The magical vision terminates in a haze of exhaust fumes from the 'Fourmillante cité', suggesting an urban hell tormented by 'The whispering of unseen flames'.

The Surrealist poetic manipulation of appearance in Gascoyne's
poetry creates the standard type of convulsive beauty, in which "The rocky peaks clawed at the sky like gnarled imploring hands," 68 "The sun bursts through its skin", 74 and there is "an explosion of geraniums in the ballroom." 75 Incongruity and tension are created by weird juxtapositions, and are maintained by the catachresis of images such as "The sun ... is a bag of nails", 76 and by strange visions such as that of a man "walking a tightrope covered with moths". 77

Tension and shock are also cultivated in Gascoyne's Surreal world through what Mr. Blackburn has called a 'terrible insight into one aspect of life--the infernal'. 78 This 'infernal' insight is, I suggest, made up of other typical Surrealist elements--cruelty, grotesque, and the gothic. The poet emphasises that in his world children are taught 'at the age of five/to cut out the eyes of their sisters with nail-scissors', 77 and a lady may pass her time 'burning the eyes of snails in a candle'. 75* Such a world is clearly morally diseased; Gascoyne simply translates moral illness into a physical grotesque, so that men become disgusting puppets wearing 'putrid masks' and furiously indulging 'the carnal lusts'. 50 Civilisation seems to be falling prey to 'the beckoning nudity of diseases' which

*It is interesting to notice in passing the recurrence of mutilated eyes here. Cyril Connolly notes that 'The ... eye is a key symbol in Surrealist art'; it may appear, he says, as 'sadistically mutilated, or disassociated from its anatomical position to suggest a mysterious presence, or ... as an emblem of the subconscious, or of sexual organs' ('Surrealism', Art News Annual, No. 21 [1952], 158). This multi-purpose symbol figures prominently not only in Surrealist art, but in Surrealist poetry also.
'putrifies' in its midst; finally people seem to be turning into disgusting insects, as the poet suggests when he describes 'The face of the precipice' as being 'black with lovers' just as carrion covered in teeming insects might be described as 'black with ants'. The grotesque vision is most powerfully realised in the gothic element of Gascoyne's poetry: we read of 'clouds carved like skulls', 'a half-strangled gibbet', and 'hungry faces gaping like raw muddy graves'. As Mr. Blackburn says, the overall impression is of an 'infernal' world (all the more powerful for being juxtaposed with a world of tenderness as evoked by delicately beautiful descriptions such as 'Love in my hand like lace/Your hand enlaced with mine').

This is Gascoyne's Surrealism, broken down into its constituent elements. But perhaps it would be convenient at this point to examine a poem rather longer than any of the extracts that have hitherto been analysed, in order to get an impression of the overall effect achieved.

Much Surrealist poetry would not be rewarding to close study of this sort, either because the poetry lacks a sustained and total unity and is therefore only successful (if at all) in small details, or because its effect is available only at a superficial level; concerning this latter contingency, Mr. Skelton notes, 'so often [Surrealism] depends simply on shock-tactics and bizarre juxtapositions for its effectiveness that once the surprise is gone the poetry is gone also.' However, some of Gascoyne's Surrealist poems are rich enough in texture to stand close scrutiny. One such poem is 'The Diabolical Principle'; the first section is as follows:-
The red dew of autumn clings to winter's curtains
And when the curtain rises the landscape is as empty as a board
Empty except for a broken bottle and a torso broken like a bottle
And when the curtain falls the palace of cards will fall
The card-castle on the table will topple without a sound

An eye winks from the shadow of the gallows
A tumbled bed slides upwards from the shadow
A suicide with mittened hands stumbles out of the lake
And writes a poem on the tablets of a dead man's heart
The last man but one climbs the scaffold and fades into the mist

The marine sceptre is splintered like an anvil
Its spine crackles with electric nerves
While eagle pinions thunder through the darkness
While swords and breastplates clatter in the darkness
And the storm falls across the bed like a thrice-doomed tree.

The poem opens on a deceptively beautiful note, with an almost charming reference to autumn's red dew. Uneasiness, however, follows immediately after this; for the curtain rises and we see an empty stage—empty, that is, except for a bizarre still life of broken bric-a-brac (human as well as mineral). On reflection we realise that the opening line of the poem is not as innocent as it seemed at first, but in fact suggests the seasons' final move into the dead part of the year. The 'curtains' of autumn foliage on the trees have become the stage-curtain for a grotesque play, whose end is the
enactment of destruction—'when the curtain falls the palace of cards will fall'—and one now feels that the red dew of autumn may after all be a metaphor for blood about to be spilled.

A nightmarish atmosphere is generated by the evocation of silence, shadow, and mist; it is heightened by an insistence on various premonitions of doom—impending winter, the broken body and bottle, emptiness, a 'gallows', a 'suicide' rising from beneath the water, a 'dead man', and a 'scaffold'. There is a grotesque focus on details and fragments—the winking eye, the automatic movement of the bed, and the 'mitten hands' of the dead man.

The last stanza of the first part of the poem shows the 'Diabolical Principle' rising to action. Silence is shattered by violent noise—the 'thunder' of war-birds and the 'clatter' of weapons and armour. The miasmal shadow of the second stanza is now obliterated in total darkness. The impending destruction begins to be actual as 'The marine sceptre' (presumably a symbol of the ordered forces of the natural world—the 'circling seas' of an earlier poem is 'splintered', and nature is unleashed in a 'storm' which destroys completely Man's domestic comfort as it 'falls across the bed' of his luxurious material wellbeing.

The second section of the poem follows up the destruction theme—

A basket of poisoned arrows
Severing seawrack, ships' tracks
Leadentipped darts of disaster
A unicorn champs at the waves
The waves are green branches singing
The cry of a foal at daybreak
A broken mouth at sunset
A broken lamp among the clouds' draperies
A sound drops into the water and the water boils
The sound of disastrous waves
Waves flood the room when the door opens
A white horse stamps upon the liquid floor
The sunlight is tiring to our opened eyes
And the sand is dead
Feet in the sand make patterns
Patterns flow like rivers to the distant sky
Rippling shells like careful signatures
A tangled skein of blood

In fumigated emptiness revolves the mind
The light laughs like an unposted letter
Railways rush into the hills.

The rampant and pernicious activity of the 'Diabolical Principle' is conveyed through a string of disjointed images arranged in short, abrupt lines. The weird images are now focused more and more on the sea; the 'poisoned arrows' which carry on the weaponry reference from the end of section one are transformed into 'ships' tracks' (the ships' wakes which lead to 'disaster' being the hafts of the arrows, and the ships themselves being the metal tips); the violence of the 'storm' in nature is epitomised in the vision of seaweed being torn apart as the noise of thunder is transformed into the 'sound of disastrous waves' which boil beneath the 'broken lamp' of the sun.
The theme of breaking and destruction from the outset of the poem becomes now the theme of inundation, as 'Waves flood the room'. Strange symbolic creatures rise from the sea—the 'unicorn' and the 'white horse' (traditional symbol of the Apocalypse, as well as being a popular name for the foaming crest of a wave).

The arrival of the white horse produces a glaringly bright light to sunder the darkness, a light painful for the inhabitants of this disaster-torn world (who are now mentioned collectively for the first time). In the illumination provided for humanity's newly 'opened eyes' we see that 'the sand is dead', and that in the dead sand are human footprints which seem likely to be engulfed or obliterated at any moment by the raging sea; as it is destroyed, the human world becomes a chaos spattered with what was once the 'red dew' of autumn—'blood'.

Now indeed the premonitions of frightening emptiness are fulfilled. Man is mocked by the light, which 'laughs' as he is left in a hellish 'fumigated emptiness'. He turns to the material supports he has created for himself, but they are now ineffectual: his 'Railways rush into the hills' in a meaningless, manic flight.

The final section of the poem is short, and it merely alters the focus to give us a different viewpoint of the disaster:—

A worm slithers from the earth and the shell is broken
A giant mazed misery tears the veil to shreds
Stop it tormentor stop the angry planet before it breaks the sky

Having shattered the untapped barrel
Having given up hope for water
Having shaken the chosen words in a hat
History opened its head like a wallet
And folded itself inside.

The destruction has extended beyond Man, encompassing the animate world in general. Now the miasma has finally cleared, as the 'veil' is torn away, revealing the full extent of hopelessness. The impassioned plea wrung from the poetic spokesman is unanswered,* and the tone becomes impersonal and measured as the poet changes rôles, from involved party to detached spectator and commentator. In conclusion he describes History's response to the cataclysm; faced with the total destruction of its unfulfilled potential--its 'untapped barrel'--History, in a weird image conveying a peculiar sense of frustration, folds itself away inside its own head, much as one might put away a lottery ticket in one's pocket--a lottery ticket never to be claimed.

Out of the illogical welter of strange images, then, there does emerge a coherent meaning. What we are witnessing in the poem is a revolution in the sense of the devastation of the established order by powerful natural forces; we are presented with a vision of ultimate universal upheaval, almost of Armageddon itself. It is the explosion of impending doom, the working out to a conclusion of a 'Diabolical Principle' inherent in the forces of the cosmos; one might almost say the poem portrays the ultimate crisis in consciousness.

This is undoubtedly the sort of subject-matter for which

*One is possibly reminded here of Isaac Rosenberg's attitude, in his later war poetry, to God: God is seen as tormentor and oppressor, a 'bullying hulk' throwing Himself 'On shy and maimed, on women wrung awry' ('God', Collected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg, 1949, p.63).
Surrealism is ideally equipped—the portrayal of fragmentation and destruction. Gascoyne uses his Surrealism to very good effect here. Immediacy and vividness are achieved through careful use of sense-reference, particularly reference to sight and sound. From the outset a highly-charged atmosphere is generated, and maintained throughout, by focus on significant detail in the over-all environment—the broken bottle, the foal whose birth pangs produce a 'cry' at 'daybreak' and whose 'broken mouth' is later lit by 'sunset', the footprints in the sand, and the laughing mouth of the flap of the 'unposted letter'. Rapid juxtapositions create a convulsive beauty, the energy of which is effectively controlled by manipulation of rhythm and line-length and by the three-section structure of the poem. The first section of the poem sets the weird scene in a measured, almost diagnostic tone. In the second section the rhythms become more urgent and staccato, and the lines become shorter as the central chaos is enacted. Then in the final section there is a combination of the two; the first part, culminating in the agonised cry, is reminiscent of the second section, while the second part once more suggests the diagnostic tone employed at the outset of the poem, bringing the poem round into a full circle. Gascoyne's fine dramatic sense leads us through the poem from the rising of the curtain to its fall in the final destruction of history (the two halves of the closing 'wallet' possibly representing the closing curtains of a play), and the completion of the dramatic action.

There is a continuity in 'The Diabolical Principle', then, which is a continuity of the imagination rather than of the logical mind. There is also a form to the poem, a form which is organic and dynamic
rather than rigid and uniform. The poem illustrates Surrealist theory intelligently applied to suitable poetic material.

* * * * * * * * * *

In view of examples such as 'The Diabolical Principle' it is perhaps unfortunate that Gascoyne broke away from Surrealism. He announced this break in New Verse, writing that 'I no longer find this navel-gazing activity at all satisfying', adding that 'The Surrealists themselves have a definite justification for writing in this way, but for an English poet with continually growing political convictions it must soon become impossible.' 83

The change in his poetic attitude is evident for the first time in Poems 1937-1942. The 'political convictions' which he cited as his reason for giving up Surrealism do not seem to make themselves strongly felt in his verse here, except in the poem 'Ecce Homo', in which the centurions presiding over the Crucifixion are presented as Fascists (with 'riding-boots, / Black shirts and badges and peaked caps,' and 'raised-arm salutes'), and in which the crucified convicts on either side of Jesus turn out to be 'A labourer and a factory hand,' or a 'lynched Jew', 'a Negro or a Red'. 84 However, if the political element is not widespread in the poetry, there is nevertheless a definable change of attitude towards Surrealist methods at this later stage of Gascoyne's poetic development.

The poetry is more Christian in orientation, less disjointed in form and imagery, and less urgent in rhythm. The poet appears to be less enthusiastic about his poetic quest. The 'traveller' towards the 'point sublime' in 'Figure in a Landscape' 67 has become 'A restless
stranger' whom 'no-one sees', and 'whose eyes/Are tired of weeping'.85  
The animistic spirit, which is reflected in descriptions of the human  
body in terms of 'the abdominal range's hairless hills' and 'The calm  
lymphatic sea/Laving the wound of birth',86 has often become self-  
consuming: there is an insistence on the 'Red dunes of rot',86 or on  
the 'savage sun' which 'consumes its hidden day' repressed in Man's  
'breast'.85  

Gascoyne now seems to regard the fantastic or gothic visions  
of his earlier poetry as largely the product of escapism. Thus his  
'first ... territory' of 'tattering tendrils' and 'Grimm's-tale  
shadow' is described at this later stage as merely 'A place to hide  
in'.87  'The Fabulous Glass' of his Surrealism turns out to have been,  
after all, only a mirror for 'navel-gazing',83 producing only a  
reflection of the poet's 'Self-regarding Gaze'.88  

To put it in a different way, Gascoyne feels he has hitherto  
been hypnotised by the 'Circean spell' of what lies 'in the depths  
beneath the real'; but now he considers he should be 'Returning to  
the narrow onward road' after his apparently unconstructive excursion  
towards 'the secret source of nothingness'.87  

Even so, there is still a pronounced element, at least of  
'l'esprit', of surrealism in evidence.  

The 'Fourmillante cité' is still at the centre of many of  
Gascoyne's late-thirties (and early-forties) poems. The 'chaos des  
grandes villes' of which he speaks centres once more on the primal  
threat that disrupts outward confidence and calm--'les peurs de  
l'ancienne nuit'.89
Conventional concepts are turned upside down, so that 'la
douceur/Est cruelle'. External reality also, built up from 'Sky,
solid brick of buildings, masks of flesh', is unreliable. In fact,
in the world of material objects and phenomena, 'all that eye can
claim is impotent'.

Gascoyne attempts to avoid the 'impotent' world by continuing
to focus his 'socket-free lone visionary eye' on what he calls the
'inner sky'. At least here 'The shock/Of visions' should guarantee
freshness of response.

The 'shock' seems to issue mainly from the 'Turbulence, uproar,
echo of a War', which pervades his poetic world. This 'War' is not
presented primarily as a political, international one (though an
international war also seems imminent), but as an overflow of
previously repressed inner forces: it is a conflict generated from
the 'nocturnal flesh/Of sexual animal'.

A crisis in consciousness, in fact, still seems likely to occur.
The emanations of 'l'ancienne nuit' impinging on the civilised society
depicted in this poetry remind us that 'Bottomless depths of roaring
emptiness' still undermine 'Man's puny consciousness'.

Gascoyne continues to regard poetry's function, in the face of
the impending crisis, as a therapeutic one, based on art's psychological
and psychoanalytical agencies. This involves, in his own words from
Poems 1937-1942, 'The sublimation* of the evil dream until 'the

*Sublimation is 'the unconscious process of deflecting the
energy of the sexual impulse ... to new objects or aims of
a non-sexual and socially useful goal' (Dictionary of
Psychology [ed. Howard C. Warren], 1934). In other words,
the poetic 'sublimation of the evil dream' involves once more
what M. Breton describes as the canalisation of the 'strange
forces' lurking 'in the depths of our minds' into channels
where they can be submitted 'if necessary, to the control of
the reason'. (What Is Surrealism?, 1936, p.64).
catharsis of the race shall be complete.\textsuperscript{94} Poetry must continue to compensate for the deficiencies of what is presented as a doomed materialistic society, until such time as 'the Unity is filled.'\textsuperscript{95}

Thus, though there were certain changes from his earlier poetic attitudes, nevertheless several similarities remained. If most of the Surrealist technical machinery had disappeared, nevertheless many of the themes Surrealism treated and the theories it advocated were still present. While 'La lettre' had gone, 'l'esprit' continued to be in evidence.

\begin{enumerate}
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\item ibid., p.147.
\item ibid., p.145.
\item M.C. Bradbrook, T.S. Eliot, 1955, pp.11-12.
\item Quoted by Robin Skelton in the 'Introduction' to David Gascoyne's Collected Poems, 1966, p.xiii.
\item Review of A Short Survey of Surrealism, New Verse, No. 18 (December 1935), 21.
\item Palinurus (pseudonym for Cyril Connolly), The Unquiet Grave, 1951, p.96.
\item Contemporary Poetry and Prose, No. 8 (December 1936), 143.
\item Toni del Renzio, 'Correspondence', Horizon, VIII (December 1943), 434.
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12 Cyril Connolly, 'Surrealism', Art News Annual, No. 21 (1952), 133.
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15 New Verse, No. 24 (Feb-March 1937), 11-15.
17 'Animal Crackers in Your Cup', ibid., p.239.
18 'Introduction', ibid., p.13.
19 No. 23 (Xmas 1936), 1.
20 Anon, 'A Wonderful Receipt for WHISKERS', ibid., 7n.
21 The Thirties, 1960, p.68.
22 ibid., p.25.
23 'The clock ticks on;...', New Verse, No. 28 (January 1938), 5.
26 From Baudelaire to Surrealism, 1950, p.291.
29 The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature (Collected Works Vol.XV), 1966, p.118.
31 Gascoyne, 'And the Seventh Dream Is the Dream of Isis', ibid., No. 5 (October 1933), 12 [also Man's Life Is This Meat, 1936, p.43].
32 André Breton, 1967, p.79.
33 'Blue Bugs in Liquid Silk', Poetry of the Thirties, p.224.
34 Haskell M. Block, 'Surrealism and Modern Poetry', The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XVIII (December 1959), 182.
35 'Sympathies with Surrealism', New Verse, No. 20 (April-May 1936), 16.
36 Poetry of the Thirties, pp.234-5.
37 ibid., p.32.
38 pp.213 ff.
39 In Surrealism (ed. Herbert Read), 1937, pp.117ff.
40 New Verse, No. 20 (April-May 1936), 15ff.
41 'On Spontaneity', ibid., No. 18 (December 1935), 19.
42 Petron, 1935, p.25.
43 ibid., p.66.
44 'Poetic Evidence', in Surrealism (ed. Read), p.175.
45 Petron, p.43.
46 ibid., p.4.
48 Gascoyne, 'Educative Process', Man's Life Is This Meat, p.29.
49 'Introduction' to Gascoyne's Collected Poems, p.xii.
50 'Purified Disgust', Man's Life, p.16.
51 'The Cage', ibid., p.28.
52 'The Rites of Hysteria', ibid., p.39.
54 Raymond, p.348.
55 'Yves Tanguy', Man's Life, p.25.
56 'Charity Week', ibid., p.18.
58 'Unspoken', Man's Life, p.23.
59 ibid., pp.39-40.
60 'The Rites of Hysteria', ibid., p.40.
61 'Unspoken', ibid., p.22.
63 ibid., p.28.
65 'Phantasmagoria', Collected Poems, p.29.
67 Collected Poems, pp.35-37.
68 ibid., p.36.
69 ibid., p.35.
70 ibid., p.37.
71 Man's Life, p.13.
72 'Lozanne', ibid., p.35.
73 ibid., p.27.
74 'Antennae', ibid., p.32.
75 'And the Seventh Dream Is the Dream of Isis', ibid., p.42.
76 'Salvador Dali', ibid., p.36.
77 'And the Seventh Dream Is the Dream of Isis', ibid., p.41.
78 op.cit., p.134.
80 'Antennae', ibid., p.33.
81 'Introduction', Collected Poems, p.xi.
82 Man's Life, pp. 37-38.
83 No. 11 (October 1934), 12.
84 Poems 1937-1942, 1943, p. 5.
85 'Winter Garden', ibid., p. 11.
86 'The Fortress', ibid., p. 12.
87 'The Wall', ibid., p. 11.
88 'The Fabulous Glass', ibid., p. 32.
90 Pierre Jean Jouve, used by Gascoyne as prefatory quotation for
the 'Time and Place' section of Poems 1937-1942, pp. 49ff.
91 'Inferno', ibid., p. 10.
92 'Insurrection', ibid., p. 16.
94 'Pieta', ibid., p. 2.
95 'Lachrymae', ibid., p. 3.
CHAPTER TWELVE: Sympathisers and Some Others.

... apart from the official body and the official definitions, there are certain 'sympathisers' in England ....

--Hugh Sykes Davies, 'Sympathies with Surrealism',
New Verse, No. 20 (April-May 1936), 15.

David Gascoyne in the closing years of the thirties, though he had broken with what there was of an 'official' Surrealism in England, might reasonably be described as a 'sympathiser', in that his poetry still had much in common with Surrealism and even reflected its spirit and theories to some considerable extent. There are other poets who also fit into the category of 'sympathisers'.

Francis Scarce, for instance, writes that in the thirties, 'I followed Surrealism enthusiastically,' even though, he goes on to say, he was 'far ... from being a real Surrealist.' ¹ Presumably he would be one of those whom Mr. Davies described as 'practising artists who see or read official surrealist work, and respond to it strongly', and whose work may as a result become 'hardly distinguishable from official surrealism'.² To this category one might reasonably assign poets such as Kenneth Allott and Ruthven Todd.

Perhaps Charles Madge gets very close to the truth when he comments that 'by definition' Surrealism 'extends beyond its titular [sic -

*Because their work is virtually identical to Surrealism, exhibiting the same sort of faults and virtues mentioned in Chapter Eleven above, there seems to me little point in examining their work separately here in any detail, since this would merely constitute a recapitulation of what I said in that earlier chapter.

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presumably 'avowed'] followers; its activities are universal, and would continue even if its organised and self-avowed theoreticians were to relapse into silence.3

One such 'theoretician' (probably the best, in fact) was Herbert Read. I am discussing him here as a 'sympathiser' rather than as a 'real Surrealist' because his contribution to Surrealism was in terms of whole-hearted support and in terms of critical theory rather than in terms of actual poetry. For, though he writes in 1967, 'I supported the Surrealist movement in the 'thirties and I would support it again were the circumstances still the same',4 there is little in his poetry that conforms to Surrealist doctrine. It is true that the necessity of 'sacrificing appearances preserving the reality',5 and the desire 'to break the logic of the mind'6 occasionally do come to the surface in his verse; also, the poems 'Love and Death' and 'A Dream' are arguably hallucinatory-vision-poems.7 However, though (like the Surrealists) he sees 'poetry ... as the mediator between dream and reality', and regards 'the imagination' as the means by which 'we can encompass the antithetical

*The best example of Read's poetic Surrealism occurs in his 'Introduction' to Surrealism, in which he sets out one of his own previously unprinted poems (1937, pp.71-72) as a description of 'the manifest content' of a dream (p.72), after which he analyses the similarities between poetry and dream. One feels in this case that the Surrealist poem is present as an illustration of a theory rather than as a poem in its own right.
terms of our experience, it remains generally true that in practice Read could not be described as a Surrealist poet.

* * * * * * * * * *

A poet whose avowed opinions revealed an open hostility to Surrealism (or, rather, to what he mistakenly regarded as Surrealism), yet whose poetry paradoxically reflects something of the surrealist spirit, is Dylan Thomas.

John Bayley mentions in The Romantic Survival that 'The poetry of Dylan Thomas has obviously much in common with that of Rimbaud and Hopkins, and with the word expedients of conventional surrealism as well.' Later he adds that Thomas shares and pursues 'the primal Romantic aim, the chief preoccupation of Wordsworth and Coleridge', poets lauded by Mr. Read and Mr. Davies as important precursors of English Surrealism.**

Another possible indication of a surrealist spirit in Thomas's work is the preoccupation with what Maurice Nadeau, writing in The History of Surrealism, describes as 'the "trauma of birth"'. Birth in Thomas's early poetry is depicted as a violent and crucial event, an explosion--'My fuses timed to charge his heart'--which

* Rimbaud was a revered precursor of the French Surréaliste poets.
** In Surrealism (ed. Read), Mr. Read discusses Wordsworth in his 'Introduction' (1937, pp.19ff.) and Mr. Davies discusses Coleridge in his essay, 'Surrealism at This Time and Place' (pp.119ff.).
*** M. Nadeau's remark concerns Mm. Éluard's and Breton's major study of the subject, the important Surréaliste text, L'Immaculée Conception (1930). The phrase 'trauma of birth' comes originally, of course, from Freudian psychology.

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liberates from the womb a suffering both physical (as 'flesh was
snipped'), mental (with 'brambles in the wringing brains'), and even
psychic (on 'The rack of dreams').

These similarities with Surrealism are perhaps not much more
than superficial ones. But there are others which are not so
superficial.

The animistic impulse which pervades Surrealism pervades
Thomas's thirties poetry too, in the form of an awareness (in
Thomas Blackburn's words) of 'Man's at-one-ness with certain non-
human energies which are also at work in nature': thus 'The force
that through the green fuse drives the flower', Thomas says, 'Drives
my green age' also. Reference to primitive animism is behind
metaphors such as 'Ancient woods of my blood,' or behind hopes
that 'The secret of the soil' may grow 'through the eye' and that
Man's 'blood' may jump 'in the sun'.

In Thomas's poetry the natural forces working in Man clash with
Man's utilitarian, mechanistic urge. The 'weather in the flesh and
bone,' and the 'tides' of 'the waters of the heart' are in
opposition to a power which turns Man into a machine or artefact.
The latter power makes the 'blood' 'synthetic', encages 'the heart'
in 'ribbing metal', turns the 'bone' into a 'jointed lever',
regulates 'the screws that turn the voice', and even reduces the
procreative urge to the 'Stroke of mechanical flesh'.

The result is that Man's allegiances are divided, and he begins
to 'stride on two levels'. He is still in contact with nature,
since he is a 'man of leaves'; but these leaves now have a 'bronze
root': that is, the once-living natural member essential to healthy growth, which affirmed his vital contact with the soil, has been turned into an artefact moulded in a Man-made alloy.

There is a consequent build-up of tension as the protagonist struggles with the rival forces represented by, on the one hand, 'man's minerals' and, on the other, the 'world of petals'--the antagonism between which is brilliantly conveyed in Thomas's image of a 'metal phantom/Forcing forth through the harebell'. This tension is manifested in the poetry not so much in the world of external appearance and political machinations as in the inner world of the individual psyche. One is made aware, through the headlong rhythms of the verse, of the impending explosion of madness, of the 'wail' which echoes 'Through the dark asylum' in 'the time-bomb town'--of the imminent crisis in consciousness.

The crisis is hastened by the violent and irresistible motion of time. Time is the 'whirlpool' which 'drives the prayerwheel', the 'hour chant' which floods over the spiritual ideologies of the 'choir minute', and which promotes the reiteration of words emphasising mortality and decay--'cadaver', 'tomb', and 'worm'.

*This is probably the most effective and striking Surrealist image I have encountered during the course of my research.
**Even a cursory glance at the poetry reveals the continued repetition of these words. The concordance (A Concordance to the Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas, ed. Robert Coleman Williams, 1967) lists eight uses in the thirties poetry of 'cadaver' or 'cadaverous', seven of 'tomb' or 'tombstone', and fifteen of 'worm' or 'wormy' (though the worm is ambiguous in that it sometimes represents the phallus as well as decay after death--hence the spectacular telescoping of the distance between generation and birth, copulation, and death).
The comforting 'certainties' with which Man has surrounded himself (such as his industrial and material world or his framework of spiritual ideas) are revealed as ephemeral and are thus undermined by the undeniable and uncontrollable power of Time.

Another of the 'certainties' which Thomas depicts as being called into question is that of 'reality' itself. G.S. Fraser has pointed out that when modern literature concerns itself with Man's psychological state (as this poetry often seems to), 'realism' becomes 'an elusive and ramifying conception'.

The comment is undoubtedly applicable at times to Thomas's work: in the poem 'Our eunuch dreams,' for instance, he is forced to ask himself, 'Which is the world? Of our two sleepings which...?'. A naturalistic vision (the description of the awake 'sleeping' life we live among 'the shapes of daylight and their starch') ceases to satisfy him. It is too simplified and rigid to accommodate the complexities of the elusive reality with which he is faced; for 'The photograph' gives only 'one-sided skins of truth', a biassed and superficial point of view. Hence photographic naturalism...

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*The poem does not seem to reach any 'real' reality in answer to this question; it merely undermines both naturalistic and psychic realities: external appearance seems as unreal as the plot of a poor film, but the inner reality reflected in dreams is no better, in that it is a 'eunuch' world of exaggerated gothicism which ceases to pertain during the day. Thomas may be explaining that there is no standard of reality, or he may be suggesting that this standard lies in some synthesis of the extreme points of view represented by total naturalism or total insistence on the psychic world to the exclusion of all other possibilities; either way, the parallel with Surrealism is unmistakable.*
(which smacks of artificiality in that it is 'Flavoured of celluloid') becomes merely a 'show of shadows'. 26 That is, the 'shots' which such methods 'Impose' make no allowance for Man's hidden, psychic, instinctual, and dreaming life (the true 'sleeping' life we live in 'dreams'): in Thomas's own words, those who indulge this naturalism are 'throwing the nights away'. 26

By contrast to this latter approach, Thomas claims that in his own artistic approach to reality an essential part of his 'world' is 'The dream that kicks the buried from their sack'. 25 His world includes an unpleasant psychic reality which, he writes in New Verse, 'is hidden' but 'should be made naked'. 27

There is an element of psychoanalytical catharsis here. 'Poetry', Thomas says, 'recording the stripping of the individual darkness, must, inevitably, cast light upon what has been hidden for too long, and, by so doing, make clean the naked exposure.' 27 He amplifies this statement when he writes, 'Freud cast light on a little of the darkness he had exposed', adding that, 'Benefiting by the sight of the light and the knowledge of the hidden nakedness, poetry must drag further into the clean nakedness of light more even of the hidden causes than Freud could realise.' 27 One is strongly reminded here of M. Breton's comment in What Is Surrealism? that 'If the depths of our minds harbour strange forces ..., then it is all in our interest to canalize them, to canalize them first in order to submit them later, if necessary, to the control of the reason.' 28

The antipathy to naturalism in Thomas's thirties poetry is complemented by a distaste for the utilitarian rationalism which is
taught from birth 'to twist the shapes of thoughts/Into the stony idiom of the brain'. This 'stony idiom' reappears in another poem as 'the word' which is 'In the beginning'. The 'word' is not the divine logos, but a rational semantic device which 'from the solid bases of the light/Abstracted all the letters of the void'. The result is a language cut off from the sensuous, tangible world—a pattern of sterile ciphers, or as Thomas himself puts it, 'words/Left by the dead'.

This, of course, concerns the poet, since words are the tools of his trade. He complains, in the short story 'The Orchards' (from The Map of Love), 'The word is too much with us, and the dead word.' In order to combat the deadness of the language at his disposal Thomas strives, as Henry Treece points out, for a 'vocabulary' and an 'imagery' which 'affect the reader primarily and principally through the emotions', thus transcending the sterility of rational usage. This often amounts to what is virtually a magical use of language. Mr. Blackburn has noticed that 'many of the poems by Dylan Thomas and a few of those by Barker ... are incantations', adding that 'an incantation is a magic spell'. Mr. Treece goes even further, claiming that 'Dylan Thomas, following in that line of modern innovators which starts perhaps with Hopkins and develops through Pound, [and] Eliot' is 'an alchemist of words.'

*John Bayley has noticed of Thomas's poetry that 'When the poem, instead of being taken in at some deep, almost wordless, level of the mind, brings itself to the rational surface, it loses its lustre like a stone from a rock pool exposed to the air' (The Romantic Survival, 1957, p.201). This would presumably be because the poetic effect depends to some considerable extent on the occultism of verbal magic.

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in fact, in this poetry is struggling to transfuse the 'chemic blood'
of the heart's 'spelling' into a devitalised poetic language which is
now composed of 'heartless words.'

This 'spelling' is not dependent solely on emotions and magic,
however; the intellect is to have its say too. Thomas writes, 'I
let, perhaps, an image be made emotionally in me and then apply to
it what intellectual and critical forces I possess--let it breed
another, let that image contradict the first, make, out of the third
image born out of the other two together, a fourth contradictory
image, and let them all, within my imposed formal limits, conflict.'

That is, vitality of expression is guaranteed by the shock of
clashing images (generating a convulsive beauty, perhaps?), and by
the tension created by the rival pulls of emotions and intellect.
This is the essence of what Thomas calls 'my dialectical method,'
echoing not only Surrealist terminology, but also the spirit behind
such terminology.

There are, indeed, aspects of Thomas's poetry which appear to
be direct derivations from orthodox Surrealism. Mr. Blackburn,
examining 'poets like Dylan Thomas, George Barker and W.S. Graham',
speaks of 'their earlier work' as giving the impression of being
based on 'whatever came bubbling out of the unconscious', the
unconscious being regarded as a mine of 'poetic truth'. Richard
Rees had made a similar comment in 1933 when he said that Thomas's
poetry 'as a whole, reminded him of automatic or trance-writing.'
It is easy to see what he means when one reads such lines as the
following:-
As they dive, the dust settles,
The cadaverous gravels, falls thick and steadily,
The highroad of water where the seabear and mackerel
Turn the long sea arterial
Turning a petrol face blind to the enemy
Turning the riderless dead by the channel wall. 40

However, if there is an impression of automatism here, it is a
misleading one. A glance at the poet's notebooks reveals a pain-
staking and highly conscious method of composition, often relying
on a re-formulation of earlier material, and carried to such lengths
as to remove the spontaneity which is such a large part of psychic
automatism. Vernon Watkins goes so far as to note that Thomas
'distrusted his own facility',41 when he wrote without considerable
conscious effort. Thomas himself had said in 1933, 'Automatic
writing is worthless as literature, however interesting it may be
to the psychologist and pathologist.'42

This latter comment does not, of course, necessarily preclude
an interest in Surrealism on Thomas's part.** The movement has a

**This is in spite of the fact that Thomas wrote in 1935, 'I am
not, never have been, never will be, or could be for that
matter, a surrealist, and for a number of reasons: I have very
little idea what surrealism is;... my acquaintance with French
is still limited to "the pen of my aunt"' (in a letter to
Richard Church, quoted by Fitzgibbon, The Life of Dylan
Thomas, 1965, p.197). His remark about having little idea
of what Surrealism is is borne out by a letter to Richard
Jones in the summer of 1951 (quoted by Fitzgibbon, p.372,
published by Jones in Texas Quarterly, IV [Winter 1961],
under the title of 'Dylan Thomas's Poetic Manifesto', and
also printed as 'Notes on the Art of Poetry' in A Garland
for Dylan Thomas [collected by George J. Firmage], 1963,
pp.147ff.); in this much-quoted document he equates Surrealism
entirely with psychic automatism.
definite attraction for him; if he never breaks bread with the Surrealists, then at least he boils string with them!" There may well be some truth in Constantine Fitzgibbon's conjecture that Thomas was, in the early part of his poetic career, 'still sufficiently provincial to share in the excitement' which Surrealism generated during its most prominent period. It seems likely that Mr. Fitzgibbon is on the right lines, also, when he speaks of Surrealism as 'a slap in the face for accepted values about the very nature of art', a gesture which, he says, 'would appeal to Dylan even though he himself continued to accept those values.'

As I suggested at the outset of this thesis, rigid definition in this subject is neither desirable nor possible--and the case of Thomas illustrates the point. On the one hand is his avowed antipathy to Surrealism. On the other is the strikingly Surrealist appearance of part of his earlier work, and, more important, the frequent similarity of theme and approach.

Geoffrey Moore, in an article on Thomas in the Kenyon Review, puts the problem in a reasonable light when he writes, 'Nor was he the Da-da-ist or Surrealist he has sometimes been made out to be--

*This refers to an incident at the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936, at which Thomas served boiled string to the audience while Breton and Éluard recited their poetry.

**There is possibly even a hint of the spirit of Dada in what David Holbrook describes as Thomas's 'deliberate perversity' (Llareggub Revisited, 1962, p.121), his 'oral sensationalism' (ibid., p.128), and in the fact that Thomas would 'court applause for irresponsibility, for casual disparagement of the artistic conscience' (ibid., p.141).
although, paradoxically, his verse may be seen as the climax of a process of poetic development which includes these phenomena. Later Mr. Moore amplifies this by speaking of a 'cult of irrationality,' which runs, in its later stages, through the gothic which precursed [sic] Lautréamont, through Baudelaire and the late 19th Century French Symbolists, through Surrealism to Dylan Thomas.  

Thomas was not, certainly, a Surrealist; but he had at times so much in common with 'l'esprit' of surrealism that one might call him a 'surrealist'. Perhaps, lacking a clear conception of what surrealism entails, he was a surrealist malgré lui. In any event, his poetry was to prove, as we shall see later, an important influence on the surrealist spirit as it is manifested in the forties.

* * * * * * * * * *

In two of the quotations I have used above,* Thomas's poetry is linked with that of George Barker. There is some justification for this linkage, not only in general terms, but in the two poets' respective relationship to Surrealism in the thirties.

The linkage is justified by lines of Barker's poetry such as, 'The green dream hung in the male tree bled when I burst/And burning boy out of the apple I fell', or 'Thus is born downward breaking from bud upward/The bare bloodred babe, the crimson cockerel.'

Obvious similarities, both thematic and stylistic, are evident here. The 'trauma of birth' (of 'The bare bloodred babe' who tears

*Nos. 33 and 37.
'The fragments of his mother's meat hanging horror\(^{47}\) and the animistic spirit (which inspires the description of the mother's womb as 'the apple' and the father as 'the male tree\(^{46}\)) are conveyed through the same sort of imagery,* and enacted in the same sort of rhythms, in the work of both poets.

Mr. Scarfe writes that 'The poems of George Barker ... are of the same category as Dylan Thomas's; they touch Surrealism superficially.'\(^{48}\) Mr. Read is prepared to go further than this, putting part of Barker's work 'in the surrealist category.'\(^{49}\)**

As is the case with Thomas's relationship to Surrealism, the most reasonable statement of it in Barker's case seems to lie between these two opinions; while not in any way being a member of the Surrealists, Barker does reveal in some elements of his thirties poetry far-from-superficial preoccupations (such as the pervasive animistic reference already mentioned) which are in keeping with the spirit of surrealism.

In Barker's 1937 collection the reader is quickly made aware that violent and disruptive forces are becoming rampant in the panorama presented: one feels that an outbreak is imminent, and indeed the poet himself speaks of sensing 'the extraordinary event, the calamiterror'.\(^{50}\) The event is not conceived specifically in

*Compare especially Barker's 'bud' of human growth with Thomas's 'green fuse' (18 Poems, 1934, p.13), or Barker's 'green body of leaf about the bone' (Calamiterror, 1937, p.13) with Thomas's 'man of leaves' (Twenty-five Poems, 1939, p.1).

**This comment applies to Barker's Janus of 1935.
terms of a political upheaval, but seems to stem from a more general
'violent spinning of things',\(^{51}\) which, 'in a dark time', threatens to
undermine mental stability and 'Inundates and annihilates the mind'.\(^{52}\)

The build-up of psychic violence is reflected in poetic
technique by the manic repetition of key words—as in the description
of rain which 'returns to earth returns/Blood god blood to god',\(^{53}\)—
and by an almost obsessive insistence on rocking, sickening rhythms—as in the movement conveyed by lines such as 'the rocking of their
interlock/Confuses categories, convulses shape, rocks the rocks'.\(^{54}\)
Here convulsion (as well as being the subject-matter in the latter
quotation) spreads over the verse structure itself.

The crisis in consciousness, in fact, is building up behind the
outward shows of what the poet describes as 'The countenance of
vacancy,/The cardboard opera façade'.\(^{55}\) Impending destruction is
suggested in Barker's use of ever more bizarre and contorted imagery,
moving from 'The brainstruck eyeball'\(^{56}\) to 'The mannikin' who 'marches
down the thigh,/Trampling a bowels' shambles',\(^{47}\) and culminating in
the vision of violence of 'The birds crushed and the violated girls,/The animals screaming and the raped tree'.\(^{57}\) This reflects what
Barker in his 1940 collection of poems calls the 'imagination's
haemorrhage', which must 'Trail the disastrous message of my dreams.'\(^{58}\)

The 'haemorrhage' starts to occur when 'Horror, like a sixth
sense,/Explodes in the light of reason'.\(^{59}\) This horror is realised,

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*The quotation as it occurs in Collected Poems, 1957, is even
more colourful; Barker writes, 'let my imagination's
haemorrhage/Trail scarlet lake the message of my dreams'
(p.80).
in actual as opposed to hypothetical terms, in the onset of the Second World War. The explosion of war causes Barker to look back with a rather more coldly critical eye on his surrealist preoccupations of the thirties, of 'Celebrating the human perennial and the Sexual ecstasy of dialectics, marrying impossibles'. The crisis has proved to be, after all, not a revolution in consciousness, but merely a repeat of the armed confrontation earlier in the century; the 'hope' that the revolutionary fervour generated among younger poets in the thirties would result in a world built on a fuller awareness of the instinctual and unconscious aspects of Man's existence turns out, on close inspection, to have a 'fallen angel face'.

The Second World War, as we shall see in the forties section of the thesis, created an environment and imposed certain moral restrictions unsuitable to the flourishing of surrealism. In fact, as the late thirties drifted inevitably into the early forties and into war, the spirit of surrealism sank to a low ebb, not only in Barker's verse, but in general among the surrealist poets and sympathisers of the thirties.

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1 Auden and after, 1942, p.152.
2 Hugh Sykes Davies, 'Sympathies with Surrealism', New Verse, No. 20 (April-May 1936), 16.
3 'The Meaning of Surrealism', ibid., No. 10 (August 1934), 15.
4 Art and Alienation, p.46.
6 ibid., p.132.
7 ibid., pp.141-3, 144.
8 Read, 'Myth, Dream and Poem', Transition, No. 27 (April-May 1938), 192.
9 1957, p.190.
10 ibid., p.198.
12 Dylan Thomas, 'Two' ('When once the twilight locks no longer'), 18 Poems, 1934, p.8.
13 'Four' ('Before I knocked ...'), ibid., p.11.
14 The Price of an Eye, 1961, p.120.
16 'On no work of words ...', The Map of Love, 1939, p.19.
17 'Fourteen' ('Light breaks where no sun shines'), 18 Poems, p.26.
18 'Three' ('A process in the weather of the heart'), ibid., p.10.
19 'Eighteen' ('All all and all the dry worlds lever'), II, ibid., p.31.

20 ibid., III, p.32.
22 'A saint about to fall', The Map of Love, p.21.
23 'It is the sinners' dust-tongued bell ...', ibid., p.9.
26 ibid., p.18.
27 Answer to 'An Enquiry', New Verse, No. 11 (October 1934), 9.
28 1936, p.64.
"Twelve" ('From love's first fever,...'), 18 Poems, p.24.
30. 'Thirteen' ('In the beginning ...'), ibid., p.25.
33. op.cit., p.114.
34. op.cit., p.39.
35. 'Ten' ('Especially when the October wind'), 18 Poems, p.20.
36. Quoted by Bayley, p.208.
37. op.cit., p.149.
38. ibid., pp.149-50.
40. 'I, in my intricate image,...', II, Twenty-five Poems, p.3.
41. Foreword to Thomas's *Adventures in the Skin Trade*, 1955, p.12.
42. Quoted by Fitzgibbon, p.124.
43. op.cit., p.215.
44. XVII (Spring 1955), 261.
45. ibid., 275.
47. ibid., p.18.
48. op.cit., p.152.
49. Reported by David Gascoyne in the review 'On Spontaneity', *New Verse*, No. 18 (December 1935), 19.
50. *Calamiterror*, p.35.
51. ibid., p.37.
52. ibid., p.49.
53 ibid., p.16.
54 ibid., p.14.
55 ibid., p.11.
56 ibid., p.13.
57 ibid., p.24.
60 'To David Gascoyne', Lament and Triumph, p.77.
61 ibid., p.78.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Conclusion.

The thirties was a period marked by revolutionary fervour among younger writers—the fervour of both Social Realists and Surrealists. As the decade advanced, the fervour declined. It became increasingly clear that hopes were delusive and enthusiasms mistaken, so much so that W.H. Auden could speak bitterly in 'September 1939' of the death of 'the clever hopes .../Of a low dishonest decade'.

Julian Symons speaks of Surrealism (among other things) as 'an integral part of the Thirties dream'; like many dreams, it died in the sober light of the events culminating in the Second World War:* it, too, was perhaps one of the 'clever hopes' that Auden mentioned.

The poetic output of the Surrealist movement was relatively small; in particular very few really effective complete poems (as opposed to felicitous fragments) were produced under its auspices. It failed, in fact, to live up to the promise suggested either by its theories or by its distinguished ancestors. Of the English poets, only a handful went all the way with Surrealism, even for a short time; most important was David Gascoyne, followed by Hugh Sykes Davies, and one or two other minor talents such as Philip O'Connor and Roger Roughton. Traces of the surrealist 'esprit' existed much more widely; it would be reasonable to regard surrealism

*Mr. Symons mentions 'the defeat of the Spanish Republic and the Nazi-Soviet pact' as two main causes of the disillusionment at the end of the thirties (The Thirties, 1960, p. 171).
as 'an influential idea'\textsuperscript{3} in the thirties. Elements of surrealism were noticeable in the poetry of Auden, Spender, and MacNeice; these elements were much more pronounced in the work of Thomas and Barker, and were very strongly felt in the poetry of Kenneth Allott and Ruthven Todd (whose work was at times so strongly influenced as to be 'hardly distinguishable from official surrealism'). The whole was presided over by Herbert Read, one of the 'sympathetic writers of the older generation'.\textsuperscript{5}

With the rapid demise of Surrealism itself, it was in the 'esprit' of the movement that any chance of future growth lay. As I have already suggested, even the spirit of surrealism was drastically attenuated by the end of the decade among the thirties writers. However, there was the germ of a resurgence in the fact that, as Francis Scarfe wrote in the early forties, 'the great movement of liberation begun by Surrealism, or privately achieved by such poets as George Barker and Dylan Thomas,...[was] being continued and systematized by some ... younger writers'.\textsuperscript{6} These writers 'formed into a group known as "The Apocalypse"'.\textsuperscript{6} It was through this group that 'l'esprit' of surrealism was mainly to be propagated in the forties.

\textsuperscript{1}Another Time, 1940, p.112.
\textsuperscript{2}The Thirties, 1960, p.70.
4 Hugh Sykes Davies, 'Sympathies with Surrealism', *New Verse*, No. 20 (April-May 1936), 16.


6 ibid., p. 155.
PART FOUR:

The Forties.

Why were the Forties so awful?

--Roy Fuller, 'The Boring Forties', New Statesman,
7 February 1969, p.198, col. 3.

So in our time all art seems meaningless ....

--Roy Fuller, 'Epilogue', New Writing and Daylight,
Winter 1943-4, 22.
CHAPTER FOURTEEN: Introduction.

It seems as if the poetry of the 'thirties has been a failure. The change which it preached and prophesied has not come; the evils which it tried to prevent, have not been prevented; the dream of a new humanity has proved only a dream. Its words seem as if they dissolved in nothing.

--Demetrios Capetanakis, 'Notes on Some Contemporary Writers', New Writing and Daylight, Summer 1943, 107.

The dominant event of the forties was, of course, the Second World War. It was the war that really marked off the thirties from the forties, and gave to the latter period its own particular characteristics. Not only did the outbreak of war (1 September 1939) more or less coincide with the beginning of the forties, but also the aftermath of hostilities had a profound influence on the latter half of the period*.

A common feeling at the commencement of hostilities was disillusionment--not only a literary disillusionment, as suggested by Demetrios Capetanakis in the above quotation, but a political and even spiritual one. Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement had proved ineffectual. The old decade's 'dream of a new humanity' could

*The historian, David Thomson, even suggests that 'the aftermath of ... war ... must be regarded as lasting for at least a decade after the end of hostilities' (Europe since Napoleon, 1966, pp.763-4).
no longer be reasonably sustained.

The rise of Fascism in Europe during the thirties, in addition to heralding an inevitable European war, had increasingly undermined the hopes of left-wing intellectuals in England. The Spanish Civil War, with its clash between left- and right-wing factions, had provided a focus for these hopes. Disillusionment had been fairly widespread when the constitutionally-elected left-wing government was overthrown by Fascist dictatorship.* The victory of Fascism here served as a reminder that history (which had been depicted as the heroine or almost guardian angel of much 'Revolutionary' poetry in the thirties**) is an impersonal force, unswayed by notions of 'good' and 'evil'.

In the second half of the thirties Nazism won not only an armed victory in Spain, but also political victories in central Europe (such as the acquisition of the Sudetenland through negotiation). Faced with the threat of war against Germany, in practice the major Western powers failed to champion the oppressed minor central-European powers against Nazi domination. The failure was all the more hard-felt among intellectuals in England in that Russia finally forfeited all right to be regarded as an alternative

*The sense of outrage at this evident injustice and perversion of the course of progress was reflected in terms of the world of art in an editorial comment from Contemporary Poetry and Prose in 1936; the editor wrote, 'The communist Minister of Education in the democratic Spanish government appoints Picasso director of the great Art Museum of the Prado; the Spanish fascists murder Lorca [Spanish folk-poet revered alike by the English literary intelligentsia and the Spanish peasantry]' (No. 6 [October 1936], 106).

**Julian Symons described this tendency effectively when he wrote, 'History is on our side. I must have read the words in a dozen poems' (The Thirties, 1960, p.20).
champion, by entering into an agreement with the Fascist oppressors.* The German-Soviet Pact, and unprovoked Russian aggression in Finland (coming on top of rumours of Communist persecution of Anarchist allies in the International Brigade in Spain, and rumours of brutal Stalinist purges inside Russia itself) finally proved the image of an idealised communism cherished by many young people in the thirties to have been totally inaccurate.

One of the results in literature of the undermining of the thirties leftist political idealism was that in the forties 'the impetus given by Left Wing politics ... [was] for the time exhausted'.** Certainly the rebellious 'Revolutionary' vigour evident in much thirties poetry was no longer to be seen. The Auden-generation watched the poetic fervours of youth 'advance into/a calmer stream, a colder stream'. The new literary generation seemed to be made up of poets unwilling to commit themselves to rebellion of any sort. In a review of new war poets and poetry Diana Witherby noted that 'though there are many poets with different opinions, the one thing they have in common is a cautiousness in committing themselves', further adding that 'there is something

* This was the Hitler-Stalin agreement of August 1939, which led to the German and Russian joint partition of Poland after Hitler's invasion of the country.
** The strict, doctrinaire lines of Communism were superseded by the almost a-political, non-Party lines of Anarchism; instead of advocating the concerted efforts of a disciplined group, poets were content to witness 'Under the crust of bureaucracy, quiet behind the posters,/Unconscious but palpably there—the Kingdom of individuals' (Louis MacNeice, 'The Kingdom', i, Springboard, 1946, p.46). Mr. Auden put it very effectively when he claimed that 'the successful artist ... is always an anarchist at heart'; he added the rhetorical question, 'Who has ever met a left-wing intellectual ... for whom the real attraction of Communism
profoundly dreary in the fact that the chances and prospects of war are touched upon without any protest, elaborate or otherwise.3 The vital (if eventually misspent) energies of thirties writers were gradually replaced by a 'general state of opinion' which Herbert Read considered 'might best be described as fatalistic'.4

This artistic fatalism had perhaps been initiated by the failure of artists in England to arouse sufficient support (either moral or material) for the ousted Republican government in Spain. Writers of all kinds were forced to realise that their individual powers of persuasion and action were now virtually meaningless in the unheroic world of political machinations. As Stephen Spender put it, 'The 1930's saw the last of the idea that the individual, accepting his responsibilities, could alter the history of the time.'5 It was no longer individuals, but powerful political blocs with huge mechanised armies, which were the agents of history. In England the forties was to see, in Alan Ross's words, 'the end of a myth; the myth that had unified writing and action, the writer and society, the interest of the individual with the interest of humanity.'6

The intractable realm of political machinations tended in the forties to be excluded from poetry, as being unsuitable material. W.H. Auden's opinion in the new decade was that 'Both their unique position in society and the unique nature of their work conspire to make artists less fitted for political thinking than most people.'7

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continued from previous page] did not lie in its promise that, under it, the state should wither away for others as it has already withered for him? (New Year Letter, 1941, pp.82-83).
Instead of the common thirties insistence on the external, political world there was what Mr. Ross described as a 'steady swing away from documentary writing and social realism' and 'a retreat into personal themes based on a fundamental dislike of public issues'.

Undoubtedly, from the artist's point of view in the forties, as Mr. Ross put it, 'political ... formulas ... [had] lost both their novelty and practical effectiveness'. The promise voiced in much of the socio-political verse of the thirties had not been fulfilled. Mr. Spender suggests in his autobiography that some progressive thirties writers 'had taken a bet that a world order of peace and social justice would emerge in their time, just as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley had done in their day'; and, he adds, the men of the thirties had 'lost, as the Romantics had done'. Auden made a similar point in his New Year Letter when he described himself and his contemporaries as poets who had been 'Expecting the Millennium/That theory promised us would come', but who had waited in vain, since 'It didn't.'

Political events in the late thirties clearly by no means suggested the attainment of 'the Millennium'. Rather, these events revealed the extreme debasement of humanity under the pressure of overwhelming political forces. Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland demilitarised zone and his calculated flaunting of treaty commitments

*Mr. Spender noted that, faced with a debased external world, the artist was 'forced on to his individuality', so that 'Individualism' became 'not so much a philosophy, an outlook, as a principle of integrity' ('The Creative Spirit--II', New Writing and Daylight, Winter 1942-3, 80).
at once showed up the moral weakness of the Western powers and exemplified the successful use of moral treachery on an enormous scale as a political weapon. In the ensuing tactics of international politics, millions of helpless people in smaller countries were used as material for barter between the major factions. Human individuality and rights were often totally ignored*—hence moral and spiritual, as well as political, disillusionment. For all apparent 'progress' in the intervening quarter of a century, Western Man was virtually back to where he had been in 1914. Faced with this retrogression, poets now instead of predicting the imminent rise of a 'new humanity' voiced rather gloomy prognoses such as Ruthven Todd's prediction that 'The imperishable gold of to-morrow is tarnished/Already.'12

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At least the outbreak of war itself put an end to the painful and protracted failure of the League of Nations and of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement.** The conflict was now open rather than undercover (and underhand), and there was an opportunity for positive action. As Jocelyn Brooke noted in retrospect, 'one was at least leaping into something different and difficult—like a winter bathe in the Serpentine'.13***

*Probably the best-known example occurred in the meeting between Hitler and Chamberlain at Berchtesgaden, during which the allied powers ceded large parts of Czechoslovakia to the Nazis while the Czechs looked on, helpless (see Thomson, Europe since Napoleon, 1966, pp.745-6).
**A history student suggested an apt analogy when he likened pre-war Europe to a patient suffering from grumbling appendicitis; at least the war provided the possibility of a successful operation.
***One is perhaps reminded here of the sentiments of Brooke's more famous First World War namesake.
There were, indeed, intermittent hints of a desperate optimism. One commentator wrote, 'It is now apparent to all that we are witnessing the end of an age and the beginning of a new one.'\textsuperscript{14} Lord Elton claimed that war was to serve as an 'opportunity of regeneration through suffering.'\textsuperscript{15} In one current of opinion the war was even identified as 'the continuation of social processes in new and more violent forms':\textsuperscript{16} it was to be regarded as 'an episode in the revolution.'\textsuperscript{17} The enforced entry of Russia into the war possibly even revived hopes of some sort of left-wing crusade, such as had seemed possible in the mid-thirties.

Even the unsettling period of waiting often called the 'phoney war',\textsuperscript{*} and the initial unchecked speight of victories for Hitler did not wholly destroy the spark of enthusiasm generated by the declaration of war, though this enthusiasm became more clearly nationalistic (rather than humanitarian) in orientation as the war effort was stepped up. Dunkirk was regarded not as a disaster, but as a turning point. Mr. Connolly wrote in July 1941 that 'Since Dunkirk we have seen the end of the political and military decadence of England', explaining that 'Whatever residue of complacency, sloth and inefficiency there may be left, England is now a great power, and able to stand for something in the world again.'\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{*}Mr. Thomson summarises as follows:—
The winter of 1939 was the time of the 'phoney war'. Apart from occasional skirmishes in the Maginot Line and considerable action at sea, the war in the West reached an uncanny anticlimax. After so much feverish preparation, mobilization, bracing for battle, nothing much happened for six months. It created in Britain a false sense of security, in France a mood of relaxed effort which corroded morale and contributed to her eventual collapse. It gave time for German propaganda to soak in ....

\textit{(Europe since Napoleon, 1966, p.766).}
In literature this period of optimism gave rise to a short-lived but (as Brian Gardner points out) nevertheless 'considerable wave of patriotic, neo-Brookean verse'. It also arguably gave rise (as we shall see later) to the New Apocalypse movement, which was to carry on what there was of a surrealist spirit in the forties.

However, certain factors in the general nature of the war conspired to make optimism increasingly hard to justify. At best optimism was rather a desperate response, undoubtedly partly drummed up by propaganda.* If one tried to be philosophical about the war, taking an other-than-nationalistic view, the optimism tended to disappear.

This was a war even more mechanised than had been the First World War. The familiar theme of individual insignificance in the face of impersonal machines of mass destruction was consequently even more relevant now. The pernicious aspect of scientific progress was revealed in ever-increasing magnitude by increasingly refined weapons of aerial bombardment; within five years Man's faculty for destruction went from the London 'Blitz' to the Allies' Thousand Bomber Raids to the German V1 and V2 rockets, and culminated in the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (weapons which inflicted enormous civilian casualties).**

So the war was widely regarded (reasonably enough) as a 'Hiatus'.

*In a war in which English civilians were for the first time subjected to bombardment, optimism on the home front became almost a strategic material in the war effort.

**John Hayward writes that 'The first use in 1945 of atomic energy—to wipe out an entire community of men, women, and children—was an ominous and alarming symptom of ... [a] dangerous, perhaps fatal, disease of the human spirit' (Prose Literature since 1932, 1947, p.39).
in healthy natural life, as 'The years that did not count'. Alun Lewis captured the feeling effectively in the elegiac poem, 'All Day It Has Rained'; he wrote that we

For years have loved, and will again
Tomorrow maybe love; but now it is the rain
Possesses us entirely, the twilight and the rain.

The frequent unavoidable inactivity occasioned by military routine, and referred to in this poem, often created not elegiac beauty, but frustration and lethargy. Lewis himself spoke of "wasting my own time" and sitting 'untouched in ... trenches and tents, and the war ... going on somewhere else'—the sort of situation that Emanuel Litvinoff described as 'Inactive Service', in which 'The spirit shrivels in the idle hands.'

The conditions of war undoubtedly exerted a large (and generally deleterious) influence on the poetry of the period. Maurice Bowra wrote in 1946 that 'The vast mechanized effort which it [modern warfare] demands of everyone is too exacting and too exhausting to allow creative writing, and the violent sensations of battle dull and stun the poetical sensibility.' His contention is borne out by the fact that there was something of a 'Hiatus' in artistic effort equivalent to the one caused by war in healthy natural life. Mr. Connolly drew attention to this hiatus (particularly in the progressive, avant-garde element of literature) in his apologia for the first number of the periodical Horizon in January 1940.*

*Mr. Connolly was described by Mr. Hayward as 'leader of the intellectual avant-garde' (Prose Literature since 1939, 1947, p.26); and Horizon was described by Nicholas Moore as an 'arbiter of respectable progressive taste' ('The Poetry of Dylan Thomas', Poetry Quarterly, X [1948 Winter 1949], 229).
He wrote, 'The moment we live in is archaic, conservative ..., for the war is separating culture from life and driving it back on itself, the impetus given by Left Wing politics is for the time exhausted, and however much we should like to have a paper that was revolutionary in opinions or original in technique, it is impossible to do so when there is a certain suspension of judgement and creative activity' [my italics]. Alun Lewis was also aware of an interruption in literary creativity, as is shown by his comment that in the war environment 'The small hungry or creative self must wait until all this is over'.

The most obvious effect of the war was that, as John Hayward pointed out, 'potential young writers of both sexes were conscripted for national service and had little chance of pursuing a literary career, except spasmodically and against extra-ordinary hindrances.' As well as this physical conscription there was a more subtle form—one might call it a moral or spiritual conscription. Mr. Hayward noted that 'For five years, the energies, mental and spiritual no less than physical, of the whole nation were conscripted for one end; and the activities and interests of every man and woman were directed, if not actually prescribed, by the over-riding needs of the State.' Undoubtedly such a state of affairs would have made the completely free exercise of the poetic imagination very difficult.

This was by no means the only problem for the war-time poet. In addition he was faced with what frequently appeared to be an intransigent subject-matter. One poet described the world with which the war writer was inevitably occupied as 'The dirty-moted, bomb-soured, word-tired world.' Mr. Connolly further suggested that the
Second World War was 'a war without the two great emotions which made the Spanish conflict real': that is, it was 'a war which awakens neither Pity nor Hope'.

Events did not seem to provide adequate stimulus to activate latent poetic abilities, at least in such an impressive way as they had done in the First World War. The element of shock which had galvanised the poets of 1914-1918 into vital poetic action was notably absent since (Alex Comfort remarked) the generation of Second World War poets had grown up 'from early adolescence in the almost complete certainty that we should be killed in action'. They came to the war 'knowing more or less what it would be like but never sure that it was worth it.'

Poets were confronted with the problem of finding an honest and suitable approach to their subject-matter. Having seen the excesses of poets of the earlier World War--chauvinism and false-sounding heroism--in general they avoided such responses. At the same time the outraged fervour of rebellious First World War poets was scarcely appropriate to the different circumstances of the new war. H.B. Mallalieu points out that 'Because there was no illusion at the outset, there was not subsequent outcry against the futility of war'.

The most common method of coming to terms with the problem was that of employing the relatively negative tones of anti-heroics and understatement:* in order to avoid grandiose gestures, poets were

*Mr. Gardner writes that 'Anti-heroics were popular,' pointing out that 'even Timothy Corsellis's fighter pilots were drawn together, not by some crusade, but "by a common love of pornography and the desire to outdrink one another"' (The Terrible Rain, 1956, p.xix). Later he continues, 'the first War poet who seems closest to many of those of the following war is Edmund Blunden, who had spoken with their kind of understatement [my italics]' (ibid., p.xx).
willing to retrench to a minor idiom.

Though the poets of the earlier war did not in general provide much helpful precedent as regards approach to subject-matter, nevertheless the situation of war poets in either war was similar enough for the Second World War poets to feel forestalled by their soldier-predecessors. Keith Douglas, for instance, wrote, 'Rosenberg I only repeat what you were saying';\textsuperscript{33} and Alun Lewis in a poem 'To Edward Thomas' said 'I remembered/This war and yours', as if both poets in their respective wars were part of the same 'weary /Circle of failure'.\textsuperscript{34} One is certainly tempted to agree with Roy Fuller's retrospective view of 'The Civilization' of these forties war years, that 'Their poets choked on/The parallel of past calamities.'\textsuperscript{35}

Further than this, the familiar problem of suitable poetic language remained. In a time when the spirits of the civilian population were bolstered with what in retrospect appears as ludicrously inflated and pompous rhetoric, and when military expediency made it necessary to have a slick official jargon, language was subjected to unaccustomed pressures. Mr. Spender noted that language was abnormally 'misused, trafficked, stretched thin, turned abstract, officialised and castrated'\textsuperscript{36} in the war. The problem was made greater by misuse in poetry itself. The onset of war provided the majority of the civilian population with a new 'black-out' time with little to do, and writing (including the writing of poetry) became a not uncommon pastime. Though this in itself may have been desirable, the result was often that (in Mr. Fuller's words) 'a horde of phoney and second-raters\textsuperscript{37} were let loose to ravage poetic diction; thus lack of technical and verbal 'know how' put a
further strain on language, often turning it into sentimental cliché.* Indeed, Mr. Connolly, complaining of 'an unchecked inflation in our overdriven and exhausted vocabulary', suggested ironically that the situation was so critical that 'dictatorial powers to clean up our language should be given to a Word Controller.'**

The overall state of affairs with which new forties poets were faced was fairly accurately (if pessimistically) summed up by Mr. Connolly in *The Unquiet Grave.* He wrote,

The triple decadence: Decadence of the material; of the writer's language. The virgin snow where Shakespeare and Montaigne used to cut their deep furrows, is now but a slope flattened by innumerable tracks until it is unable to receive an impression. Decadence of the myth, for there is no longer a unifying belief (as in Christianity or in Renaissance Man) to permit a writer a sense of awe and of

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*Of course, the same might easily be said with some validity of any period, since each generation has its incompetent versifiers. The essential difference is that in the forties much of this low-quality poetry was seized on (possibly by the governmental propaganda machine) and actually printed; it became public instead of disappearing virtually unheard. Mr. Spender commented effectively on the general quality of much anthologised verse during the war when he wrote, 'Reading the year's poetry ... I cannot help sometimes wishing that instead of schools of poets, there were schools for poets' ('Lessons of Poetry 1943', *Horizon*, IX [March 1944], 207). Earlier he had noted (of a collection of Poems from the Forces) that 'the poets are sharply divided into those for which [sic] technique exists and those who have no sense of it' ('Poetry in 1941', ibid., V [February 1942], 105).

**It would be foolish, of course, to suggest that the war was solely responsible for any or all of the problems mentioned; rather, war seemed to cause a loss of artistic morale which made these problems appear even more insoluble than hitherto.
awe which he shares with the mass of humanity. And even the last myth of all, the myth of the artist's vocation, of 'l'homme c'est rien, l'oeuvre c'est tout', is destroyed by the times, by the third decadence, that of society. In our lifetime we have seen the arts advance further and further into an obscure and sterile cul-de-sac. 39

Certain recurrent themes in the poetry of the period indicate a growing feeling of artistic pessimism. One such theme was that of England's isolation by war. The exciting pan-Europeanism which had helped to fertilise and stimulate elements of modernist poetry in England during the thirties (and earlier) was no longer possible. Europe was now divided into rival military camps, with the British Isles hopelessly cut off from the mainland by a heavily-fortified sea-moat. Spender aptly illustrated the situation when he described the waves in the Channel as being 'like scissors,/Snipping and snipping England from France'. 40

Insularity inevitably destroyed the feeling of world (or at least European) brotherhood as manifested earlier in the International Brigade or in Surrealism.* Men were united now only by the fruitless death and destruction of war, to which they were conscripted. As Laurie Lee pointed out, 'brotherhood' was revealed not through concerted idealistic action nor through art and a collective imaginative faculty, but only through 'death's family likeness in each face'. 41

Indeed, some poets saw the war in terms of a 'human civil war', 42 in which universal brotherhood was destroyed by universal fratricide--

* --Surrealism, Mr. Connolly said in 1944, was 'the last international movement in the arts' (The Unquiet Grave, 1951, p.96).
hence the frequent reference to the example of Cain and Abel. Man had become the 'universal Cain', his forehead stamped with 'the brand of Cain', his steps dogged by 'The Shadow of Cain'.

Another of the recurrent themes was that of crucifixion. Christ on the cross (or sometimes the pagan equivalent, the sacrificed god) was an ethico-religious symbol of some importance to the period. It provided a focus of Man's cruelty, and of his vilification of the divine. Sir John Rothenstein, speaking of the important forties painter Francis Bacon, writes that 'his several Crucifixions represent not the historical event, but archetypes of the brutality of man's treatment of man'; the same might be said of the use of the symbol in poetry in the forties. Crucifixion (the violent evidence of Man's betrayal of the trust put in him by God) and war (the violent evidence of Man's betrayal of the trust put in him by other men) went hand in hand not only as artistic but also as poetic themes. War itself was sometimes described as 'the eternal crucifixion: ...Our own Last Supper', and its victims were seen as 'young white Christs'.

A theme inherited from the thirties, but much more widespread in the forties, was that of the onset of a figurative winter,* a theme promoted mainly by symbolism of ice and snow. The winter made itself felt on more than a merely physical level. As well as affecting the external environment, turning it into 'a landscape of white heat

*One might again cite Bacon's painting as an illustration. G.S. Fraser has noticed how Bacon in the forties 'had begun to exhibit his paintings of screaming paranolacs frozen into great blocks of ice' (The Modern Writer and His World, 1964, p.333): the combination of paranoia and ice suggests that the 'winter' may have stemmed at least in part from psychological causes. See p.248A, below.

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... screaming paranoids frozen into great blocks of ice ....


frozen', 49 ice touched the emotions and senses, so that 'pleasures' were made to 'freeze', 50 and invaded the spiritual world, leaving 'cathedrals' 'Frozen for ever in a lie'. 51

The winter theme presumably represented what Mr. Ross described as 'a mental and physical freeze-up' in the forties 52—a state of affairs made worse in England by the fact that the English people had become a 'Frozen Army', or 'The stiffened indigenes of winter's year' who 'stalk[ed] the shore' of a besieged isle, unable to break out. 53

Closely allied to the symbols of freezing and ice were symbols of petrifaction and stone (also present in the thirties). Auden spoke of 'a nature' not only stranded 'in the mountain frost' but also turning 'her future into stone'. 54 Once again the symbol functioned not only on this physical level but also on the emotional and spiritual levels, creating 'a stony wilderness of the heart'. 55 In literature the paralysis and petrifaction extended over the imagination so that it produced what Sidney Keyes described in the poem 'Images of Distress' as 'the knocking stones inside my head'. 56

One might say that these themes present a microcosm of prevalent artistic pessimism during the period.

Obviously some writers were finding it increasingly difficult to exercise their talents to telling effect. Mr. Spender said in 1940 that 'I am going to keep a journal because I cannot accept the fact that I feel so shattered that I cannot write at all'. 57

Indeed, the efficacy of poetry itself was sometimes called into question. Auden's Caliban gave authentic voice to a large element
of poetic opinion in the forties when he sneered that, in spite of "what once we would have called success" in the arts, "this world is no better and it is now quite clear to us that there is nothing to be done with such a ship of fools, adrift on a sugarloaf sea in which it is going very soon and suitably to founder." 

As W.R. Rodgers put it, 'All, all was gone, the fervour and the froth/ Of confidence' from the earlier decade. Instead we have what George Barker called the 'long lingering of disillusion.' David Gascoyne accurately captured, both in subject-matter and in rhythm, a common mood in the literature of the period when he wrote, 'An incommunicable desolation weighs/Like depths of stagnant water on this break of day'; as Louis MacNeice pointed out, 'all is flat, matt, mute, un-livened, unexpectant'.

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Weariness and pessimism were carried over into the immediately post-war period. Mr. Ross explains that 'In England everyone was tired.' An initial element of enthusiasm at the new peace (enthusiasm evidenced in the periodical Horizon by, on one level, delight with the results of the General Election, and, on another level, by a revived interest in the fortunes of French literature) was quickly dampened. By 1946 already 'The confident, assertive step of a society on the march had petered out into a kind of sluggish dawdle.' The keynotes once more became exhaustion and lack of expectation, typified by Christopher Hassall's description of a ticker-tape celebration as 'all the windows weeping paper tears, Weeping waste paper for the wasted years.'
Humphrey Slater says that after the war 'the intellectual stream' continued to flow 'slow and thin'; and he emphasises that there was 'nothing in the least like the bursting iconoclasticism of the early twenties.' Literature was in a particularly bad way, apparently. The run-down condition of poetry at the time was suggested by Mr. Connolly's 'Comment' in 1947 that 'for the first time there will be no article on last year's poetry for we do not consider the volumes produced in 1946 to justify one.'

In particular the progressive element of literature still seemed to be the worst hit of all. Philip Toynbee could still describe England in 1948 as a nation of poets 'without an avant-garde'. Mr. Connolly took a very pessimistic view once more; having stated in his turn that in England 'such a thing as avant-garde in literature has ceased to exist', he added that 'a literature without an avant-garde soon becomes a literature without a main body', concluding that 'It is but one more sign of what a distinguished critic has called "The Twilight of the Arts"'.

In 1948 John Berryman made a comment similar in spirit when, having asserted that 'It has been a bad decade so far', he suggested that 'If the twenties were Eliot's decade, and the thirties Auden's, this has been simply the decade of Survival.' With surrealism too (as we shall see in the following chapter) it became a question of survival in the forties rather than of expansion and healthy new growth.

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1 Cyril Connolly, 'Comment', Horizon, I (January 1940), 5.  
'Selected Notices', Horizon, VI (August 1942), 144.

4 'At the Moment of Writing', ibid., I (January 1940), 20.

5 World within World, 1951, p.290.

6 The Forties, 1950, p.17. [There is no printed pagination in this book, so I have assumed a pagination, taking the fly-sheet as p.1.]

7 New Year Letter, 1941, p.82, note to ll.78-79.

8 op.cit., p.17.

9 Poetry 1945-1950, 1951, p.64.

10 op.cit., p.287.

11 op.cit., p.43, ll.769-71.

12 'In September 1939', Until Now, no date [but 1942], p.24.


14 Archimedes, 'The Freedom of Necessity--I', Horizon, VI (July 1942), 16.

15 Quoted in ibid., VI (October 1942), 226.

16 Goronwy Rees, 'Letter from a Soldier', ibid., I (July 1940), 471.

17 James Burnham, quoted by Dennis Routh in 'The Twentieth-Century Revolution', ibid., VI (September 1942), 151.

18 'Comment', ibid., IV (July 1941), 5.


21 In The Terrible Rain, p.37.


23 In Lyra (ed. Alex Comfort and Robert Greacen), 1942, p.42.
24 'The Next Stage in Poetry', Horizon, XIV (July 1946), 10.
25 i, 5.
26 Quoted by Hamilton in Alun Lewis, p.22.
27 Prose Literature since 1939, 1947, p.12.
28 ibid., p.9.
29 H.E. Bates, 'Give Them Their Life ...', I Burn for England
30 'Comment', Horizon, I (January 1940), 5.
31 Quoted by Hamilton in The Poetry of War, p.2.
32 In ibid., p.167.
33 'Desert Flowers', The Poetry of War, p.25.
34 ibid., p.29.
36 Poetry since 1939, 1946, p.59.
37 'The Boring Forties', New Statesman, 7 February 1969, p.198,
   col. 3.
38 'Comment', Horizon, IV (October 1941), 229.
39 1951, p.54.
40 'June 1940', Poetry of the Forties, p.39.
41 'The Long War', New Writing and Daylight, Winter 1942-3, 40.
43 Edith Sitwell, 'Invocation', New Writing and Daylight, Winter
   1943-4, 9.
45 Edith Sitwell, ibid., pp.197-8.
46 Francis Bacon (The Masters art series No. 71), 1967, p.3.

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48 Maurice Lindsay, 'Casualty List', ibid., p.97.


50 Spender, 'Winter and Summer', ibid., p.36.

51 Auden, op.cit., p.66, ll.1458/60.

52 The Forties, p.57.


54 op.cit., p.28, ll.337/31/40.


57 'September Journal', Horizon, I (February 1940), 102.

58 'The Sea and the Mirror', For the Time Being, 1945, p.52.


60 'News of the World', III, ibid., p.215.

61 'A Wartime Dream', ibid., p.86.

62 Precursors', Springboard, 1946, p.11.

63 The Forties, p.48.

64 ibid., p.57.

65 'Hats, Demob Depot, York', The Terrible Rain, p.188.


67 Horizon, XV (April 1947), 154.


69 'Comment', ibid., XVI (December 1947), 299.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: Surrealism in 'the decade of Survival'.

It is time to examine the fortunes of Surrealism, and of the surrealist spirit, in the forties.

Cyril Connolly wrote in The Unquiet Grave of 1944 that 'Surrealism ... is now in its decadence.' It would be very difficult to argue with this statement as regards Surrealism in England during the decade. Of the thirties Surrealists, Hugh Sykes Davies and Roger Roughton (as far as I am aware) produced nothing of note. Philip O'Connor contributed to The New Apocalypse in 1940, but otherwise published no poetry. Indeed, in England in the forties it seems that the name of Surrealism was scarcely ever mentioned, even in periodicals such as Horizon.

Where Surrealism was referred to, it was mainly as a joke --something flippant and trivial. Stephen Spender wrote in 1942, for instance, that a poet's 'humour is brightened up in the surrealist manner,' and that Charles Henri Ford's work 'has surrealist charm.' In similar vein was a poem by Lord Berners, addressed to Salvador Dali under the title 'Surrealist Landscape', in which Surrealism was presented as a humorous game that eventually palled for an irritated audience, becoming a 'Gothic Erection of Urgent Demands/On the patience of You and of Me.'

The serious elements of its theories, as put into poetic practice notably by David Gascoyne, seemed in general to have passed away during the second half of the thirties, remaining in the

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*The comment was, I suspect, directed principally at the non-English manifestations of Surrealism. It would have been even more pertinent to the movement in England.*

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forties only as a blurred memory.

The spirit of surrealism, as I suggested earlier, was itself severely attenuated at the end of the thirties, and in general its decline continued in the forties.*

The avant-garde element in English literature in general appeared to be on the decline in the war years. But, in particular, certain characteristics of surrealism made it especially vulnerable to the conditions of war.

For an art-form claiming an appeal that transcended national barriers, the consolidation of such barriers by the necessities of war must have been a definite set-back. England was cut off, not only from France (whose literature had played a large part in the germination of twentieth-century English modernism), but from refreshing and stimulating artistic intercourse with every other country: as Ruthven Todd observed, 'the five continents again ... [were] separately numbered'.**

Even in the restricted area of the home front, surrealism found itself in untoward circumstances. Individuality and freedom, which are both emphasised in the surrealist philosophy, were constricted by a state of affairs in which John Hayward said, 'In the struggle for survival the individual, regimented, directed, and controlled at work and play,... [was] forced to submerge his identity,

*An exception to this generalisation was a short-lived resurgence of the surrealist spirit in the form of the New Apocalypse movement in the early forties. I shall discuss this later.

**Henry Treece in How I See Apocalypse revealed the fact that English poetry was now forced back onto nationalism by his (erronious) insistence that 'the Apocalyptic tradition is British and not French' (1946, p.74).
and sacrifice, in the common interest, much of his freedom of action.' The non-conformity and anti-Establishmentarianism cherished by surrealism could not be freely exercised in the environment of England at war, in which 'the activities and interests of every man and woman were directed, if not actually prescribed, by the over-riding needs of the State.'

The effect of this in literature was well illustrated in a forties poem by George Barker: William Wordsworth was brought back to life in the poem 'Resolution of Dependence' specifically to point out that 'already your private rebellion has been quelled', that 'the violent gestures of the individualist' have disappeared, and that conformity has been allowed to swallow up 'the erratic, the strange'.

The forced conformity apparently had repercussions on poetic style itself. John Lehmann asserted in 1944 that 'poets have rejected any extreme experimentation in form'. So 'the strange' no longer even appeared in the world of literary technique.

In a besieged nation, the utilitarianism which surrealists had sought in the thirties to belittle (or reduce to a reasonable size) became of extreme importance. The English people were forced

*Mr. Lehmann went as far as to suggest that 'one can ... descry the outlines of a new classicism' ('The Armoured Writer--V', New Writing and Daylight, Autumn 1944, 171); though this statement seems to me to be an overstatement in terms of the evidence available, it remained true that experimentation, either in form or subject-matter, played relatively little part in the development of poetry in the decade. This was in complete contrast, of course, to the situation as it had been in the thirties, with its rather outre avant-garde (by English standards) and particularly its Surrealism.
to concentrate on the careful use of available strategic materials, and industrial productivity became a prime concern. The balance (which was the ideal of surrealism) between utility and aesthetic, spiritual, or humanitarian concerns was consequently rendered even more unlikely than it had been earlier. An erstwhile sympathiser with Surrealism, Kenneth Allott, now spoke of the necessity of 'Coming to grips with the dimensional world' (rather than attempting to transform it); as Mr. Connolly put it, during the war period, artists were forced to watch 'the whole world move noisily into the Dehydra-headed Utility epoch.'

Science, usually regarded by surrealists as one of their main enemies, became even more dominant in the forties. It was rampant in refined devices of warfare operating by land, sea, and air, and at home as well as abroad. The war aptly illustrated the power lurking behind the scientific ethos. Mr. Hayward spoke in 1947 (with the experience of war still freshly in mind) of the modern world as being 'controlled, to all immediate intents and purposes, by the power for good and evil that applied science has placed in men's hands'.

It might be argued that the unleashing of the power of 'applied science' caused (as had the First World War) a type of crisis in consciousness, in which an irrational destructive urge inherent in

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*The same held good after hostilities had ceased. Mr. Thomson explains that 'The austerities and discipline of war were projected far into the postwar years', mentioning 'sustained austerity ... in the cause of long-term economic reconstruction' as the major concern of 'the Labour government of 1945-50' (Europe since Napoleon, 1966, p.821).
Man was liberated,* and that this should have been conducive to the
growth rather than to the diminution of the surrealist spirit.**
However, the violence liberated was not really that of an irrepressible
psychic force. It was the violence, not of men but of machines, and
as such seemed merely another depressing indication of the power and
primacy of science: as Auden put it in his New Year Letter, 'This lust
in action to destroy/Is not the pure instinctive joy', but 'the
refined/Creation of machines and mind'.13

Thus the conditions of war seem actually to have forestalled
or undermined the efficacy of the surrealist crisis in consciousness
in the forties. In England the domestic façade of a once comfortable
materialistic society was literally shattered, by bombing raids that
carried international warfare into England itself for the first time
for over eight hundred and fifty years. However, the shock generated
by such destruction was dulled both by the inevitability and
predictability of air-raids, and by the protracted period over which
the destruction lasted.*** After the first occasions, presumably the

*Mr. Lehmann wrote in 1943 that the events of the period had
promoted 'the realization that there is no true and complete
picture of existence in which the unseen, what lies beyond
our five senses and logical proof, does not play a part, in
which there is no suggestion of what a modern poet meant when
he wrote "we are lived by powers we do not understand" '
('The Armoured Writer--IV', New Writing and Daylight, Winter
1943-4, 164).

**That pressures exerted by war could create surreal distortions
of 'reality' is possibly hinted at in Gavin Ewart's poem
'Oxford Leave', in which 'real people' appear as 'the

***After the shock of Guernica in 1937 (best conveyed in the
world of art by Picasso's cartoon of that name) it became
clear that in any future war aerial bombardment of the sort
practised in Spain would become a routine part of
hostilities.
the element of shock would have disappeared (to be replaced by
annoyance at the nuisance of black-out precautions and of interrupted
nights of sleep). As Allott put it in a forties poem, the 'haemorrhage
of images', caused in the poetic vision, itself became 'Diurnal',\(^{14}\)
--part of the set pattern of routine and (in the peculiar wartime
environment) one of 'The things we call normal'.\(^{15}\) In the poem
'City Nocturne' Allott amplified the point by describing the community
under constant threat of airborne destruction as a 'City of clichés',
whose people were obliged to carry out a 'rat's maze puzzle of drab
routines'.\(^{16}\) The 'crisis', in effect, turned into a cliché, and
was consequently of little use to surrealism.

In fact, whereas the First World War had produced an environment
in which surrealist poetry was to flourish, the Second World War
created an environment, it seems to me, in which surrealist poetry
was inhibited.

Mr. Connolly summed up the situation adequately when he wrote,
'We have gained in seriousness, but lost in mental elasticity; the
emotional strain of war has broken our curiosity, has fatigued us to
the point at which we are cynical, impervious, ... or hostile in the
presence of new ideas'.\(^{17}\) Such a loss of 'mental elasticity' and of
'curiosity', and such imperviousness to 'new ideas', it need hardly
be emphasised, would be notably antipathetic to the prolific growth

\(^{14}\) The continued wholesale slaughter and mutilation caused
by aerial bombardment created not galvanising shock, but
what Henry Treece called 'yet another step towards final
disillusion and disgust; the feeling which, held
individually in peacetime, might produce a Lawrence or
a Brueghel, but which, every man's property in time of
war, may bear no harvest 'but black-out gossip and shelter
apathy' (\textit{How I See Apocalypse}, 1946, p.8).
of art-forms such as surrealism.

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Certainly, the fact remains that historically the surrealist spirit which had flourished in the fertile environment of the mid-thirties was now scarcely in evidence in the work of most poets who had become established in the thirties and continued to write in the forties.

In the 'Auden group' in the earlier decade this spirit had been at most only a small part of the total extent of their work. But in the forties it was not to be found at all. I would suggest that just as the presence of the surrealist 'esprit' in some of the 'Auden group's' poetry in the thirties had been an indication of a fairly widespread interest in the themes of surrealism, so its absence from these writers' work now was a fairly accurate indication of a more general restriction of surrealism's extent in the poetry of the war decade.

When one looks for the spirit in the poetry of former sympathisers such as Allott or Todd, one's search is virtually fruitless. These poets were now at a large remove from its influence, using surrealism only occasionally, and as subject-matter taken from the art of the previous decade rather than as a principle of poetic creation and composition.* In particular there was no evidence of

*See, for instance, Todd's poems 'For Joan Miro' (Until Now, 1942, p.18) and 'Giorgio De Chirico' (The Planet In My Hand, 1946, p.53).
surrealist technique at work.

Even David Gascoyne, the chief Surrealist of the previous decade, was now at a further remove from surrealism. The urgency of his thirties poetry seemed forgotten. In his forties collection* he wrote, 'I stand still in my quasi-dereliction, or but stray/Slowly along the quais towards the ends of afternoons'. A Vagrant is thus a fitting title for the volume. At the time of writing, the spiritual quest of the thirties (in which Gascoyne's Surrealism and, later, surrealism had played a part) had degenerated to vagrancy, as a result of which 'The "Modern Man in Search of Soul" appears/A comic criminal or an unbalanced bore'.

In this situation, instead of attempting to attack or jolt the stultifying shiftlessness and apathy, Gascoyne now seemed capable only of asking the rhetorical question,

'What, oh what
A vagrant hope to find to take the place of what was once
Our expectation of the Human City, which each man might
Morning and evening, every day, lead his own life, and Man's?'

Gascoyne's style, as well as what one might call his spiritual approach, changed in the forties. What Miss Raine calls 'the style

*By this I mean A Vagrant, which was written, so the heading in Gascoyne's Collected Poems (1966, ed. Robin Skelton) informs us, '1943-1950' (p.viii), rather than Poems 1937-1942, which seems to me to be a product of the thirties rather than of the forties.

**The reference here is to an important psychological and spiritual thesis written in 1933 by C.G. Jung, entitled Modern Man in Search of a Soul; this work exhibits certain affinities with surrealism theory, as may be seen from reference to the quotations I have used from it in Chapter Two above.
of Hölderlin, ... the Orphic voice' was, along with other formative influences, 'assimilated so completely' in A Vagrant that it could not 'be detected' any longer. 20 Undoubtedly Miss Raine is correct when she notes that 'of the imagery of surrealism, the landscape of Hölderlin, ... no trace is now discernible'. 20 These were replaced by a consistently high technical standard and uniformity which, however, lacked the vital spark of vigour of Man's Life Is This Meat. As Thomas Blackburn puts it, 'wit, tenderness and insight' which were 'more relaxed than his earlier work' superseded the 'lurid glare and sense of apocalyptic revelation' of Gascoyne's thirties poetry. 21

All that Gascoyne himself had to say of his Surrealist days of 'lurid glare' was to quip, in conclusion to A Vagrant, in the poem ' Toujours Dans les Nuages',

I'm such an impractical dreamère
I seem to have mislaid my chimère. 22

One feels that it is in this forties collection of poetry that his mid-thirties claim to have given up Surrealism took total effect: for even the spirit of surrealism was no longer felt.*

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It is in Dylan Thomas's poetry that one can perhaps most readily distinguish surrealist elements continuing from the thirties into the forties. On a fairly superficial level, his verse still occasionally retained the outward appearance of surrealism. He retained more of his thirties verbal vigour than did Gascoyne or Barker, avoiding flat, pedestrian rhythms, and continuing to create weird and striking imagery (though the exuberant rhythms of his earlier poetry were certainly now more disciplined and moderated). One might cite as the most obvious example of his forties surrealism the 'Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait', with its narration of an individual's symbolic journey across a weird and dangerous ocean. In this poem the protagonist finds himself in an alien, surreal world in which an anchor can fly 'free and fast/As a bird hooking over the sea', in which grotesque spectres such as 'the crab-backed dead on the sea-bed' rise out of the waves, and in which the hero himself is subjected to a bewildering mélange of experiences that finally strand him high and dry once more in the 'real' world of 'Rome and Sodom To-morrow and London'.

Dream, as a kingdom where daytime consciousness is assailed by powerful, unfamiliar, and often grotesque forces, is a preoccupation Thomas continues to have in common with the surrealisists. In the poem 'Into Her Lying Down Head', for instance, the heroine is subjected in sleep to 'The colossal intimacies of silent/Once seen strangers or shades on a stair'.

[continued from previous page]

Gascoyne's 'relaxed' rhythms of A Vagrant were paralleled by Barker's modification of his own thirties rhythms (a moderation that in the latter case sometimes produced a slow, turgid verse movement). Thus the surrealist spirit had now disappeared in the work of both poets.
Madness is another surrealist subject still to be found. In 'Love in the Asylum' the poetic spokesman imagines himself embracing 'A girl mad as birds' and thus attaining 'the first vision that set fire to the stars'. The espousal here of dementia once more seems to be performed in the hope of thereby achieving some sort of ancient, mystic illumination, and one could argue that this is essentially a surrealist idea.

Primitive animism and the invocation of chthonic powers are further surrealist elements which remain in Thomas's forties collection (though they are now less forcefully presented and less pervasive than they had been earlier). The most striking examples occur in 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London', when Thomas speaks of himself entering 'the round/Zion of the water bead' and 'the synagogue of the ear of corn', and when he suggests that the dead child in the poem has been reunited with 'her mother' in the soil (presumably the earth-mother, Pound's 'GEA TERRA'), among 'The grains beyond age' and 'the dark veins' of the earth.

However, it would be misleading to over-stress the surrealist element, which in Deaths and Entrances is less strongly felt than it had been in Thomas's thirties collections.

The general direction of his verse has become clearer at this stage. It appears to be moving towards revelation based on the notion of redemptive death and subsequent rebirth. Inevitably, the ingredients of surrealism in his poetry are affected by this orientation. They are modified, reduced in vigour (sometimes even
reduced to the status of referents) and subsumed under the theme of apocalyptic revelation.

Of importance in setting out this theme are the series of stanzas entitled 'Vision and Prayer'. The first half of this poem encompasses the movement of human existence from birth to death, the opening stanza ending with the word 'Child' and the final stanza ending with the word 'Die'. The second half of the poem embodies the 'Prayer' arising from the life sequence of the first half, and culminates in the 'Vision' of blinding revelation at the end of the poem as the spokesman sacrifices his self-hood and is immolated in the fire of the sun which 'roars at the prayer's end'. The whole movement of life (and the whole movement of the poem) seems to be towards this moment of revelation. Though one could scarcely call the poem 'surrealist', one might reasonably call it 'apocalyptic'.

The theme of self-immolation and subsequent revelation is epitomised in the archetypal symbol of the phoenix. In 'Unluckily for a Death' the bird is described as an 'arrow now of aspiring', engaged in 'the phoenix' bid for heaven'. In 'A Winter's Tale' the poetic spokesman is depicted as eventually transcending the tribulations of earthly life and mating with the phoenix; he drives 'through the thighs of the engulfing bride,/The woman breasted and the heaven headed/Bird' as she bursts into flame, 'Burning in the bride bed of love'. In this image the sensuality of Thomas's earlier poetry is given a new spiritual purpose, in that the act of self-sacrifice in love here provides the fire necessary to the phoenix's flight and may lead to a 'paradise, in the spun bud of the world.'

Thomas's forties poetry seems to centre around this spiritual
purpose. One of the prime concerns of the poet in *Deaths and Entrances*, it seems to me, is to invoke or elicit the fire by which his phoenix may be immolated, and through which he may be vouchsafed a revelation of his 'paradise'.'* Once more, one could reasonably describe the poet's search as an apocalyptic one.

In this poetry, in fact, one can detect a modification of his thirties surrealistic spirit as it is moderated and directed more explicitly and specifically towards the theme of apocalyptic revelation. One might therefore describe Thomas as a New Apocalyptic poet in the forties.** The description may be further supported by the fact that he contributed to the anthology *The New Apocalypse* in 1940, and by the fact that he was the acknowledged idol and mentor of the New Apocalypse group. As Francis Scarfe said, Thomas acted for the group 'as a sort of mascot or Apocalyptic Hero'; and 'His peculiar talents really ... [did] fit very well into the Apocalyptic framework

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*This possibly accounts for the frequent reference to various sorts of fire in *Death and Entrances*. Thomas speaks of the fire of 'The sun' which 'roars at the prayer's end' ('Vision and Prayer', ii, p.54), of 'fire green as grass' ('Fern Hill', p.65), of the 'hunting flame' of the 'leoin' ('Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait', p.63), and even of the fire of a wartime 'Fire Raid' ('Ceremony after a Fire Raid', p.37). The concordance [ed. Robert Coleman Williams] lists twenty-two examples of the use of 'fire' or 'fires' in *Deaths and Entrances* (in twenty-five poems, as opposed to fifteen examples in fifty-nine poems from the thirties); it gives ten instances of the use of 'flame' or 'flames' in *Deaths and Entrances* (as opposed to four such instances in the thirties poetry).

**This was a description proffered at the time not only by disinterested critics such as Francis Scarfe, who regarded 'Dylan Thomas' as being 'in the movement' (Auden and after, 1942, p.160), but also by New Apocalyptic theorisers themselves: G.S. Fraser spoke of 'An Apocalyptic poet, like Dylan Thomas ...' ('Apocalypse in Poetry', *The White Horseman* [ed. Hendry and Treece], 1941, p.14).
of anarchism, myth, personal discovery'.

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It is to the disciples (and sometimes imitators) of Dylan Thomas that one must turn in search of any new growth of the surrealist spirit in the forties. These disciples formed themselves into a group called the New Apocalypse. A provisional credo was evolved apparently as early as 1938,* but the first collective publication of poetry did not occur until 1940, when The New Apocalypse went on sale.

Reasons for an upsurge of the surrealist spirit in 1940 must remain largely a cause for speculation. I would say that the most likely explanation is that the initial enthusiasms of the declaration of war (mentioned in Chapter Fourteen above) temporarily provided a suitable environment and an audience for a group of poets who optimistically chose to regard war as a period of redemptive suffering preliminary to some form of rebirth.** The group's first important publication did, after all, coincide with a time when public opinion

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*I am indebted to Frederick J. Hoffman for this information. During the course of my research I have been unable to find any other reference to the document as existing in the late-thirties, though I found it cited in Mr. Scarfe's Auden and after (1942), in Mr. Hoffman's article in ELH (June 1948), and in A New Romantic Anthology (1949, ed. Stefan Schimanski and Treece).

**Henry Treece, one of the important New Apocalyptic 'philosophers', wrote in How I See Apocalypse that 'war, after all, is an Apocalyptic affair' (1946, p.21). One feels that Dylan Thomas would have agreed with this statement. He himself used the destruction and fire of war as a sort of spiritual catalyst for his 'Ceremony after a Fire Raid', which culminated in the apocalyptic gesture at the end of the poem, of 'Glory glory glory/The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder' (Death and Entrances, 1947, p.39).
could regard the military catastrophe of Dunkirk in 1940 not as a national disaster, but as a turning point promising future improvement."

In any event, a resurgence of the surrealist spirit under the name of New Apocalypticism certainly took place in the first two years of the forties.

Though the group can be most conveniently discussed in detail in future chapters, it is perhaps desirable at this stage to give a brief literary history of its growth.

The group produced three anthologies in the first half of the forties; these were The New Apocalypse of 1940, The White Horseman of 1941, and The Crown and the Sickle of 1945. Mr. Treece's significant collection of critical essays, How I See Apocalypse, was printed in 1946. In the later forties, when an extension of the New Apocalypse came into being under the equally grandiose title of the New Romanticism, a further anthology, A New Romantic Anthology of 1949, was produced.

At first the surrealist spirit was strong in the group. However, if one reads the New Apocalyptic anthologies in chronological sequence, one can detect a progressive move away from surrealism, both in technique and in content.

In The New Apocalypse there is ample evidence of surrealist technique. One has the Petron-like prose poem narratives of Treece's

*One remembers that Mr. Connolly had written, 'Since Dunkirk we have seen the end of the political and military decadence of England' ('Comment', Horizon, IV [July 1941], 5).
'The Brindled Cow', 33 and Dorian Cooke's 'Ray Scarpe', 34 as well as some very strange surrealist poetry by Norman McCaig (such as 'To call the crutch a deliverer from crystal' or 'The closer fist clamped my ell-head in'), 35 and a contribution from a thirties Surrealist, Philip O'Connor. In The White Horseman there are still obviously surrealist poems--one or two of Hendry's contributions (such as 'Europe: 1939'), 36 and some of McCaig's 'Nine Poems'. 37 However, by the time of the publication of The Crown and the Sickle, the surrealist technical element seemed to have waned considerably in strength. In this anthology surrealist technique is reduced to intermittent fragments--images or flashes of vision such as that embodied in Ian Bancroft's description of 'strange giants stalking in our streets/And grey wings flapped by fast-retreating swallows'. 38 The same might reasonably be said of surrealist technique in A New Romantic Anthology, though there is now even less evidence of it. It is reduced to the infrequent use of surrealist devices (as in the creation of a surreal vision in Peter Ure's 'In the City') 39 whose effect is often muffled by the overall impression of the verse in which it is only one element.

One can trace a similar attenuation of surrealist content. In the first two anthologies it seems to be of central and almost exclusive importance, and is supported by copious surrealist theory. However, The Crown and the Sickle, as Mr. Treece pointed out in the 'Preface', contains 'no manifesto' and presents 'no editorial policy distinguishable from a general desire to collect and display ... examples of a new Romantic tendency'. 40 That is, the emphasis here appears to have shifted from a concern with the specifically surrealist theories and poetry of the New Apocalypse to a concern with a more
general manifestation of Romanticism. This change of emphasis culminates in *A New Romantic Anthology*, a collection in which Maurice Lindsay claimed that the New Apocalypse had 'disintegrated', and which illustrated what Mr. Fraser has called 'a wider and even more shapeless stream of tendency [than the New Apocalypse], the New Romanticism.'

Thus the surrealist spirit inherent in the New Apocalypse movement became progressively diffused and weakened. The surprising rise of a new group championing surrealism was only short-lived, and its energies tailed off rapidly in the second half of the forties.

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1. 1951, p.96.
2. 'Poetry in 1941', *Horizon*, V (February 1942), 103.
3. ibid., 104.
4. ibid., VI (July 1942), 6.
5. 'March 16th, 1940', *Until Now*, no date [but 1942], p.28.
7. ibid., p.9.
8. *Lament and Triumph*, 1940, p.64.
10. 'The Children', *The Ventriloquist's Doll*, no date [but 1943], p.11.
11. 'Comment', *Horizon*, X (December 1944), 367.
14 'Feast of Saint Swithin', _op.cit._, p.35.
15 'Morning and Evening', _ibid._, p.31.
16 _ibid._, p.52.
17 'Comment', _Horizon_, IX (February 1944), 77.
18 Title poem, _A Vagrant_, 1950, p.8.
19 _ibid._, p.9.
22 p.62.
24 _ibid._, p.59.
25 _ibid._, p.62.
26 _ibid._, p.20.
27 _ibid._, p.15.
28 _ibid._, p.8.
29 _ibid._, pp.43ff.
30 _ibid._, p.17.
31 _ibid._, pp.30-31.
32 _Auden and after_, 1942, p.163.
33 1940, pp.38ff.
34 _ibid._, pp.41ff.
35 _ibid._, pp.63-64.
36 1941, pp.62, 63.
37 _ibid._, pp.79ff.
38 'Poem for Dorothy', 1945, p.88.

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39, 1949, p. 118.
40 p. 5.
41 p. 145.
42 Vision and Rhetoric, 1959, p. 224.
CHAPTER SIXTEEN: The New Apocalypse--Theories and Themes.

...the great movement of liberation begun by Surrealism, or privately achieved by such poets as ... Dylan Thomas, is now being continued and systematized by some of the younger writers, who are trying to give it a more positive direction. These young writers have formed into a group known as 'The Apocalypse'.

--Francis Scarfe, Auden and after, 1942, p.155.

It is now less misleading than it was with reference to the thirties to speak of a 'group' of surrealist poets, since the New Apocalypse movement consisted of a body of writers whose allegiance was, in the forties, unchanging and unequivocal.* Of most importance among these writers were Alex Comfort, J.F. Hendry, Norman McCaig, and Henry Treece. Their New Apocalyptic work was presented in the group anthologies mentioned in Chapter Fifteen, or in collections sympathetic to their cause, such as Lyra in 1942 or Sailing To-morrow's Seas in 1944.

One of the results of the New Apocalypse's attempts at 'systematizing' Surrealism was the accumulation of a barrage of theory in its anthologies, a barrage through which one must pass before reaching the poetry itself. Consequently, for the remainder

*The New Apocalypse even had 'in the group', in the person of J.F. Hendry, 'like Breton for the Surrealists, its official public spokesman' (Fraser, 'Apocalypse in Poetry', The White Horseman, 1941, p.5).
of this chapter I shall concentrate on examining the movement as a philosophy, in the light of its avowals of policy (notably in essays in *The New Apocalypse*, *The White Horseman*, and *A New Romantic Anthology*), and of its main themes.

In spite of the *New Apocalypse*’s attempts at systematizing Surrealism, one immediately comes up against a difficulty of definition; for, as G.S. Fraser said, 'This is ... a flexible philosophy; a philosophy which hardly dictates to anyone how he is to write or feel.'¹ Mr. Treece suggested that its 'most obvious elements ... [were] love, death, an adherence to myth ....'² This is all rather vague. One can understand John Heath-Stubbs's exasperation when he complained that 'From the mass of critical verbiage with which the "Apocalypsics" sought to define their position it is no more possible ... for the wit of man to recover a coherent meaning than to reconstruct the song of the Sirens.'³ Elements that Mr. Heath-Stubbs managed to extricate were 'a general discontent with the social-objective way of writing which prevailed in the 'thirties, plus some rather vague ideas about the importance of "mythical" imagery'—preoccupations sufficiently diffuse to encompass 'the rhetoric of Mr. Hendry, the naïve romanticism of Mr. Treece, and the marginal comments of Mr. Fraser and Mr. Moore'.’³

Mr. Treece attempted to present a general ideology in *How I See Apocalypse*. He wrote,

Apocalyptic means: apprehending the multiplicity of both Inner and Outer worlds, anarchic, prophetic, whole and balanced in the way a man becomes whole and balanced when

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he has known black as well as white, death as well as life, kindness as well as cruelty, madness as well as sanity, and all the other paradoxes and opposites, in his own nature as well as in the world about him. 4

To this might be added Mr. Treece's portentous warning that 'Apocalypse is the most militant movement seen in Britain for the last hundred years'. 5

The general ideology gave rise to certain aims and theories, which were presented in manifesto form. Frederick J. Hoffman quoted this 'statement of principle' as follows:-

(1) That Man was in need of greater freedom, economic no less than aesthetic, from machines and mechanistic thinking.

(2) That no existent political system, Left or Right; no artistic ideology, Surrealism or the political school of Auden, was able to provide this freedom.

(3) That the Machine Age had exerted too strong an influence on art, and had prevented the individual development of Man.

(4) That Myth, as a personal means of reintegrating the personlity [sic--presumably 'personality'], had been neglected and despised. 6

These four clauses were rather wider in implication than might at first be realised.

*Mr. Hendry made the point more economically in his very Surrealistsounding statement that Apocalypse poets were seeking ... the optimum living synthesis of man and exterior world; the fusion of man and object ... through the collapse of the subject-object relation' ('Introduction: Writers and Apocalypse', The New Apocalypse, 1940, p.15).
The revolt against 'machines and mechanistic thinking' suggested in clause one was expanded to include a 'machine-world' consisting 'not merely of motor-cars, trains and bombers, but of the whole field of objects.' Further than this, it comprised 'systems of thought and inference erected on the basis of these objects, such as those we call science and includes what we are pleased to term "objectivity."',

On a political level the revolt suggested anarchism--revolt against the central machine of government since, Mr. Treece claimed, 'there is no place for the individual in the Machine States and Apocalypse is, above all things, anti-mechanistic.'

Clause two also provided a justification for anarchism, since anarchism (theoretically) ignores both the political systems of 'Left or Right' which were incapable of achieving the desired 'freedom'.

The New Apocalypse tried to guarantee individual freedom by maintaining that, irrespective of political Party or artistic ideology, 'The future unit is the individual'. However, as was the case with Surrealism, the individual was not to be restricted to a purely personal world. For the 'acute self-consciousness' generated by concentration on the individual state of being had as its ideal the attainment of 'the mystical abyss of absolute

*Indeed, Mr. Hoffman described the movement's ideology in general as 'a restatement of aesthetic anarchism' ('From Surrealism to "The Apocalypse" ', ELH, XV [June 1948], 158).
oneness with the "Universal Spirit". Instead of merely pacing the prison of his own personality, the New Apocalyptic poet was conceived of as being united with some universal impulse. He was to be set free in a collective world governed by what Herbert Read in *The Philosophy of Anarchism* called 'the principle of equity,' which embodied 'principles of equality and fairness inherent in the natural order of the universe.'

From these principles stemmed the suggestion of re-establishing an animistic kinship between Man and the natural world. D.H. Lawrence in his version of *Apocalypse* (printed in 1932) had suggested something of the kind when he wrote, 'What we want is to destroy our false, inorganic connections, especially those related to money, and re-establish the living organic connections, with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind ...' His New Apocalyptic successors would have agreed wholeheartedly with this sentiment.

Possibly it was an awareness of the primacy of 'inorganic connections' in an industrial and scientific civilisation which led to clause three of the above manifesto. That science (the creator of the Machine Age and thus destroyer of the natural world) was the arch-enemy of New Apocalyptic poetry was frequently

"Mr. Read explained, 'It is possible ... to conceive a new religion developing out of anarchism' (*The Philosophy of Anarchism*, 1947, p.25)—the 'new religion' being, in fact, no more than a restatement of the common modern artistic desire for a return to primitive animism, a return to acceptance of 'the natural order of the universe' (ibid., p.16) to be effected in much the same way as was suggested in Surrealism, via a collective self in intimate contact with the primal powers of human, animal, and cosmic motivation."
emphasised. In opposition to science the New Apocalyptic poets pledged themselves to the promotion of art's status: they took a 'critical view of the nature of scientific description' and tried to 'open the way to a clearer, more just view of the nature of poetic description.'

The poets of the group, as clause four above reveals, had ambitious aims for this 'poetic description'. It was to be a vehicle for 'Myth' in the widest sense: this was what Mr. Hendry described as 'myth, the living and organic expression of human need'. That is, the group's poetry was to be 'concerned with the study of living,' and its importance was not to be solely a literary one. By creating a 'pattern of myth, individual and social,' these poets hoped to meet at least some of the spiritual problems facing Man in 'the Machine Age'—hence Mr. Fraser's claim that 'the poetry of the Apocalyptics is likely to have a certain permanent clinical value for the human race.'

Already one can detect the surrealist spirit at work in the philosophy. Indeed, at this point the theories of the New Apocalypse seem to all intents and purposes identical to those of Surrealism itself. As support for this statement one need only cite the New Apocalypse's emphasis on the necessity of challenging the primacy of the machine ethic (with its scientific rationalism, utilitarianism, and objectivity) and on individual freedom in the face of this established ethic. One might also cite the movement's desire for the total reintegration of the divided parts of Man's individual personality, its desire for a rapprochement between Man and the forces
at work in the natural universe, and its insistence on poetry's importance in evolving a 'Myth' for ameliorating Man's spiritual condition. These had been tenets basic to Surrealism in the thirties, and were now carried on by the New Apocalypse in the forties.

In addition to the basic ideological framework's being virtually identical to that of Surrealism, the surrealist spirit was revealed in New Apocalyptic writing in the recurrence of certain typical themes.*

Rebellion continued to figure prominently as a theme. Mr. Treece argued that revolt implied 'intelligence and sensibility, the use of head and heart, the senses of decency and equity, and over all, a natural balance.' The only difference was that now the internal and external conflict implied in revolt centred in the symbol of the Second World War rather than in that of the impending thirties Revolution; hence Mr. Treece could claim, 'war ... is an Apocalyptic affair--an organic movement with ... all the systematic anarchy and the ordered chaos of a lover's dream'. War apparently constituted 'a world revolution in which all conventions, whether of thought or action, break down and are replaced'.

The revolt was to embody not only 'the war for justice to man, to prevent his becoming an object ... in ... the Totalitarian State'...

*As I shall now be tracing ingredients of the surrealist vision through the New Apocalypse, it might be convenient for the reader to refer once more to the main points underlined in Chapter Two above.
but also an aesthetic revolt, bent on nurturing 'the growing edge of
poetry.'

In accordance with this latter (artistic or aesthetic) revolt, the
rights of the individual imagination were once more stressed in
opposition to the prevailing intellectual conformity. The group felt
compelled to 'mount guard over the integrity of the imagination'.
The sort of imaginative affirmation sought by New Apocalypse poets
was suggested by Mr. Read in *Poetry and Anarchism* (an author and a
book widely admired among the group*); he spoke of 'individual artists
whose aims and whose achievements have step by step built up a new
conception of reality—a conception of reality totally opposed to the
bourgeois standards of the period.'

The New Apocalypse's 'conception of reality' was primarily
concerned with the inner world. In the essay 'Apocalypse in Poetry'
Mr. Fraser claimed that the movement embodied (in Mr. Read's words)
'the effort ... to realize some of the dimensions and characteristics
of man's submerged being'. This effort marked only the first step
towards an ideal 'healing of the wounds of conflict between
depolarized sundered parts' of the personality. As was the case
with Surrealism, the psychic realm was stressed only to right the
balance of a world in which the external, material environment had
become overbearing.

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*Mr. Treece in How I See Apocalypse wrote of 'Herbert Read' as
a person 'who, in every branch of his art has shown that
selfless balance, that restraint, and that concept of eternity
towards which it is my hope that we are all moving' (1946, p.11).
Later Mr. Treece went on to cite as the essence of the New
Apocalypse outlook 'a form of anarchism not unlike that of
Herbert Read' (ibid., p.14). Indeed, Walford Morgan considered
the New Apocalypse as being essentially no more than a 'fusion'
of Surrealism with 'the anarchism of Herbert Read' (A New
But before balance and what Mr. Fraser called 'completeness' could be achieved, the insistence on the primacy of the object-world had to be attacked. As with the Surrealists, the attack took the form of an attempt to precipitate a crisis in consciousness, though it was now called 'the crisis of Spirit.' The Reverend E.F.F. Hill explained,

... man is enslaved both to the machine which he has made to master nature and to nature, and also to the social norm which he has established. The machine, nature (the cosmogonic process), and society become instruments of death. It is man's task ... to redeem nature, the machine, and society. This is the new element in consciousness ....It is crisis of Spirit.

Mr. Hendry emphasised the violence implicit in this 'crisis' when he asserted that 'Unless provision be made for the release of conative instincts, for the realization in society of the individual myth, and unless society is based entirely upon the individual, it will perish in a welter of blood, since it harbours within it, the seeds of its own destruction.'

The hypothetical 'crisis' facing society in 'the Machine Age' was epitomised in the individual crisis of madness, the dire, anarchic consequences of which were suggested in Wrey Gardiner's description of madness as the 'Filigree of insanity across the

*He wrote in the first essay in The White Horseman, 'The impulse behind the writing in this volume can be best described as the impulse towards completeness' (1941, p.3); this was presumably Mr. Treece's 'completeness' based on 'totality of experience' ('Preface', The Crown and the Sickle, 1945, p.5).
unbrushed abyss.' Dementia was an integral part of the New Apocalyptic vision since, we remember, Mr. Treece spoke of the ideal New Apocalyptic poet as 'apprehending ... madness as well as sanity'. Indeed, by a process of over-compensation away from the 'sanity' of scientific rationalism, madness was sometimes regarded as offering an excellent opportunity for lucid and untrammelled insight (very much as hysteria had been regarded by the Surrealists as 'a supreme means of expression' for the artist): thus Gardiner spoke of 'the madman's dream' as reflecting 'The mind's clear pool no thorn can stain.'

Dream also played its part in New Apocalyptic revelation; for, apparently, 'in one nest truth and dream' existed side by side. The New Apocalypse poet desired to 'make the dream/Into a rich diversely patterned world'. A less violent 'crisis' than madness, dream was more amenable to pattern and balance than had been the Surrealist hysteria.

Myth and legend were also reasonably tractable sources of the 'rich diversely patterned world' of New Apocalyptic completeness. Robin Skelton mentions 'Hendry's and Treece's emphasis upon myth', as a result of which 'Poetry became filled with archetypal references and dream imagery'. He adds that 'the favourite myths of the period were those concerning the dead or dying god of the fertility rituals described in Frazer's The Golden Bough and exploited in the poetry of T.S. Eliot': thus one reads in the poetry of the New Apocalypse of 'the tears of blood from the yew' occasioned by the 'dead man' who was 'hanging', or of 'Good Phoebus youth nailed on the bleeding branches.'

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Mr. Skelton speaks of Treece's and Hendry's use of these mystic archetypes in terms of an 'attempt to put the poet back into the sacred priesthood'.40 A reference in some New Apocalypse poetry to the type of the mystic-poet-bard, Orpheus, seems to confirm Mr. Skelton's point.**

The use of these archetypes was by no means wholly religious, though. Mr. Hendry spoke of his own 'psychological approach to myth [my italics]':41 by this approach the poet was to 'discover and reveal to the world ... those fundamental, organic myths which underlie all human endeavour and aspiration, and from the recognition of whose universal application will come a reintegration of the personality with society.'42 Yet again, here as in the other themes mentioned above, Surrealism was not far away: the spirit of surrealism, in fact, pervaded the New Apocalyptic approach to subject-matter.

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Clearly the New Apocalypse owed a large debt to Surrealism. This was partly acknowledged by Mr. Fraser when he wrote,

The discoveries of Freud, and the work of the Surrealists (valuable as experiment, if not valuable in its results) have convinced the Apocalyptics that every poet has enough to write about in the contents of his own mind ... It might be said, therefore, on the whole, that the younger generation

*One is strongly reminded of the Surrealists' use of reference to alchemy to give themselves the status of 'mystics, of whom a special purity and a constant meditation are required' (Michel Carrouges, paraphrased by Mary Ann Caws in Surrealism and the Literary Imagination, 1966, p.39).

**See especially Hendry's The Orchestral Mountain, 1943, p.18.
of poets, to-day, tend to derive from Pound and Eliot, through
Freud and the Surrealists, through especially, in the very
recent past, Dylan Thomas* .... 43

Indeed, at one point Mr. Fraser admitted the full extent of the debt
to Surrealism. He said,

The New Apocalypse, in a sense, derives from Surrealism, and
one might even call it a dialectical development of it: the
next stage forward. It embodies what is positive in
Surrealism .... 44

The main difference between New Apocalypticism and Surrealism
was one of degree rather than of kind. That is, 'l'esprit' was
virtually identical in both, and only the extent to which it was
pursued was different. In the forties movement, for instance,
madness tended to become merely a referent, rather than being a
principle enacted both in the imagery and the rhythm of the verse.
The magic element tended to be muted in the New Apocalypse, and the
anti-mechanistic theme emphasised. In general surrealist themes
were perhaps less frequently in evidence than they had been in
Surrealism.

The degree of control exercised over the poetic imagination
was also different. The writers of the New Apocalypse usually
dreamed only with wide-open eyes, and explored the subconscious

*Mr. Treece spoke of the New Apocalypse's 'Social-Romantic
ideal' as 'a development of Thomas's early modus operandi;
"I let an image be made emotionally in me and then apply to
it what intellectual and critical forces I possess"'
(How I See Apocalypse, 1946, p.62).
only from a very firm foothold in the conscious. They were more aware than were the Surrealists that 'the subconscious mind ... is a rubbish-heap as well as a treasure-island.' Mr. Hoffman was correct when he wrote that though New Apocalypse poets 'praised surrealism for its boldness in revolt against reason,' nevertheless 'they insisted strongly upon the right of the poet to give to unconscious imagery his own form and ... order.' This was suggested in the title of the third New Apocalypse anthology, The Crown and the Sickle, in which 'the sickle' representing 'the surgical reason' was apparently given equal status with 'The crown' representing 'the imagination.' The stress was now more firmly on form and order than it had been in the thirties with Surrealism.* An indication of how far some New Apocalypse poets had moved from psychic automatism is given by Tambimuttu's comment that 'W.S. Graham, J.F. Hendry and some others construct their poems with great care which might make them seem artificial'; he added that poems by these poets 'gain in weight what they may lose in fluidity, and they are objects to be admired for their careful craftsmanship and design.'

Possibly, the poets of the group, faced with the example of

*The difference was often magnified out of all just proportions by New Apocalypse theorisers; for the definition taken of Surrealism was that of Andre Breton's first Manifeste: ' "SURREALISM, n. Pure psychic automatism ..." ' (quoted by Treece, in 'Criticism: an Apocalyptic Writer and the Surrealists', The New Apocalypse, 1940, p.49) -- an avowal long discarded by M. Breton himself as 'extremely mistaken' (What Is Surrealism?, 1936, p.50), and of little significance to English Surrealism, as I suggested in Chapter One above.
Surrealist excesses in the immediate past, would have agreed with F.L. Lucas that, if 'The pure Classic is too stiff and stifled' then 'the pure Romantic [is] too drunken and way-ward', if 'the pure Realist [is] too drab' then 'the Surrealist [is] a self-segregated sot.'

Certainly the New Apocalypse was prepared to move away from the conception of a 'pure' Romanticism or, rather, a 'pure' Surrealism. That is, while maintaining an essentially surrealist direction these young forties poets were prepared to acknowledge also the merits of Social Realism (in spite of their virulent criticisms of that latter school's defects).

They were prepared to acknowledge, more fully than had the Surrealists, art's commitment to the relatively public world of an audience. In particular they sought clarity of style. They claimed to be, in Mr. Fraser's words, 'artists more responsible than the Surrealists', and they affirmed 'that art is not merely the juxtaposition of images not commonly juxtaposed, but the recognition, the communication of organic experience; experience with ... shape, experience which (however wild and startling in content) is a formal whole.'

Their poetry aimed in fact, at what Mr. Treece called a

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*To put it another way, the New Apocalypse poets saw the possibility of improving on Social Realism and on Surrealism by using aspects of both. They claimed that 'the Audenites ignored the fundamental cataclysms, restricting themselves mainly to objective recording of industrial surface phenomena; the Surrealists, on the other hand, confined themselves to displaying real and faked cataclysms, without any attempt to analyse or interpret them'. By contrast, 'Apocalyptic writing is that which seeks to interpret the cataclysmic nature of life' (Treece, How I See Apocalypse, 1946, pp.50, 49). Though I do not necessarily agree with the judgements put forward in this quotation, the attitude suggested reflects accurately the New Apocalypse's desire for a synthesis of the positive aspects of Social Realism and Surrealism, and for a rejection of those schools' shortcomings.
'Social-Romantic ideal'.

Ultimately, indeed, one is forced to agree with Mr. Fraser's assessment that the New Apocalypse represented, at least in theory, 'a dialectical development' of Surrealism.

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3 'Pity and the Fixed Stars', Poetry Quarterly, XII (Spring 1950), 18.
4 1946, p.21.
5 ibid., p.74.
6 'From Surrealism to "The Apocalypse"', ELH, XV (June 1948), 158.
7 Hendry, 'Introduction: Writers and Apocalypse', The New Apocalypse (ed. Dorian Cooke and Hendry), no date [but 1940], p.11.
8 How I See Apocalypse, p.76.
11 p.18.
12 ibid., p.16.
13 1931, p.200.
15 Paraphrased by Fraser, The White Horseman, p.9.
18 ibid., pp.28-29.
20 ibid., p.21.
24 Fraser, *The White Horseman*, p.31.
26 *The White Horseman*, p.3.
28 ibid., p.39.
29 ibid., p.49.
30 *The White Horseman*, pp.164-5.
31 'Look into Your Heart', *Lyra*, p.33.
33 'Astroderme', *Lyra*, p.35.
34 Norman McCaig, 'To call the crutch ...', *The New Apocalypse*, p.63.
35 Gardiner, 'Look into Your Heart', *Lyra*, p.32.
37 ibid., p.20.
38 Nicholas Moore, 'The Double Yew', *The White Horseman*, p.98.
40 *op.cit.*, p.29.
41 The White Horseman, p.167.
43 The White Horseman, p.29.
44 Ibid., p.3.
45 Fraser, ibid., p.4.
46 op.cit., 159.
48 'Introduction', Sailing To-morrow's Seas (ed. Maurice Lindsay), 1944, p.5.
49 The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal, 1963, p.139.
50 The White Horseman, p.5.
51 How I See Apocalypse, p.62.
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: The New Apocalypse--In Practice.

... these lyrics which have been introduced with such important trumpet flourishes are in so many cases about nothing at all.


In view of the close similarity between the theories of Surrealism and those of the New Apocalypse, it is not surprising to find what looks like Surrealist poetry produced by the latter group of poets.

In a 'Poem' by Charles Davie written in Lyra, for instance, the disjointed and headlong rhythms once common in Surrealism are used to convey the impression of an imagination assailed by vivid, almost uncontrollable sense-impressions. The poet speaks 'Of flowers sipped breaking on split tongue tips eloquently/Speakers of silence as the soundless wheels of dreams/Caught me'.

The New Apocalyptic poetic world was still sometimes subject to the sort of rapid and unexpected transformations that had typified Surrealism in the thirties. Henry Treece's 'Brindled Cow' in The New Apocalypse suddenly turns into a 'phosphorescent lobster', and a girl becomes a newspaper before his eyes--'Her hands grew into a Comic Strip, and her feet into a Sports Page, and her eyes into the Society Column ... And she blanched, and bent double, and fell flat in the dust.'

In the New Apocalyptic poet's individual response to reality,
catachretic imagery continued to be of importance, since it involved bringing together 'concepts or sensations' which, Mr. Fraser suggested, had 'a secret montage-value' for the individual consciousness. Weird visual imagery and illogical sequences of events were still used to build up a peculiar vision, as in Nicholas Moore's 'Song', in which the poet says,

I offered her an orchard of trees hung with nails,
I offered her a basket of deer.
She took only the eye from my lap.

A particularly effective surreal vision is that created by Peter Ure in one of his contributions to A New Romantic Anthology. In the poem 'In the City' he portrays simply and economically the surrealist scene of a township invaded by the sea--'The bodies of sailors drag among ... [the] shops,' their mouths covered with seaweed; as young girls walk around, 'the waves press their skirts on their thighs'; and 'naked mermen grin from the corners of streets.' The hallucinatory (almost nightmarish) quality of the subject-matter is made more immediate by the use of vivid visual effects, such as the juxtaposition and contrast of the subdued colours of mermen's 'glaucous/Eyes' with the bright colour of 'girls like poppies'. The sinister aspect of the invasion of urban civilisation by the natural power of the sea is suggested in that under the calm surface of the almost stagnant water the humans in the poem are at the mercy of the sea's fantasy-creatures—the sailors are sapped of all strength and the girls are ravished by mermen. The poetic vision created here is clearly one of the
kind favoured by Surrealist poets in the previous decade.*

Catalogue poetry was still intermittently used by New Apocalyptic poets, its main exponent being Norman McCaig, 'whose only modification of the surrealist-catalogue poem' was, in Francis Scarfe's words, 'that he divides it up into stanzas of equal length.' In the first of McCaig's 'Nine Poems' in The White Horseman ('I brought you elephants and volcano tops'), a catalogue poem in which the poetic spokesman attempts to provoke some response in his lover by lavishing on her the strangest of presents, the weird humour characteristic of the more flippant Surrealists is also present.

A more serious use of weird vision to create an estranged world occurred in the cultivation of gothicism, a method perhaps in evidence to a greater extent than any other surrealist element in New Apocalyptic poetry. Mr. Treece spoke of 'the recurrent element of horror' as 'something almost approaching a major poetic issue'. Certainly in the work of the New Apocalypse there was often an insistence on a horrific gothic world of 'skulls above the door,/And dead eyes screaming in the grate', and of 'black boughs' which 'gropes/With leper's weary hands'.

Occasionally one can even discern what might reasonably be described as a 'convulsive beauty' similar to that sought by

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*One might compare the atmosphere of the poem quite closely, for instance, with that evoked by David Gascoyne in 'Phantasmagoria', when he spoke of a seaside township enveloped or flooded by the alien forces of silence (which 'lolls like smoke along the disused harbour-quays') and of 'the homeless night', while corpses sit 'propped-up in the windows robed in flags' (Collected Poems [ed. Robin Skelton], 1966, p.28).
Surrealism. J.F. Hendry in 'Europe: 1939', for instance, presents a tortured vision very reminiscent of the pictorial effect achieved by Salvador Dali in 'Premonition of Civil War':*

Thunder and the blood shout fight to the head in a dream;
Rat seed and strangle harvests in the burning shadows
Where our arteries of wire shroud weed for squinting limbs
And a lopped head, held up like a heart, crushed root
and bloody
Brandishes strands of flesh, the fruit of a coughing womb.12

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Quotations of this sort clearly indicate the kinship between Surrealism and the New Apocalypse. However, it would be wrong to over-emphasise such examples. For if there were many similarities between the work of the two movements, there were also dissimilarities. Though the theories which gave rise to both Surrealist and New Apocalyptic poetry were virtually identical, in practice there were often great differences between the actual poetry of the two groups.

One main cause of these differences was a wide disparity between the theory and the practice of New Apocalyptic poetry.** Perhaps the clearest example of the disparity occurs in the work of Treece.

*See p.192A, above.
**In any group of poets there is always, of course, some gap between theory and practice. With Surrealism, as I suggested in the first part of Chapter Eleven above, the gap was perhaps wider than usual. But with the New Apocalypse it was often so wide that if the essays on theory and the poetry had not been printed in the same anthology, under the auspices of the same group, one would have very little cause to associate them with the same school of writers.
In *How I See Apocalypse* he stated,

Poetry in its most primal sense is incantation; the words must echo through the mind, hence rhymes, assonances and alliterations. The verbal rhythms must predispose the muscles to movement just as the rhythmic patterns of a drumbeat might do.

Poetry is the drum of that sophisticated medicine-man, the poet. He is the dream-maker, the spell-binder, who is master over the most potent weapon man knows—the word.\(^{13}\)

This, with its mention of primal expression, incantation, and verbal magic, appears to be very close to Surrealist theory. But the poetry Treece produced was in marked contrast to his theory, often being tame, conventional, and filled with cliché: in 'The Ballad of the Prince', for instance, one reads,

So from my fable break I off a crumb
To paint you man and monarch in their sin
And peasant in his fetters, staring; dumb
With a pitiful desire. Yet, in the fern,
Young lovers still shall dream of gilded years,
When lark will laugh them from their tumbled bed \(^{14}\)

One could scarcely be further from surrealism. Rhyme-scheme, rhythm, diction, and idiom, all fail to correspond to the 'magic' theory of writing put forward by their author.

Technical inadequacy of this kind was not restricted to Treece's poetry. It was common throughout the New Apocalypse. A clear
illustration of this occurs in the sort of imagery often produced under the name of the group.

Mr. Hendry considered 'the image as a sort of fluorescent screen on which something of the deeper structure of reality is revealed',\textsuperscript{15}--an impressive formulation indeed (and one which might reasonably be called 'surrealist'). However, when one looks in New Apocalyptic imagery for this 'deeper structure of reality', or for the '"production of a [new] concept or sensation through the mutual impact of other concepts or sensations"',\textsuperscript{16} one is often disappointed to find, not a shocking clash of images, but merely strings of uniformly inappropriate imagery.

The fault is revealed in poetry loaded with sonorous but ultimately meaningless archetypal symbolism and poetic gestures. Treece, for example, amasses the following impressive, yet useless, conglomeration of poetic furniture:--

A white horse proudly walked along a hill,
Bearing an eagle, who with bloody claw,
Tore out its entrails just before the wall;
I saw the horse blaze banners from his eye.\textsuperscript{17}

In particular the religious New Apocalyptic symbols of 'Harps and crowns and white robes and pavements of gold and walls of crystal and the light of the sun and the River of Life', far from revealing the 'deeper structure of reality' or suggesting any attempt at a surrealistic transformation of external reality, became totally incommensurate with the wartime reality of 'rusting iron and broken machinery and slagheaps and syphilis and bombs and poison gas
... and deserts and fear and the smell of death.\textsuperscript{18}

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The gap between New Apocalyptic theory and practice was evident not only in technique but in treatment of themes and in subject-matter, causing a still further remove from Surrealism.

Surrealist poets had attempted to make good their challenge to what was regarded as a stultified, bourgeois society by producing poetry calculated to shock and undermine it. With New Apocalyptic poets this was generally not the case. For in spite of the New Apocalypse's claim to be militant in its criticism of 'the Machine Age', it produced little verse that even remotely suggested 'a defiant challenge to the Object and the Machine.'\textsuperscript{19} Far from generating a rebellious or even 'reconstructive energy' in its poetry, it often managed to achieve (as John Lehmann pointed out) only 'a rather glib and cliché-ridden sentimentality'.\textsuperscript{20} Alternatively it produced tired and defeated gestures such as Nicholas Moore's 'all my words flutter out with the candle',\textsuperscript{21} Trece's 'The page blows over--and the poem ends',\textsuperscript{22} or Fraser's 'There is little I can/Do at this season, little at all'.\textsuperscript{23}

Even the anarchist motif in general failed to generate any lasting energy.

The theme of anarchism was undoubtedly most forcefully presented in the poetry of Alex Comfort. At first, indeed, it appeared that his poetry was to be at the service of an active anarchist rebellion: his 'Song for the March' asserted that
'this is our poetry'--'the conscript who disobeys/a prison roof in a blaze', and 'a heel in a ruler's face'. What Comfort regarded as a unique historical situation prompted him to give 'The Signal to Engage' (the title of his 1946 collection of verse): he claimed that 'never before the circle of time threw up/such battle as we join,' and that never before had time 'ranged so clearly/men against government'. Now 'There ... [was] one freedom only', and that was 'to take the hands of men called enemies', and 'to seek out every throat that told you Kill'. A Sassoon-like spirit was to kindle 'the fire of disobedience,' by which the spiritual ice might be melted. However, in Comfort's next collection, And All But He Departed, (1951) the rebellion seemed to have petered out: somehow 'England's Easter week' still had not occurred. In this new book of verse the poet was once more faced with 'A city asleep', a 'dead city' in which 'Snow fills ... roofless rooms.' The anarchists themselves, 'somehow preserved', were 'waiting the thaw' which, mysteriously, had not yet happened. The vehement threat of anarchist violence vaunted in The Signal to Engage was swallowed up again by spiritual winter, and the promise of action froze once more into immobility. A similar loss of energy and of positive effect was noticeable in the results of the New Apocalypse's cultivation of individualism. In theory such cultivation, apart from affirming the rights of the individual in defiance of what was regarded as the State Machine, should have produced therapeutic self-knowledge (as suggested by Surrealism, or by the New Apocalyptic hero, Dylan Thomas,
when he spoke of 'stripping ... the individual darkness,' which would 'make clean the naked exposure'. But in practice the concentration on the individual self, instead of aiding each man's development 'towards completeness', often produced only guilt, morbidity, and a feeling of hopelessness.

When, for instance, Fraser arrives at a personal 'Crisis' in which he says, 'I met myself in my dream,' instead of completeness being achieved through the unification of disparate parts of the psyche, 'my own eyes looked through me, my voice said, "Traitor!"' When, in a similar situation, Alex Comfort meets himself, his alter ego appears as 'a mindless figure on the yellow beach/its hands idle,' and there is no communication between the divided parts of the individual personality—'Passing each other we had nothing to say,/but the dead followed him under the dunes'. One is left with an impression not of the individual's 'completeness', but of morbidity and emptiness.*

The spiritual refreshment to be won from an individual rapport with the Collective Unconscious advocated by Surrealism (or by the Reverend Hill when he spoke of 'absolute oneness with the "Universal Spirit"') was not achieved. Irrespective of the group's theories, New Apocalyptic poets failed to make any positive spiritual (or literary) contribution to the forties. In their poetry they failed to attain 'a massive rather than a trivial response'. Even the war, instead of proving to be a 'cosmic calamity' which might have

*This is in contrast to a similar meeting in David Gascoyne's Surrealist poem, 'Figure in a Landscape' (Collected Poems, 1966, pp.35ff.), which resulted, as I suggested earlier, in a resolution of conflict and the creation of cosmic harmony.
awakened the individual imagination to great poetic deeds, seemed to give rise only to a minor poetry in the movement. Consequently, one feels that instead of D.H. Lawrence's resplendent 'rider on the white horse' (who represented the 'sacred ego ... riding forth to conquest,\textsuperscript{38}) a more apt symbol for the New Apocalypse group would be the lyric poets described in Dorian Cooke's poem 'The Crowning', who 'sigh and freeze and clutch at outworn spells',\textsuperscript{39}--poets bound up in (not transcending or transforming) the spiritual winter of the forties.

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There can be no doubt that the efficacy of the verse of the New Apocalypse was generally limited, and its quality frequently very poor. In practice the movement produced poetry which had most of Surrealism's faults, and few of its redeeming features (such as the sharp immediacy of the sort created by Gascoyne and Hugh Sykes Davies in their best work).

What one might call the 'low pressure' of this forties movement's poetry can be explained to some extent by the fact that New Apocalypticism was, as Mr. Fraser emphasised, 'a flexible philosophy; a philosophy which hardly dictates to anyone how he is to write'.\textsuperscript{40} On humanitarian grounds the wish to avoid dogma and the concern for the individual's rights evident in Mr. Fraser's

\textsuperscript{38} This was a symbol chosen by the movement for its second anthology, \textit{The White Horseman}--a symbol whose spiritual grandeur was wholly in keeping with the New Apocalyptic desire 'to know with prophetic insight the living future' (Herbert Read, 'Preface', \textit{Lyra}, 1942, p.11).
'flexibility' may have been eminently desirable.* But, in practical terms, it seems to me that this flexibility amounted to the virtual omission of discussion of technique from the movement's theories—an omission which resulted in a dissipation through many styles (some of which were inappropriate to the theoretical purpose they were supposed to serve) of such poetic energies as were mustered by the group. At one end of the spectrum was a rigid rhyme-scheme and set line-lengths and rhythms, as sometimes favoured by Treece (as in the section from 'The Ballad of the Prince' quoted earlier in this chapter,¹⁴ or as in 'The Shapes of Truth'¹⁴¹) or Fraser (as in 'City of Benares'¹⁴²). At the other end of the spectrum was the weird poetic prose of Dorian Cooke's 'Ray Scarpe'—'It was a cardboard morning with galloping panicky breasts when Ray Scarpe disturbed the figments that stirred the bed in his make-shift room. It was the remains of an archaic lavatory¹⁴³—and the flow of obscure images often used by McCaig:-

Dark woods hung umbrella witches upside down
in glass houses and I and my lost one gathered on the banks
of fishy light the droppings from a cloud town,
filter from a brain-pan, egg of eye, a rocky
ritual of bone—all of them, wriggled clear from the hook .... ⁴⁴

Such distinctiveness and singleness of purpose as had been achieved by the prescribed methods and techniques of Surrealism were lost. Thus the surrealist spirit tended to be deprived of the

*In view of the New Apocalypse's anarchist tendencies, one might say that Mr. Fraser's statement represents a decentralisation of artistic method—the move away from the authoritarian group.
concerted energies of surrealist technique. To put it another way, what still claimed to be a rebellious avant-garde poetic was often forced to rely on indifferently-handled conventional techniques: subject-material and vehicle ceased to be appropriate to each other.

As had been the case with Surrealism, the New Apocalypse's theories (and particularly the group's desire to achieve a dialectical development of Surrealism) were quite reasonable. But often its practitioners were rather inept, as can clearly be seen from the poetry in its anthologies, or even from the poetry produced by its adherents outside these collections.* Thus, in spite of New Apocalyptic poets' strongly surrealist theories, the practical effect of their writing was to dissipate and attenuate the surrealist spirit. In the forties, instead of this spirit's expansion one has, rather, its debilitation. Indeed, one might reasonably adapt the comment of Cyril Connolly's 'distinguished critic'—that writers in the war period and immediately after were witnessing 'The Twilight of the Arts', 45—to apply specifically to the case of the New Apocalypse's spirit in the decade: that is, in the forties we appear to have witnessed the twilight of surrealism.

*The two most monumentally bad New Apocalyptic poems outside the anthologies are perhaps Hendry's *The Orchestral Mountain*, a protracted agglomeration of eventually anti-climactic archetypal symbolism, and Treco's 'The Boat Returns' (Invitation and Warning, 1942, pp. 91ff.), a pointless exercise in poetic cliché.
2. 'The Brindled Cow', The New Apocalypse, 1940, p.38.
3. Ibid., p.39.
5. Ibid., p.107.
7. Auden and after, 1942, p.159.
8. p.79.
13. p.46.
15. Paraphrased by Fraser in ibid., p.9.
16. Raymond Spottiswoode, quoted by Fraser in ibid., p.10.
17. 'Towards a Personal Armageddon', XIX, Invitation and Warning, 1942, p.84.
22. 'The Black Book', The Black Seasons, 1945, p.11.
23. 'Epistle to an Unhappy Friend', *The Traveller Has Regrets*, 1948, p.25.


26. 'The Wingless Victory', ibid., p.11.

27. 'Song for John Hewetson', ibid., p.20.

28. Title poem, *And All But He Departed*, 1951, p.11.


30. 'A Rider Turned to Stone', ibid., p.13.


33. 'Crisis', *Home Town Elegy*, 1944, p.28.

34. 'Sixth Elegy' ('I came once to a seaport town ...'), *The Song of Lazarus*, 1945, p.61.


38. Quoted in *The White Horseman*, p.v.


41. ibid., p.50.

42. ibid., pp.66-67.


44. 'In the file of snow was a red line ...', *The White Horseman*, p.82.

45. Quoted in 'Comment', *Horizon*, XVI (December 1947), 299.
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: Conclusion.

Many critics seem to regard the forties as a very unfortunate period, not only for poetry, but for art in general in England. Roy Fuller, for instance, describes the decade in retrospect as 'awful'.¹ Even during the forties his opinion was apparently little different from this. In 1944 for example, he wrote that 'in our time all art seems meaningless'.² Cyril Connolly had spoken of a ' 'Twilight in the Arts' ',³ and Julian Symons of 'The arts' as 'disintegrating'.⁴ It would be easy to quote many similar general pronouncements.

Mr. Connolly was rather more explicit when (having noted that 'During the eight years I have edited HORIZON we have witnessed a continuous decline in all the arts') he pointed out that 'Literature has been robbed of Joyce, Yeats, Virginia Woolf, Wells, Valéry, Freud, Frazer, to name but a few, and their places are not being filled.'⁵ His historical facts are irrefutable. Nevertheless it remains true that (as with virtually any other ten-year span of the arts) much good, and indeed excellent, work was produced in the decade. This holds good for poetry in England as well as for other arts.⁶

As for the war poetry of the forties, I think perhaps

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*In painting one could cite the work of Francis Bacon, whose art took on a new power in the forties; as Sir John Rothenstein says, 'It was not until 1944 that he applied his full powers to painting; in that year he completed Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion' (Bacon, The Masters art series, No. 71, 1967, p.2).
Brian Gardner makes the fairest comment when he suggests that, although some poets of the First World War 'produced the greater poetry', there was nevertheless 'a great deal more good poetry of the Second War'. In the face of great difficulties, some poets in the forces managed to write verse which was highly competent, if unspectacular. In particular war promoted (and subsequently destroyed) three interesting new talents—those of Keith Douglas, Sidney Keyes, and Alun Lewis.

Of the established poets of older generations (other than those already mentioned in Chapter Fifteen above), as Stephen Spender pointed out in 1942, 'Edith Sitwell ..., T.S. Eliot in East Coker and The Dry Salvages, and Robert Graves in some recent poems, are all writing their best work.'

Edith Sitwell herself notes that 'I wrote no poetry for several years .... Then, after a year of war, I began to write again—of the state of the world, of the terrible rain'; she adds that 'My time of experiments was done.' Certainly, the pompous and pretentious air characteristic of her earlier, 'experimental' poetry, which had made her such an easy target for Geoffrey Grigson and some of his New Verse comrades, was largely purged. She no longer wore 'her singing robes ... flamboyantly', as she had done earlier. The 'theatrical flavour' (as Thomas Blackburn calls it when pointing out that 'she seems to be fishing up highly coloured images ... to deck herself for a charade in which she plays the heroine') was much less prominent in her verse in the forties. In addition, her verse-rhythms were less irritatingly sing-song, her lines tended to
carry more weight, and the whole texture of her poetry was now
thicker. One might reasonably say that her artistic effort (and
in particular her highly decorative and waywardly-applied imagery
from the thirties) was given a new centre in the war experience,
in 'the wars of men and of angels, the new Fall of Man.'

Edwin Muir's verse was another of the positive aspects of
literature in the forties. Kathleen Raine is perhaps correct when
she claims that 'whereas the "new" movements of this or that decade
lose their significance when the scene changes ... Edwin Muir, a
poet who never followed fashion, has in fact given more permanent
expression to his world than other poets who deliberately set out
to be the mouthpieces of their generation.' Muir, virtually in
artistic retreat during the decade, assembled truth and wisdom from
small scraps of knowledge hard won through his life: as he himself
put it,

Now I am old and wait

Here in my country house in quiet Greece.

What have I gathered?

I have picked up wisdom lying

Disused about the world, available still,

Employable still, small odds and scraps of wisdom,

A miscellaneous lot that yet makes up

A something that is genuine, with a body ...

One is strongly reminded here of the feeling in some of Eliot's
forties poetry. For Eliot, too, the forties was a valuable period
of evaluation of past experience and experiment, a time in which the
results of 'the old' world of lived experience were 'made explicit,'
a time in which the poet, 'having had twenty years' of practice, continued 'Trying to learn to use words,' to synthesise from what he regarded as his 'failure' the remarkable poetic and spiritual achievement of the *Four Quartets*.

* * * * * * *

Even so, the fact remains that from the specific point of view of our present examination, the forties was largely a period of artistic frustration. The surrealist spirit was restricted almost entirely to the New Apocalypse group—a group which failed to live up to the promises embodied in its ambitious ideology. Its poetry was most often second-rate, distinctive only when it became over-wrought to absurdity. Its poets seemed capable only of erecting empty superstructures, or of indulging spiritual defeatism when faced with the huge gap between the New Apocalyptic ideal and the actual world at war. Essentially the movement failed to achieve 'A something that is genuine, with a body', and was perhaps one of Miss Raine's 'new' movements ... [that] lose their significance when the scene changes'.

If Surrealism achieved few poems of sustained excellence, then the New Apocalypse achieved virtually none. Surprising as it may seem in view of the generally low standard of Surrealist poetry, New Apocalyptic poetry was even less successful than its predecessor. Thus, instead of the theoretical 'dialectical development', in practice we have lack of development. In the poetry of the New Apocalypse one can witness the thwarting of the surrealist impulse,
its degeneration into cliché, its perversion into morbidity and anticlimax, and its eventual attenuation almost to the point of extinction.

It is small wonder, then, that with the example of the New Apocalypse in mind poets in the late forties and early fifties allowed surrealism to lie dormant.

2. 'Epilogue', New Writing and Daylight, Winter 1943-4, 22.
3. 'Comment', Horizon, XVI (December 1947), 299.
5. 'Comment', ibid., XVII (April 1948), 233.
7. 'Poetry in 1941', Horizon, V (February 1942), 110.
10. 'A Young Girl', Green Song, 1944, p.8.
PART FIVE:

In Conclusion. The Fifties and Sixties.

Since the war England has produced very few poets and a great deal of what with mildness and generosity would be called 'literary history': movements and counter-movements, schools, trends and influences. That is to say, less affectionately, it has been racked by gang warfare.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: Introduction--The 'Movement' and Some 'Mavericks'.

The stage needed sweeping ....


There remains to be discussed, briefly, evidence of the surrealist spirit in the fifties and sixties.

At first glance, in the early fifties there appears to be very little evidence of surrealism. By the beginning of the decade, the New Apocalypse and the New Romanticism had disappeared without giving rise to any successor.

During the first years of the fifties, in fact, there was a marked reaction away from the New Apocalyptic style of writing.

D.J. Enright, for instance, in 1955 criticised the New Apocalypse on the grounds that it seemed 'in retrospect neither new nor apocalyptic'.¹ G.S. Fraser in Poetry Now expressed dissatisfaction both with the Apocalypse and with the New Romanticism, mentioning the creation of 'cults of an extreme subjectivism' as a defect 'of much of the poetry written under the influence of these two movements';² and Robert Conquest in New Lines pointed out that 'the mistake was made of giving the Id ... too much of a say' in this poetry.³

*I would say the fault lay elsewhere. I quote Mr. Conquest's statement here only as an example of dissatisfaction with the Apocalyptic style.

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the validity of the new Romantic tendency in general, pointing out that 'You cannot summon up a Romantic Revival simply by gathering together a number of kindred souls and willing it consciously.'

Even among writers one might describe as sympathetic to Romanticism, a need was felt of some new restraint, or at least of a pause for thought. After the 'ham' poetic gestures of the New Apocalypse, as we saw them in an earlier chapter, the general consensus of opinion was that 'The stage needed sweeping'.

Charles Tomlinson sums up admirably when he writes, 'the kind of verse that was written by poets like the New Apocalyptics, who were all the rage when I was beginning to write, ... was impossible to build on'; he justifies the comment by adding, 'You couldn't build a solid and trustworthy poetic architecture out of the kind of diction, out of the kind of imagery which was available at that time.'

Consequently such diction and imagery were discarded and, as Emmanuel Litvinoff said, the 'accent of the age' in the new decade became that of 'the voice of a sophisticate who has made a fool of himself in the moral fervours of his youth'. Poets 'developed a sensible distaste for romantic over-statement and an envious respect for the classical virtues'.

This latter remark possibly reminds one of John Lehmann's claims for a 'new classicism' in the early forties. One feels that such a claim would be more relevant to the early fifties than it had been to the forties, the 'new classicism' appearing in the fifties specifically as, in Mr. Fraser's words, 'the notion of a
new Augustanism. 8

As early as 1949 Mr. Fraser had written, 'We are not so much concerned ... with poetry in the Symbolist tradition—poetry ... of pure consciousness or ironical or lyrical introspection'; 'Similarly', he continued, 'we are not so much concerned with the poetry of pure romantic bewilderment, the struggle towards light out of a confused dream; Mr. Dylan Thomas is a true and splendid poet, but most of his imitators, it seems to us, do not struggle hard enough, they are bogged down permanently in thick subconscious treacle.' 9

Instead, in contrast to the neo-Thomas style, poetry in the early fifties manifested 'a desire to be lucid if nothing else,' signalled stylistically by 'a liking for strict and fairly simple verse forms', 10 and supported by 'a barrage of criticism ... to direct the attention of ... contemporaries to those poets who might be ... a salutary influence on them, such as William Empson'. 11

Certainly, Mr. Fraser's mention of Augustanism seems very appropriate. The editors of the 1953 anthology Springtime, for example, noted that 'The diction of poetry by younger people, like its form, tends to display a new austerity'; and they then suggested that 'novelty' as a poetic criterion may well have been replaced by 'decorum'. 12

In the verse itself it is possible to find lines in which the spirit of Alexander Pope is not far distant, with the careful balance of the individual line around the central caesura, such as 'Man, born to think, and out of thinking born,' 13 or 'Their good was evil; evil was your good', 14 or even 'From Sense to Sentiment, from Sentiment to Sense'. 15

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To a limited extent even poetic subject-matter suggested Augustan decorum and calm, as in David Wright's poem about the rural and tidy 'Canons Ashby', with its 'squares and spires, in the middle of England,' its 'cedar of John Dryden,' and its 'Caroline lawns'. 16

Subjects inappropriate to this decorum and calm, such as description of the overflow of primal instincts or indulgence in gothic vision, were discouraged. These were, according to Donald Davie, 'the irrelevant/Vocabulary of another age'; 17 they only gave rise to the lurid histrionics of a past Romanticism which was 'tickled up with ghosts/That brandish warnings or an abstract noun'. 18

Instead of these lurid gestures, we see a retrenchment to more down-to-earth material, an approach based on a necessary 'sense of limitation,' and a tone suggestive of nothing more sensational than 'the wan, underpaid, over-taxd hopelessness that has smothered the country since the war'. 19 This was to be the poetic era of The Less Deceived. 20

The anti-Romantic and pro-Augustan sentiments were most forcefully articulated through the concerted efforts of the 'Movement'.* Mr. Fraser writes of this 'school', 'I suppose the broadly accepted picture of their poetry as restrained, lucid, concerned with teasing out clearly small or at least manageable moral problems, rather insular, traditionally formal (the poetry of,

*The 'Movement' appeared officially for the first time in Mr. Conquest's New Lines anthology of 1956, but was present in all but name in earlier, less doctrinaire, anthologies, such as Springtime (ed. Fraser and Iain Fletcher), 1953, Poets of the 1950's (ed. Enright), 1955, and Poetry Now (ed. Fraser), 1956.
in John Wain's famous phrase, a period of consolidation), keeping its emotions well under control, given to distancing and irony, is a true picture.\textsuperscript{21} He adds, 'There is a sense in which both the virtues and the vices of the academic mind—precision and balance on the one hand, caginess and a muffled (or muffed) awareness of the world on the other—were the virtues and vices of Movement poetry.'\textsuperscript{22*}

Thus, while Mr. Davie could claim in 1955 that 'English poetry today ... is at its best far more elegant and workman-like than it was ten years ago,' nevertheless he had to admit that it was also 'rather unambitious, too limited in its scope, insufficiently various and adventurous';\textsuperscript{23} and Mr. Fraser, a year later, contrasted the achievement of 'The general standard of their craftsmanship' with the danger of 'the aridity that comes from always playing safe.'\textsuperscript{24} The poets of the Movement, in fact, were aware that they were in danger of sacrificing thematic vitality to technical efficiency. It was a risk they were obviously prepared to run: they were prepared to accept a necessary limitation of scope in order to achieve the desired measured and formal idiom. Some other poets were not willing to accept this limitation.

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Mr. Tomlinson wrote in 1957 that, whereas Mr. Davie believed that 'only by means of a "self-imposed loss of nerve" ... [could] ...\textsuperscript{*In less critical but more colourful mood, Mr. Fraser described the supercession of the decadent New Romantics by the Movement as 'an outing of the bohemians by the pedants' (Poetry Now, 1956, p.22).}
poetry be renewed after the verbal debaucheries of the forties', he himself favoured the view that 'poetry ... [could] be renewed through a revived poetic imagination, through great excitement and great control'.

The latter opinion was indicative of a growing unrest at the Movement's methods, which achieved control but failed in general to generate any 'great excitement'. Just as there had been dissatisfaction a few years earlier with the methods of the New Apocalypse so, too, there was now dissatisfaction with those of the Movement. Ronald Gaskell, for instance, complaining of the dullness of diction in New Lines, criticised a 'syntax' that was 'flabby' and pointed to frequent 'failures of rhythm'. Howard Sergeant voiced a more sweeping criticism in an introductory letter to the anthology Mavericks. He wrote of the Movement, 'the new poets claim to be both tough and restrained, their language to be pure, and their emphasis to be upon wit, discipline and form'; but in practice 'one finds that for many of these poets the much-vaulted toughness has become a pose, as phoney in its way as anything they have protested against; that purity of language more often than not means poverty of language'. What Mr. Tomlinson called 'the slick formalism of Empson's successors', then, seemed to have fallen short of expectation, at least in the eyes of some fifties poets.*

*Though Mr. Tomlinson's description here is clearly 'loaded' against the Movement, it nevertheless contains a valid point. For Empsonianism in Empson and Empsonianism in his disciples turned out to be rather different. William Empson's Collected Poems were published in 1955, and revealed a humorous yet tough mental independence that had been a characteristic of the poet throughout his career. From the present point of view, this humour is most significantly manifested in his criticism of 'The superrealistic
The poets who were dissatisfied with the Movement consequently attempted to move in a different direction and to explore different possibilities. Aware of the Movement's 'general failure to see things anew, to register any *nouveau frisson*,\(^{29}\) they decided to search for ways of re-introducing this novelty.

A refreshing element of sensationalism was to be cultivated again, a *'nouveau frisson'* generated out of at least 'one small syllable of defiance',\(^{30}\) such as might once have been expected from that 'curiously gallant figure: the poet of the thirties'.\(^{31}\) Along with this defiance, and in reaction away from the decorum and restraint characteristic of the Movement, went what Mr. Fraser calls 'a positive taste not only for emotional violence but for the ugly, the grotesque, and sometimes indeed for the cruel.'\(^{32}\)

But, if there was to be a reaction against the Movement, with its neglect of what Dannie Abse called 'primary Dionysian excitement',\(^{33}\) then this reaction was to be neither blind, nor total. Mr. Abse himself asserted, 'if ... I am anti-Movement, I'm certainly not opposed to discipline and form and style. For these qualities make those disturbing Dionysian elements acceptable to oneself and to others.'\(^{34}\) The poets of the reaction, faced on the one hand with 'the excessive verbal luxuriance of neo-romanticism', and on the other

[continued from previous page] comp' which he typified by 'a good student who enjoys/A nightmare handy as a bike' ("Autumn on Nan-Yueh", Collected Poems, p.76), and in his description of the 'school of trout' which 'hangs round' "The Golden Bough" asking '"Are crucifixions what they were?"' (ibid., p.80). This sharp and perceptive wit, in the hands of imitators, tended to become weak and self-conscious humour, and his formal *finesse* tended to degenerate into a rather facile glibness.

*These subjects are the essential ingredients, one remembers, of the Surrealist *beauté convulsive,* which 'includes the elements of tension, shock,... and even cruelty' (Mary Ann Caws, *Surrealism and the Literary Imagination*, 1966, p.43).
with 'the slick formalism of Empson's successors', strove to synthesise the positive aspects of the two extremes. Once more, we appear to be dealing with a dialectical development.

Concomitant with the reaction away from the so-called 'new Augustanism' was a revival of interest in the Romantic mode. Herbert Read as early as 1950 had spoken of the 'need for a redefinition of romanticism,' to dispel the 'prevalent confusion about what it means.' In much the same vein was a comment by the editor of Poetry and Poverty who, speaking of 'a sterile and dull Neo-Classicism', suggested that

*It is not ... in this over-compensated reaction to Neo-Romanticism that the poetry of the fifties has hope of importance or readability, but rather, I believe, in the modification and development of the romantic vision of the poets of the last decade. Nobody wants to save the corpse of The New Apocalypse ...; rather the time has come for poetry to move into a new and second phase of Neo-Romanticism. What should be discarded are its faults alone: there is no need to throw the whole apparatus of Romantic expression overboard ...*  

In order to guard against New Romantic excesses, it was suggested that poetry should achieve 'A disciplined romantic texture' [my italics]. But this discipline was not to preclude the 'mystery or magic' without which 'poetry hardly ever leaves the page to haunt and hunt the imagination.'

The suggestion was put into most effective poetic practice in the anthology of 1957 entitled Mavericks. The policy of its
contributors was that 'Whatever the merits or demerits of "The Movement" as such, we are of the opinion that, due to the intensive methods of publicity which have been adopted, there is real danger that it may serve to distract attention from those young poets outside "The Movement" who are making a valid attempt to grapple with problems beyond those of mere technique and to communicate ... what they feel to be significant experience.' 40*

This 'significant experience', coupled with the desire for a 'disciplined romantic texture', 38 was to represent the 'new and second phase of Neo-Romanticism' mentioned in Poetry and Poverty. 37 The Maverick-poets were to attempt in their work a 'redefinition of romanticism' such as Mr. Read had called for. 35

Indeed, one might reasonably regard Maverick-poetry as the synthesis of the spirit of the New Apocalypse and New Romanticism with the concern for efficient technique shown by the Movement: Maverick-poetry is, as I suggested earlier, a dialectical development of surrealism in the fifties.

*The publication of Mavericks, of course, by no means signalled the demise of the sort of poetry written by the Movement. However, for the present purposes the Movement at this point ceases to concern us; having served the function of putting the surrealist spirit in the fifties into a correct perspective, it is of no further relevance to the discussion in hand.

4 ibid., p.xviii.

5 The Poet Speaks (ed. Peter Orr), 1966, p.252.

6 'Notes on the Poverty No. 2', Poetry and Poverty, No. 2 (no date), 33.

7 'The Armoured Writer--V', New Writing and Daylight, Autumn 1944, 171.

8 Poetry Now, p.17.


10 Kingsley Amis, Poets of the 1950's, p.17.

11 John Wain, ibid., p.90.

12 Fraser and Iain Fletcher, p.7.


15 A.A. Hartley, poem of that title, ibid., p.55.

16 Poetry Now, p.190.

17 'Too Late for Satire', New Lines, p.68.

18 Amis, 'Against Romanticism', ibid., p.45.


20 Title of a collection by Philip Larkin, 1955.


22 ibid., p.348.

23 Poets of the 1950's, p.48.


25 'The Middle Brow Muse--I', Essays in Criticism, VII (October 1957), 460.
26 'The Middle Brow Muse—II', ibid., 462.


30 Litvinoff, Poetry and Poverty, No. 2 (no date), 36.

31 ibid., 34.


33 'Introduction—I', Mavericks, p.9.

34 ibid., p.10.

35 'Select Correspondence', Nine, II (Winter 1949-50), 66.

36 Anon., 'Editorial Note', Poetry and Poverty, No. 4 (no date), 3.

37 ibid., 4.

38 ibid., 6.

39 Anon., 'Flute and Ukelele', ibid., No. 5 (no date), 36.

40 Anon, note on the front dust-cover of Mavericks.
CHAPTER TWENTY: 'Mavericks'.

Maverick .... A masterless person; one who is roving and casual.

--Oxford English Dictionary, 1933.

It is the Maverick-poets with whom we are particularly concerned in this period. I am using the terminology 'Mavericks' or 'Maverick-poets' as a convenient critical shorthand, to indicate not only those writers who contributed to the anthology of that name (such as Dannie Abse, J.C. Hall, Vernon Scannell, and Jon Silkin), but also writers who seem to have shared the general approach to poetry suggested in that publication (such as Thomas Blackburn or Martin Seymour-Smith, and later Ted Hughes or Ted Walker)—writers who, for instance, set store by what Mr. Abse described as 'primary Dionysian excitement' and who insisted on 'the image' as a necessary poetic exegesis of 'the mystery' that lurks in 'the depth mind.'¹ These writers are the ones who

¹G.S. Fraser's 'critical shorthand' terminology for the anti-Movement poets is 'the Group' [see The Modern Writer and His World, 1964, Chapt. 21—'The Movement and the Group', pp.346ff.], which produced A Group Anthology in 1963. The titles 'Group' and 'Mavericks' (as I am here using the latter) are interchangeable. So Mr. Fraser's comment on 'the Group'—that 'It is almost as if the horrors of the Second World War, from Auschwitz to Hiroshima, having failed to penetrate very deeply into the imaginations of men ... who served through that war ... had pierced through ... to the imaginations of a younger generation' (The Modern Writer, p.352)—would apply equally to those poets I am calling 'Mavericks'. I persist with my own nomenclature because the word 'Maverick' (meaning an individual without allegiance to any group) more aptly suggests than does the word 'Group' the individualism of the poets under present discussion.
carried on what there was of a surrealist spirit in the fifties and sixties.

It must be emphasised from the outset that there was now even less of an organised 'school' than there had been in the thirties with Surrealism. This comes out clearly in a note on the dust-cover of Mavericks which stated, 'We must emphasise that the poets ... cannot, in any sense, be regarded as an opposing "school [to the Movement]." Each is pursuing his own line of development and our intention is to present them as individual poets who are not connected with "The Movement".' Burns Singer echoed the sentiment here in a poem 'To the Critic', advising the latter to look elsewhere, 'to the nearest cotery', if he was looking for 'styles and schools'.

The Mavericks had in common only certain themes for, and approaches to, poetry, independent of any manifesto or other group critical avowals. Thus it is in these themes and approaches that we must search for the surrealist spirit.

Rebellion once more became an important theme (though its manifestations in Maverick-poetry were rather different from those in Surrealist poetry).*

As we saw earlier, the surrealist crisis in consciousness and the New Apocalypse's anti-mechanistic theme (both of which indicated the desire for a rebellion against an imposed absolute standard of reality) had increasingly fallen into abeyance during the latter

*It may be convenient, once more, for the reader to refer to the main points of surrealism outlined in Chapter Two above.
years of the forties. In the early fifties the Movement reached almost total acceptance of the imposed urban milieu, coming to terms with what Alfred Alvarez unkindly described as 'the gradual leveling down of all standards to the neutral weariness of enlightened suburbanism'.

But by the mid-fifties the theme of rebellion against this sort of suburbanism was becoming evident again, in the work of the Mavericks. The Maverick-poets would have agreed with Kathleen Raine that although 'Adaptation to environment is deemed a virtue in this world', nevertheless 'the imagination, whose kingdom is "not of this world", must wage a bitter struggle against "adaptation"'. They would have agreed, too, with an even more apposite comment by Charles Tomlinson, that the poet must feel a 'need actively to resist the provincializing effects of our suburban culture'.

Symptomatic of the reborn urge to rebel was the anger of writers who have become known as the 'angry young men'. In Look Back in Anger (the first of the 'angry' literature) in 1957, suburban society is shown as insufficiently pliable to accommodate individuals like John Osborne's 'Jimmy'. By ignoring or even suppressing the forces of individual volition, it cultivates the seeds of revolt. A demand for social conformity produces in 'Jimmy' an aggressive assertion of his independence. He shouts, 'Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we're actually alive. Just for a while. What do you say?

*Indicative of the acceptance of a suburban environment is the fact that, whereas some New Apocalypse poets felt themselves to be exiles, cut off from society at large (as suggested in the title of Henry Treece's 1952 collection, The Exiles), Philip Larkin was 'the antidote of an exile' and 'stayed put in Hull' (Frederick Grubb, A Vision of Reality, 1965, p.226).
Let's pretend we're human....Oh, brother, it's such a long time since I was with anyone who got enthusiastic about anything.'7 In this outburst we see the desire for an individual affirmation of vitality that is in contrast to what the protagonist sees as the negative and moribund society in which he lives.*

The rebellion of the Mavericks, occurring at the same time as that of Osborne's 'Jimmy' (1957), was undoubtedly related to the 'anger' motif, though it was usually less violent. Most often it took the moderate form of a general non-conformism.

A 'Maverick' is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary of 1933, 'A masterless person; one who is roving and casual.'*** David Wright gave the type of the Maverick in the poem 'A Funeral Oration': the Maverick is a wanderer who is 'Often arrested for being without a permit,' whose 'life' is 'appalling; his conduct odd'.

*The rebellion theme was highlighted by Helena's comment that Jimmy 'thinks he's still in the middle of the French Revolution' (Look Back in Anger, 1966, p.90).
  His revolt is given a more interesting, contemporary, French significance in a remark by a former Surrealiste, Philippe Soupault, who wrote, 'What strikes me as singular and hard to explain is that after World War II it was only in England, with its "angry young men," that a comparable upheaval to Dada and Surrealism could be seen' ('Traces Which Last', Yale French Studies, No. 31 [no date], 22).
**This character is not, of course, restricted to purely literary circles, but also figures prominently, for instance, in modern folk music. Wandering anarchist bards such as Woody Guthrie and Cisco Houston become almost mythic heroes in this field, and their lives are celebrated in song by their contemporary disciples—as in Bob Dylan's 'Song to Woody' or Tom Paxton's 'Fare Thee Well, Cisco' (the latter on an L.P. significantly entitled Rambling Boy). Though I am concerned in the present thesis specifically with Maverick poetry, it is interesting to note the wider extent of the Maverick spirit in the culture of the fifties and sixties.
He is the poet who will write with irony of the individual 'justly imprisoned for injuring the State/By not joining the Army'. He is the poet who (in a world where orders are obeyed and laws, scientific as well as civic, are followed without question) points to the individual quirk of 'an odd I' who 'does things it can't explain', and to events that have no logical cause, 'disorders that have no because'.

The notion of poet-as-Maverick gave rise to two important conceptions. The first of these was that of poet as aesthetic, intellectual, moral, and occasionally also political, anarchist. The other was that of poet as wandering bard, not part of society's materialist order, but, rather, fascinated by 'The clouded animals of sense' who 'Follow a vagrant, orphic cry.' These were the crucial aspects of the Maverick's 'rebellion'.

At its minimum definition, the Maverick-poet's anarchism (presumably inherited to a large extent from Herbert Read and from the New Apocalypse of the forties) was often nothing more than an assertion of having 'faced squarely ... the situation of the intelligent individual in an increasingly collectivised society.'

In a political sense, this attitude was a negative-critical one; that is, instead of the positive lauding of the tenets of Anarchism, it took the form of a belittling of the collectivised State, and of a pronounced distaste for its methods. So, in this poetry, 'parliament debases' what the common people have achieved, disguising tyranny behind innocent-sounding phrases such as 'play the game' while itself employing the underhand and hypocritical methods.
revealed in Martin Seymour-Smith's poem, 'The Last Chance' (which is the confessions of a State-appointed assassin).  

A more positive aspect of the anti-Establishment feeling was the poet's sympathy for those helpless individuals whom he regarded as 'The Victims' of a highly organised civilisation—people such as the 'Suicides' of a poem by J.C. Hall, who are outcasts alienated by social pressures which are seen as merely a more subtle form of the State's coercion of the individual. People of this sort (like the protagonist of Kafka's The Trial, perhaps) have been 'Condemned for an undisclosed offence,/But pronounced beyond an undefined pale.' 

Thus the anarchist motif was very wide in scope, extending far beyond a purely political concern. It even occurred in what was overtly nature poetry. Jon Silkin, for instance, anticipating 'a time when the state will wither away', could regard (in his Flower Poems) 'the wild flower' as 'an acceptable symbol' for the individual who objects to 'The state, or monopoly capitalism controlling the individual's environment'.

The State, or society itself, was seen in Maverick-poetry as an organisation moving increasingly towards totalitarianism. The threat of totalitarianism was frequently depicted as a pervasive Nazism, surviving long beyond the war. George MacBeth, for example, in one poem showed how our society can unwittingly produce a 'Saviour' who turns out to be either Hitler or his double, acclaimed by 'our massed lifted hands at/The Rally.' In an interview in 1966 MacBeth admitted to a fascination with 'fascism' as one of the 'crucial major themes which one must grapple with if one has a serious interest
in the modern world.'\textsuperscript{21}\textsuperscript{*} Evidently Thomas Blackburn shared the fascination, since he dedicated a poem to 'German students who were executed for resistance to the Nazi regime';\textsuperscript{22} Silkin dedicated a poem 'For those murdered by the Nazis in concentration camps';\textsuperscript{23} and, Sylvia Plath stated that 'my concern with concentration camps and so on is uniquely intense'.\textsuperscript{24}\textsuperscript{**} What Silkin described as the 'primitive agonies/In concentration camps'\textsuperscript{25} certainly seem to have caught the imaginations of these poets as a gruesome warning of the dangers of ruthless totalitarianism.

Silkin suggested in the poem 'Deficient' that what is required of our civilisation (to prevent it from drifting into totalitarianism) is 'A degree of self-criticism,/Of self-hatred even,' which may act 'Like stones placed counter/To the foundations' to give the system tolerance yet strength; his ideal seemed to be the 'self-critical/Society of opposed stones' to which he referred in the poem.\textsuperscript{26} Society, or even civilisation at large, should not be allowed to approximate, Silkin seemed to suggest, to a rigid system where only responses conditioned by the social norm are acceptable (as is apparently the case in the 'Hampstead' of the poem\textsuperscript{26}); rather, it should have the flexibility and firmness generated out of self-awareness and self-criticism. The 'stones' of which society is constructed, in fact, must be capable of being re-ordered, as the title of his collection \textit{The Re-ordering of the Stones} implies;

\textsuperscript{*}The interest is not wholly, nor even principally, a political one, though; rather, in Mr. MacBeth's own words, it is an interest in 'the psychology of politics,' or 'politics seen from the inside' [my italics] (\textit{The Poet Speaks} [ed. Peter Orr], 1966, p.134).

\textsuperscript{**}One has only to read 'Lady Lazarus' (\textit{Ariel}, 1967, pp.16-19) to be convinced.
otherwise the result may be the sort of brutal intolerance mentioned
by Silkin in 'The Coldness', a poem in which he described how 'eight
hundred Jews/Took each other's lives' in twelfth-century York in
order 'To escape christian death/By christian hand'.27* The
anarchist rebellion motif is here revealed as essentially no more
than a plea for tolerance of non-conformism.

As well as the Maverick's being opponent (and sometimes victim)
of society's fascist tendencies, he was also, as I mentioned earlier,
the wandering bard. As non-conformist wanderer (almost tramp,
perhaps), he was 'unencumbered with the cares of wealth'28 that
devolve upon the affluent members of a materialistic civilisation.
He rebelled against the comforts of a suburban society 'as a way to
material disaffection and the spiritual life.'28**

Wandering was depicted as servant of spiritual necessity: that
is, it was (in Blackburn's words) a 'vagrancy of need' which the
material comforts of society cannot satisfy, which 'No dining-room
nor marriage bed' 'Can halt'.29 J.C. Hall, an older poet than most
of the Mavericks, emphasised in the poem 'Before This Journeying
Began' that in his poetic journey through life he had passed up such

*As was fairly common in Maverick-poetry, we have here the anti-
semitic (usually Nazi) group as representative of society at
large, and the oppressed Jewish minority as representative of
the victimised individual within society.
**The phrase here comes from Muriel Spark's review of the
significantly entitled The Pleasures of Poverty. The theme
of the poet as Maverick or tramp was reflected also in the
title of the periodical Poetry and Poverty, and may well have
been an extension of 'a time-honoured connection between poetry
and poverty; and, for that matter, between poverty and truth'
(D.S. Savage, 'Notes on the Poverty No. 3', Poetry and Poverty,
No. 3 [no date], 31).
material considerations and had endured instead 'the dusty road'. He had, in fact, undertaken what amounted to a pilgrimage, whose object was that of keeping Man in touch with his primal, natural origins; for, as he approached the end of his 'journeying' he claimed to be 'still in primary innocence,' feeling the 'elemental need' of 'earth-born wood, air, water, fire'. The idealised description of a tramp-like existence evidently acted as a satisfying symbol for the poet of 'material disaffection', and of the rapport made possible between elemental nature and the individual when the comforts of suburbia are forfeited.

The idealised conception of poet as wandering bard was epitomised in the archetypal character of Orpheus (a revival of a forties theme). Ideally, Orpheus was the triumphant 'Orpheus the singer, Orpheus the makar [sic]' of Tom Scott's poem.

In Scott's 'Orpheus' the bard is torn apart at the outset by bacchantes, but his own magic voice ('yon voice o his' that 'quaetit [quieted, charmed] the forest and its fowk,/That reconcile lion and lamb') calls out, and his limbs reassemble themselves into a reborn body purged 'o the auld despair'; from this new Orpheus springs a song that 'will never end."

More often, though, Orpheus appeared in an inauspicious environment, almost as the victim of his own powers, tortured and unsure. In a poem by Burns Singer, for instance, Orpheus's songs are 'scraping his tongue,' and he 'aways tormented'; he moves

*One is strongly reminded here of the Apocalyptic phoenix, which rises to immortal flight from the flames of her own destruction.
'Backwards and forwards' in indecision, eventually moving 'towards the final immensities' only out of a guilty feeling of obligation—'for any .../... shelter from ghosts with their guilt'. His original motivation is forgotten; he cannot 'quite remember who or where, /Why, what or how he is,' until he reaches his destination; and then he remembers that he came 'To construct a new kind of riches where death is absolved.' However, when he gets the chance to win these 'riches' (in the symbolic person of Eurydice) from hell, haunted by doubt and fears of his inability to achieve 'this small newness' which is without 'precedent', he commits the error which ensures his failure—he turns round to make sure that Eurydice is following him out of the underworld. As a result of this latter action the beauty he has sought to absolve from death is reduced to 'mildewed lineaments and worm-worked skin.'

Blackburn, in 'Orpheus and Eurydice', went even further in his criticism of Orpheus, suggesting that the bard 'was mistaken all the while' on his quest—his mistake being a rather morbid artistic introspection, as suggested in the claim that 'He'd pored too long upon his own black letters'. As a result, the poem ends not in rebirth, but in tortured madness, with 'the dog-teeth in the outer darkness,/A plunging, seaborne head that moans and raves.'

Consequently the prevailing image of Orpheus built up in Maverick-poetry was that of a morbid lyric poet haunted by guilt and often close to madness, wandering ineffectually in the underworld. Orpheus, in fact, was a figure here reminiscent of the image of the neurotic poet sometimes conveyed in the poetry of the New Apocalypse.

The danger was that the Maverick-poet, if he followed in
Orpheus's footsteps, might be prevented from realising his full artistic potential (achieving harmonious Orphic song) by this neurosis, by what Silkin called 'The piled cacophany of/My spiritual unrest'.

So the poet set out to explore the inner world of his 'spiritual unrest' in order to bring to light what Blackburn called 'the unlit areas of the mind'.

But if the Maverick was 'to write about the inward processes of man himself', he was not to cut himself off completely from the 'outside' world of 'material existence' (as some New Apocalyptic poets seemed to do). As Mr. Blackburn explained, he was to employ 'metaphor' which examined 'the inward processes' 'through counterparts and resemblances drawn from the external world'.

The immediate goal of such an approach seems to have been a balanced view of experience, balance pertaining not only to inner and outer worlds, but also to the 'night' and 'day' aspects of the former. Mr. Blackburn claimed that it is necessary 'to maintain' a 'perilous stance between the night and day of existence ... if a poet is to remain true to his vocation'. Later he added that an essential purpose of poetry is to give 'a local habitation and a name to the strange and savage fauna within us'; that is, poetry should reconcile the weird emanations from the 'night' side of the individual psyche.

*One is strongly reminded here of Dylan Thomas's (and the New Apocalypse's) self-appointed task of seeking to 'cast light upon what has been hidden for too long, and, by so doing, make clean the naked exposure' (Answer to 'An Enquiry', New Verse, No. 11 [October 1934], 9). Orpheus's visit to the underworld in the hope of bringing back Eurydice to the light of day provided an apt symbol of this process; this is presumably why this particular aspect of the Orpheus myth was the one stressed in Maverick poetry.
with the familiar 'day' side.

Silkin suggested that what is required is a union in which 'the transparencies of intellect' are 'Coupled to the embraces, the convictions, of feeling.' As was the case with Surrealism, then, balance was to be only the first stage of a progression towards a desired unity of being which encompasses 'the totality of a human being,' and 'not just the intellect.' Indeed, the Mavericks would have agreed with Mr. Blackburn's claim that 'poetry does try to sustain and recreate a living unity of thought and feeling.'

A 'living unity' may have been the ideal. But the existing environment, physical and spiritual, militated against such unification in practice. The world in which the Maverick had to live was dictated, he said, by the 'cool strictures' of the 'intelligence'. Society was, apparently, dominated by the 'Lord of microscope and rule' whose reign is 'After the last phantasma died'. So 'the strange and savage fauna', or what J.C. Hall described as 'the sudden shapes/Of animal trees', were destroyed or at least obscured by a 'Worldly and workaday' façade or 'mask'.

Consequently there had to be (as was the case with Surrealism) an initial compensation, or even over-compensation, to right the balance, to revivify the 'animal trees', and to push aside the 'mask'. So attention was focussed on the often violent, mysterious, and irrational 'night' side of Man's consciousness. The Maverick emphasised, for instance, not the fact that in the school-room the children are 'disciplined' into the laws of 'microscope and rule', but that hidden away in the desks are 'Vicious rope, glaring blade,
the gun cocked to kill'. Or the Maverick maintained that the chief interest in a crossword puzzle is not in the intellectual satisfaction to be obtained from finding the one correct solution to the rigid verbal pattern, but in the insoluble enigmas of the black squares, which 'hide the secrets you will never uncover.'

Intellection as a system was seen as failing to encompass a complete view of life. As Dannie Abse put it, 'The map does not show the rain:' that is, it fails to take account of an element (often, as here, a part of elemental nature) which is refreshing and vital. The Maverick, then, setting himself in the scales against the map-maker, stressed the point that every night 'the whole flat civilised map' 'like energy explodes, goes black'. He stressed his acknowledgement of the potentially destructive yet necessary night-side of life.

On another level he tended to opt for a raw, untamed nature which he felt embodied the spirit's antidote to the rational, utilitarian, and commercial ethics, and to the 'myopic' vision these ethics promoted. It seemed likely that truth was to be found, not in the artificial world of what Vernon Scannell described as 'celluloid legends and paper lies', but in the natural world, and by penetrating (rather than superficial) vision.

In order to cure the prevailing 'myopia', 'the poet's vision' aspired to pierce 'the crust of convention and platitude by which we so often reduce a human being'. Sometimes, in its efforts in this direction, it even reflected 'the experience of mental breakdown,' and offered, as Alfred Alvarez suggested, 'useful imaginative warnings of a state of affairs which we may all have to face some time.'
This brought Maverick-poetry very close to projecting the hypothetical crisis in consciousness that had been a central datum of Surrealism's rebellion against the rational and material world. Indeed, such a crisis was often predicted in the poetry under present discussion. Most frequently it was presented in terms of a collision between civilised society and the raw, violent forces of nature, the former being obliterated by the latter.*

The most forceful description of such a collision occurs in Tom Scott's** 'The Ship', a poem based on a disaster identical to that of 'The Titanic'. Here, society, or even civilisation in general, symbolised by a vessel that Man declares to be unsinkable, runs into an iceberg which represents 'the kosmic cauld'\(^5\) (that is, the impersonal force of 'Law o Nature'\(^5\)). As a result of the collision, Man's constructs, both intellectual and physical, are destroyed; for 'The reason that was "sound" ' ends up in 'the abyss'; 'The truth that wes unfaultable' turns out to be 'faus'; and 'The house sae stably foundit nou wes foundert.'\(^5\) Because Man's attention is focussed on the material world of 'the latest news/Frae Wall Street and the Bourse', he cannot have time 'to gie a thocht/Til onythin sae profitless as ice.'\(^5\) This proves to be his ultimate undoing, since the ship which is the product of 'Man, the unconquered overlord o

*There may well have been a suggestion here not only of external nature but also of internal nature, of Man's own instinctual life. One remembers J.F. Hendry's dark warning in The White Horseman that 'Unless provision be made for the release of conative instincts, for the realization in society of the individual myth,... society ... will perish in a welter of blood, since it harbours within it, the seeds of its own destruction' ('Myth and Social Integration', 1941, pp.164-5).
**Scott is a poet who contributed to the New Apocalypse movement's anthology The White Horseman in 1941.
fate", sinks as soon as it strikes the ice; and 'Nature ... [takes] owre ance again frae Man.'

The poem carried on the New Apocalypse's criticism of 'the Machine Age' which has brought about a retreat from the 'Law o Nature' and a move into the world of material wellbeing. In the civilisation as it was depicted in Maverick-poetry, 'Men's made things' generally superseded 'what we have learnt/Of trees that hold the soil'. The primacy of the machine ethic (an ethic manifested both literally in the industrial world, and figuratively in the intellectual 'machinery' of an increasingly totalitarian State) was regarded with distaste, both by implication (as in poems like 'The Ship'), and in more overt manner in poems such as 'A Curse on the Great Beast', with its hatred for 'Steel wheels and the automatic bureaucrats'.

The hope of the Mavericks lay in the fact that nature did not appear to be passive beneath the machine's tyranny. Rather, it was seen as fighting back, not merely hypothetically (as was the case with the portrayals of the crisis in consciousness), but actually, invading civilisation.**

Superficially, the invasion was a literal and physical invasion

*The natural growth of the plant world, though neglected by Man, still contains, as Silkin showed, valuable lessons for him. The 'Small Celandine' whose 'Roots concert the sensuous/ Nourishment of earth' (Nature with Man, 1965, p.50) reveals the possibility of a beneficial contact with the soil; or the life of 'Peonies' is guided by 'one rule,' displaying a wholeness of existence that generates 'confidence' in itself (Flower Poems, 1964, p.6).

**In the light of this it is interesting to note that, in his essay on 'Surrealism', Cyril Connolly described 'the Surrealist animal' as being 'usually depicted on the verge of conquering the world or, even worse, invading our privacy' (Art News Annual, No. 21 [1952], 156).
of Man's territory, as in the 'Disused Canal' of which Ted Walker wrote, 'Earth began to take it back/years, years before men left'.

It was an encroachment by Those Other Growths of nature on 'Lancing Beach', 'By the Saltings', on 'Breakwaters', and in the 'Estuary'.

On a deeper level the invasion was a mental one, by uncontrollable, irrational forces. These were 'Those/other growths' that 'live on in the dark/wildernesses of ... [the] mind'. They might give rise to 'the rabid voices' which 'bray' through the crazed brain, and cause the poet to ask himself, 'Am I mad?'

Fascination with this second invasion was no more than an extension of the Surrealist concern with dementia. However, there is some difference, inasmuch as the theme was now muted, and there was no suggestion of madness pervading the verse-structure itself. Rhythms and syntax suggestive of hysteria were seldom present; rather, as Sylvia Plath asserted, 'experiences, even the most terrifying, like madness' were manipulated and controlled within a rational structure which was the product of 'an informed and an intelligent mind'.

Dream was another indication of the natural invasion of the mind. It was 'A world we lose by merely waking up', a primal world contained in 'the profane grail' of 'the dreaming skull'. It brought Man into a closer kinship with the chthonic powers of nature as he slept, since 'The sleeper at the rowan's foot/Dreams the darkness at the root'. Once more, though, its old Surrealist power was diminished, in that it was a referent rather than a

*As Mr. Blackburn is aware, 'one is lived by things, written by things, almost beyond one's control' (The Poet Speaks [ed. Peter Orr], 1966, p.28).
principle of poetic creativity; it was not invoked, nor were dream sequences any longer widely used.

In fact, it holds good for what one might term the 'psychological' reference as a whole in Maverick-poetry, that there was less emotional involvement and a more clinical approach to it than there had been either in Surrealism or in New Apocalyptic poetry. 'A psychological standpoint' was still employed, on the grounds that 'in the last resort' events 'can only be understood through the inner dynamic of man himself.' Mr. Blackburn could still note 'that there has been through Jung, I suppose through Freud too, a revolution in what we feel about ourselves: the mind of man has expanded into all sorts of mysterious continents which were unknown before'; but now the poetic-psychological approach was seen almost as a purely objective one: for, Mr. Blackburn continued, 'Psychology has roughed out a chart of the world of inward experience and so made that world available to our surface comprehension, to that part of the mind which checks facts and analyses.' This tended towards psychology as science rather than as myth. The rational element appeared to be

*Mr. Blackburn went on to qualify the comment by adding that 'after the surface mind has got used to such terms as the Unconscious, the Super Ego, the Collective Unconscious, or the Id, these abstractions have to be restored to the turmoil of emotional experience they have been distilled from, and known by the whole being' ('Introduction', 45-60 [ed. Blackburn], 1960, p. 19). Even so, one nevertheless feels that the Surrealists' balance was changed. The Maverick could not truthfully say, as A.J.M. Smith had done in the thirties, concerning psychology, that 'One is not concerned with its scientific truth: its poetic truth is beyond reproach' (Answer to 'An Enquiry', New Verse, No. 11 [October 1934], 10).
assuming primacy.*

The latter comment might reasonably be applied as regards technical methods in Maverick-writing.

The poet still strove for expression beyond mere semantic notation, as his 'longing, in itself alone,/Beyond the alphabet runs on'. 70 The words of a language dulled by daily usage (a language in which 'the life-blood seeped away/From any word', 71) could not supply the poet's need. Mr. Blackburn contrasted these 'commonplace daily words which rise so glibly to the tongue' with those of true poetic expression, which 'well up from a deeper level, or rather which catch the stirrings of those depths'. 72 The situation, in fact, was still basically as it had been with Surrealism in the thirties. However, at this stage, any attempt at varying conventional expression (such as Scott's use of lowland Scottish dialect [see quotations nos. 32, 51-55 above] or of seeking the 'deeper level', lacked the innovatory sensation of outré methods such as automatism. That is, one now gets modification rather than dislocation.

So, when the poet turned to 'the turmoil of emotional experience', 69 it was only within a carefully controlled verse form that he created the convulsive beauty of

the stricken vision

Which penetrates the foliage of a dream,

* A good illustration of this is Peter Redgrove's poem 'Mr. Waterman', in which the protagonist's mad transformations of shape (from 'a charming dolls' house of glass' to 'a tree that thrusts up and fills the room' to 'a terrifying shark-shape') occur only within the controlled environment of the psychiatrist's office (A Group Anthology, 1963, p.99).
From fire and sword, the voltage of disaster
Which shocks us through the landscape as we scream. 73

Here reference is made to familiar ingredients of the dream-gothic; but the violence of the subject is not translated into the rhythms and form of the poetry. The poet (in this case Blackburn) seems prepared to accept Francis Hope's suggestion of revealing 'Visions of otherness' only 'In the exactitudes of place'; 74 that is, the chaotic world of strange and violent phenomena appears in this poetry only within the controlled 'exactitude' of a regular verse-form with solid, reassuring rhymes: in this way the poet keeps the potential hysteria at a distance.*

The key-note was moderation. This is clearly revealed in Mr. Blackburn's comment that 'The real revolutions in the art of verse have been very small modifications of technique'; he added

* A notable exception to the general rule was the grotesque element in the poetry of Sylvia Plath, a poetess who tended to immerse in the hysteria. The immersion is symbolised in the action of the poetic spokesman walking into the sea, as in 'Full Fathom Five' (The Colossus, 1967, pp.46-47), 'Suicide off Egg Rock' (ibid., p.33), and one of the heroine's suicide attempts in The Bell Jar (1966, pp.159-62/70). These represent the total surrender of the human and poetic will, a surrender also detectable in the cry, 'Mother of otherness/Eat me' ('Poem for a Birthday', The Colossus, p.81).

One has here an example of a luridly obsessive imagination. Its unsavoury power is most forcefully presented in a pervasive vampire theme. The poetess's 'Daddy' seems to be half-Nazi, half-vampire (Ariel, 1967, pp.54-56); and her husband, also, is a vampire who 'drank my blood for a year' (ibid., p.56). The theme of people feeding off each other, and drinking blood, is even carried on in a poem about 'Poppies in July', in flowers which have 'A mouth just bloodied' (ibid., p.82). The poetic spokeswoman of 'Childless Woman', 'Uttering nothing but blood', invites her audience to 'Taste it, dark red' (The New Poetry [ed. A. Alvarez], 1966, p.71), as if the efficacy of poetry itself depended on vampirism.

This is, as I said, an exception to the general rule of more distancing and restraint in Maverick-poetry than in earlier surrealist poetry.
that 'Usually when you have had absolutely outrageous and strange changes,... and everything broken up, these have been, as it were, sports, things which were ephemeral and were soon lost.'75 In the poem 'The Black Way' he spoke of enlarging the mind only 'by patient ways,/Pain and slow discipline' in the quest for 'That metaphor of dark and buried sea/Which lies beyond our shell strewn temporal beach.'76 No longer was the poet to indulge in ludicrously extravagant gestures; no longer was the poetic heart to be 'worn upon the sleeve/Of singing robes',77 as it had often been in the forties. Restraint, possibly borrowed from the example of the Movement, therefore played an important part in the new Neo-Romanticism.

* * * * * * * * *

The basic attitude to experience and existence put forward by Maverick-poetry continued to be in keeping with a modern Romanticism, in which 'The Self seeks to discover itself through the energy of its insights into reality and through the sensuous excitement generated in it by its experience of reality.'78 As Mr. Rosenthal says of similar poets in America, 'the continuing power of the Romantic tradition is clear'.79 The main difference from Surrealism and, to a lesser degree, from New Apocalypticism, was that this modern Romanticism now seemed to have divested itself of most of its avant-garde apparel.

Undoubtedly, Surrealism itself was now at a number of removes. It remained only as a surrealist spirit which had passed through
another dialectical process of development, producing an end-product
rather different from the original.*

In Maverick-poetry one can discern certain thematic continuities
with the New Apocalypse movement, in particular in the themes of
poetic anarchism,** and of the collision between natural animism and
'the Machine Age'. Some other surrealist themes, such as those of
madness and dream, are also present, but usually less vigorously
pursued, and often reduced to the status of mere referents. But
almost all surrealist technical devices are muted out of existence.
Only the general approach, one might say the ethic of writing,
remains.***

*Thus it would be hard to trace a surrealist spirit from the
thirties directly to the fifties and sixties; it is necessary
to be aware of its development in the intervening decade of
the forties before one can readily see the continuity.

**In the light of the Mavericks' anarchism I was interested to
read an interview in the Auckland University student newspaper
recently. In the interview in question the novelist Anthony
Burgess said, 'I'm very much an anarchist. I believe you've
got to fight the state whatever form it takes; whether its [sic]
socialist or conservative or liberal. The state is ipso facto
an evil thing. Well its [sic] dedicated to the suppression of
the individual; ... parties, sects, you know they are quite
happy. Once you get the maverick, once you get the individualist
trying to be a human being then they get very angry.... The artist
is probably the last of the Mavericks' (Craccum, 30 April 1970,
p.6, col. 1). In addition to the penultimate sentence here
reminding one of my earlier quotation from Look Back in Anger,
this quotation is of interest in that it suggests a continuation
of the Maverick spirit in literature in the first year of the
seventies.

***It would be possible to argue (as did Kenneth Cornell with
reference to surrealism among contemporary French poets) that
the Maverick-poets' ethic of writing, their attempt at 'creating
a metamorphosis of the visible world', is 'closer to the romantic
alliance of man and nature than to Surrealism' ('On the Difficulty
of a Label', Yale French Studies, No. 31 [no date], 144): the
title of Silkin's 1955 collection--Nature with Man--suggests as
much. Certainly, as the avant-garde element of the surrealist
spirit became less prominent, surrealism's close connection with
traditional Romanticism became more apparent.

2 Anon., ibid., front dust-cover.

3 **Still and All**, 1957, p.6.

4 'Poetry Chronicle', *Partisan Review*, XXV (Fall 1958), 605.

5 **Defending Ancient Springs**, 1967, p.36.


7 John Osborne, **Look Back in Anger**, 1966, p.15.

8 **Mavericks**, p.20.

9 Wright, 'A Visit to a Poet', ibid., p.21.

10 Anthony Cronin, 'Surprise', ibid., p.48.

11 Thomas Blackburn, 'Orpheus', **In the Fire**, 1956, p.25.

12 Anon, front dust-cover to Martin Seymour-Smith's **Tea with Miss Stockport**, 1963.


14 Seymour-Smith, 'Request on the Field', *op.cit.*, p.28.

15 ibid., pp.20-22.

16 ibid., p.9.


18 Seymour-Smith, 'The Execution', *op.cit.*, p.23.

19 'Note on "Flower" Poems', *Nature with Man*, 1965, p.56.


24 The Poet Speaks, p.169.
25 'Dedications--2', The Re-ordering of the Stones, p.46.
26 ibid., p.27.
27 ibid., p.12.
29 'Eros and Agape', In the Fire, p.5.
30 The Burning Hare, p.31.
31 ibid., p.32.
32 The Ship and Ither Poems [sic], 1963, pp.11-12.
34 In the Fire, p.9.
36 'Cnossos', A Smell of Burning, 1961, p.29.
39 ibid., p.164.
40 'Three Critics', The Re-ordering of the Stones, p.17.
41 Blackburn, 45-60, p.13.
42 Silkin, 'For a Child, on His Being Pronounced Mentally Defective by a Committee of the LCC', The Re-ordering of the Stones, p.43.
43 Blackburn, 'The Return', In the Fire, p.29.
44 'Against Magic', The Burning Hare, p.40.
46 Scannell, 'How to Fill in a Crossword Puzzle', ibid., p.27.
47 'Looking at a Map', ibid., p.34.
48 'The Word of Love', ibid., p.29.
52 ibid., p.57.
53 ibid., p.54.
54 ibid., p.52.
55 ibid., p.60.
57 Hilary Corke, Springtime (ed. G.S. Fraser and Iain Fletcher), 1953, p.33.
58 Fox on a Barn Door, 1965, p.43.
59 Titles of poems, ibid., pp.25, 13, 14-15, 18-19 respectively.
60 Walker, 'Mushrooms', Those Other Growths, 1964, p.5.
61 Christopher Hampton, 'The Man with the Club-Foot', A Group Anthology, p.35.
62 Peter Porter, 'Annotations of Auschwitz', ibid., p.85.
63 The Poet Speaks, p.169.
65 ibid., p.40.
67 Blackburn, 45-60, p.16.
68 The Poet Speaks, p.28.

69 Blackburn, 'Eros and Agape', In the Fire, p.5.

70 Blackburn, 'The Pronouns', The Next Word, p.15.

71 The Price of an Eye, p.31.


75 The Poet Speaks, p.31.

76 III, Springtime, p.22.

77 Jonathan Price, 'A Manner of Speaking', New Lines--II, p.44.


79 Ibid., p.15.
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: Ted Hughes--Into the Present.

I have tried to suggest how infinitely beyond our ordinary notions of what we know our real knowledge, the real facts for us, really is. And to live removed from this inner universe of experience is also to live removed from ourself, banished from ourself and our real life.


Charles Tomlinson, describing the state of contemporary poetry in 1961, spoke of it as still fluctuating between the intolerable extremes of 'Phillip Drunk' (by which he meant 'the neo-Dylan Thomas stuff') and 'Phillip Sober' (by which, I presume, he meant the Movement style of writing). He suggested that both of these were unsatisfactory because modern verse 'needs a greater richness than you can do either completely drunk or completely sober.'¹

Then Mr. Tomlinson added a footnote comment about Ted Hughes, 'whose work', he said, 'obviously changes the balance here'¹—as if, perhaps, in this poet's work the fluctuations may resolve into a 'greater richness'.

So, finally, we arrive at the poetry of Hughes, a poet whom M.L. Rosenthal describes as 'The most striking single figure to emerge among the British poets since the last war'.²

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Hughes has written three collections of poetry for adults --The Hawk in the Rain in 1957, Lupercal in 1960, and Wodwo in
1967—as well as some verse for children, one collection of which (The Earth-Owl and Other Moon-People of 1963) I shall have cause to mention, and a book of poetic theory, Poetry in the Making of 1967.

A starting-point for much of his poetry is recognisably one of Maverick-poetry's main themes—that of the opposition between the worlds of nature and of Man.

Hughes usually gives nature pride of place, whether it be through 'Landscape', 'Wind and Weather', or 'Animals'. The natural world is frequently depicted as a harsh, brutal place in which human beings appear as insignificant aliens.* In the title-poem of his first collection, The Hawk in the Rain, for instance, the human protagonist is reduced in stature by the hugeness of the natural setting in which he appears; he is a 'Morsel in the earth's mouth', and is assailed by the 'banging wind' around him. He is in contrast to the hawk of the poem, for he is depicted as totally earth-bound—'I drown in the drumming ploughland, I drag up/Heel after heel from the swallowing of earth's mouth' (a description heightened by the alliterative effect of the heavy, dragging 'd' sounds)—whereas the hawk is airborne and 'Effortlessly at height hangs' (the description once more heightened by alliteration, in this case of 'h' sounds suggestive of the breath-taking swirl of air around the bird's wings). In this poem Man is an insignificant spectator in the violent natural drama of the hawk's death.

*Frederick Grubb's mention of 'the baleful naturalism of the Border Ballads' (A Vision of Reality, 1965, p.217) with reference to Hughes's poetry is by no means inappropriate.
Perhaps of most interest in Hughes's poetic evocation of the alien world of wild nature is what Mr. Rosenthal has called 'the bestiary he presents', since animals in particular reveal (in the poet's own words) 'a vivid life of their own, outside mine.' For example, 'The Jaguar' in the poem of that title, though apparently caged in Man's zoo nevertheless exhibits 'wildernesses of freedom' in 'His stride'; or 'An Otter', still in touch with the seemingly mythic power of its ancient ancestry, 'Brings the legend of himself/From before wars or burials,' and can still dive down to reach 'The pebbles of the source' (overtly, the source of the river in which he lives, but presumably also the primal source of animal vitality).

On the other hand we are shown Man, who is totally 'alone-in-creation', cut off from nature by the 'monstrous "I"' of his assertive human personality. Unlike the otter, Man has developed away from his ancient origins, as 'The hot shallows and seas we bring our blood from/Slowly dwindled'. In the course of this process, by the exercise of his growing intellect and will (his 'monstrous "I"'), he begins to assume dominion over nature,** 'Killing the last of the mammoths' and banishing all 'monsters' from the 'maps'. He even reaches out to the cosmos, to 'the whole/Sun-

*It is interesting to note here Cyril Connolly's comment that 'wild beasts are ideal Surrealists, being at once correctly instinctual and always capable of frightening the spectator who is unprepared for their encounter' ('Surrealism', Art News Annual, No. 21 [1952], 156).
**This process is well symbolised in Hughes's poem 'Fourth of July' by the voyage of 'Columbus' to tame the wild continent of 'North America' (Lupercal, 1965, p.20).
swung zodiac of light', shrinking it 'to a trinket shape/On the rise of his eye:' this constitutes a wilful manipulation, or belittling, of the enormous scale of the natural universe so that Man can put himself at its centre, and 'outlook life like Faustus.'  

On the physical level, Man's assertion of his primacy over nature is translated into the action of taming the landscape (imposing on it towns like 'Hull's sunset smudge'), or of caging wild animals. In the zoo of the poem 'The Jaguar', for instance, once-wild animals are reduced by Man's will to inertia--'apes yawn', 'tiger and lion' are 'Fatigued with indolence,' and 'The boa-constrictor's coil/Is a fossil': Man has here virtually reduced the animal realm to a pale copy of his own, domesticating it so that 'It might be painted on a nursery wall.'  

If he cannot tame, then he will try to kill. So, for example, the magnificent otter is reduced to 'nothing at all,' merely a 'long pelt over the back of a chair.' In 'An Otter', an additional element is added also; as well as revealing the human urge to overpower physically the world of external nature, the poem suggests Man's desire to eradicate the natural instincts within himself, since the otter beneath the surface of the water is at once an animal, but likened also to 'the self' which 'under the eye lies,/Attendant and withdrawn.' Thomas Blackburn is clearly correct when he claims that Hughes's 'Otter is a ... symbol for the questing night-time

*In Poetry in the Making* Mr. Hughes extends the significance of the caging urge when he equates 'capturing animals and writing poems' (1967, p.15); possibly he is implying in this linkage a danger inherent in the writing of poetry—that of reducing the vital life of the poetic material to inertia by caging it with 'domesticated' words.
element in ourselves'. The caging urge is thus introjected, the domination of the wild animal being paralleled by (or at least suggesting) an attempted domination of the natural, instinctual elements in Man's own consciousness.

In Man's world, then, as Hughes sees it, there seems to be a dangerous imbalance, the natural life in all its manifestations being suppressed by the march of civilised progress. The result is that human society forfeits the vitality and freedom associated (in this poetry) with the world of untamed nature. Thus, paradoxically, 'The Jaguar' in the zoo is free, but the zoo-keeping humanity is fettered.

This comes out most strongly in the poem 'Macaw and Little Miss'. The macaw's cage is, significantly, 'The size of a man's head,' suggesting already that intellection is a cage for Man. Certainly, as the poem continues, we see that it is the people in it who are really caged--the 'Little Miss' in 'the old lady's parlour, where an aspidistra succumbs/To the musk'. The parrot, on the other hand, with its burning, animal vitality (characterised by words such as 'Crimsoning', 'smouldering', 'Volcano', 'furnace', 'conflagration', and 'frenzy') and its 'thunderous mythological hierarchy,' is the only free being.

The domestic world revealed here is further described in poems such as 'Secretary' and 'Parlour-Piece', in which the 'fire and flood' of instincts are restrained by 'Pale cool tea in tea-cups chaperoned'. One might reasonably apply to this society F.L. Lucas's comment that 'A garden-suburb England is only too likely
to produce an anaemic suburbivity." 18 Certainly, as Hughes puts it in 'Fourth of July', in contemporary civilisation 'the mind's wandering elementals' have now been 'Ousted' from 'their heavens and their burning underworld',* and only 'Wait dully at the traffic crossing,/Or lean over headlines, taking nothing in': 10 the questing, mysterious aspect of Man's consciousness seems to have been replaced by a jaded, almost automated response to life. As a result, inertia and paralysis threaten to take over all activity, so that 'Your neighbour moves less and less, attempts less.' 19

An interesting poem at this point is 'Lupercalia'. 20 In its first section we have the description of nothing more heroic than a scavenging mongrel which, however, retains the animal vitality that seems to be lacking in Man. The dog might be described as a 'wandering elemental', 10 retaining 'An anarchy of mindless pride' in its 'blood', and having a 'mouth like an incinerator' which holds 'man's reasonable ways' helpless. In contrast to the dog, in the second section of the poem we have the description of a woman (who seems to me to be a symbol of the human civilisation described in 'Parlour-piece'). She is 'as from death's touch: a surviving/Barrenness', and though 'perfect' she has been 'flung from the wheel of the living'. Having described this moribund woman, Hughes then voices the wish,

Now the brute's quick
Be tinder: old spark of the blood-heat
And not death's touch engross her bed ....

*One is reminded strongly here of the archetypal figure of Orpheus 'wandering' in the 'burning underworld'.
At the end of the poem the wish is taken up again in the plea, 'Maker of the world' 'Touch this frozen one.' Hughes seems to be hoping for some resurgence of animal instinct in Man's civilisation, to save Man from the inertia and paralysis that threaten his emasculated society, some 'spark' of vitality to thaw the 'frozen' world he has made.

Lacking the necessary 'spark', society has to retreat in self-defence to the temporary material satisfactions suggested in the poem 'Roarers in a Ring'\(^2\) --to 'Good company', 'ale', and 'laughter'--in order to prevent the onset of the 'Silence' of a brutal natural world, a silence which may 'drink blood.' In contrast to the apparently cosy festivities of the farmers around the fire, nature in this poem does not rejoice, but goes on in cold, one might almost say predatory, grimness, threatening at any moment to hurl 'Those living images of their deaths' (presumably the rejoicing farmers) into 'bottomless black/Silence'.

Later Hughes carries one stage further his imaginative analysis of the precarious state of our modern society. He shows that the primacy of the material 'reality' such as that around which the 'Roarers' gather is by no means as undeniable as might be believed.

\(^2\)One is reminded here of the forties imagery of spiritual winter, of snow, ice, and paralysis. The image is most fully explored by Hughes in the theatre-of-the-absurd-like story 'Snow', in which the hero is a highly rational man 'living exclusively on will-power,' (\textit{Wodwo}, 1967, p.77) constantly guarding against 'the moment of overpowering impatience when ... [he] could easily lose control and break out, follow ... [his] instinct,' (ibid., p.79) proudly assuring himself that 'All the facts are on my side' (ibid., p.81), but doomed to walking for his whole life over dead-flat expanses of endless snow.
He exploits what an anonymous reviewer has called 'his gift for the bizarre, the frightening and the macabre', and what Mr. Rosenthal describes as his 'exuberantly horrid imagination' to create a vision of another, more sinister, 'reality' suffusing the material world. Moving from the natural world of animals, as depicted in his first two collections, to this other reality the poet writes, 'However, the number and oddity of the creatures which inhabit the earth ... are nothing to those which inhabit our minds, or perhaps I ought to say our dreams, or the worlds from which our dreams emerge, worlds presumably somewhere out beyond the bottom of our minds.'

These other worlds are presented, more or less humorously, in The Earth-Owl and Other Moon-People.* In this collection is posited 'the existence of the dream moon, and as this one is somewhere inside our minds it affects us much more closely than the other, and so ought to be much more our concern.' The society of the dream moon is a grotesque one in which moral and spiritual traits are translated into external appearance: acquisitive people become entirely hands, and conformists become entirely feet** lining up in orderly queues. What we have here is an individual transformation

*It would be unwise to take this collection too seriously, since it is ostensibly a book of nonsense rhyme (to some considerable extent directed principally at a child-audience) with the fairy-tale atmosphere of 'Foxgloves' (1965, p.35), the lightness of touch in the pun and assonance of 'Moon-Hops' (ibid., p.25), and the humorous use of gothicism in 'Moon-Nasturtiums' (ibid., p.19). Even so, there is an underlying serious content.

**One might compare here the Surrealist painter René Magritte's painting 'The red [sic] Model'; see p.353A, below.
Another sort of people are condemned to being just feet,
Wandering about without ankles or knees or thighs.

--Ted Hughes, 'Moon-Freaks', The Earth-Owl and Other
of normal external reality into a surreal vision.

Something of the vision, but in more serious terms, is carried on from *The Earth-Owl* to Hughes's latest collection, *Wodwo* (1967). In *Wodwo* the reader is quickly made aware that the poet's imaginative world is one inhabited by memories of hanging animals (as in 'The Rain Horse' and 'Karma'), and by a Poe-like gothic hallucination-vision (as in 'The Wound'). It is a world where a man can suddenly become, or at least live the sensations of, the hare he is hunting (as in 'The Harvesting'), and where a jaguar can become a 'Gangster, club-tail lumped along behind gracelessly,' 'Hurrying through the underworld'. It is a place where the relentless weather and the animal world conspire in a malevolent opposition to Man (as in 'The Rain Horse'), and where huge crabs swarm from the sea to take over the city at night (as in 'Ghost Crabs'). In fact, it is a world which might reasonably be described as 'surreal'.

In this collection, what Mr. Hughes himself describes as 'the encounter between the elemental things and the ... human' reaches a critical point, one might almost say threatens to bring on a crisis in consciousness, in 'One smouldering annihilation' of the 'old brains, old bowels, old bodies' of conventional reality.

The point is most powerfully explored in the poem 'Gog'.

At the outset the poetic spokesman is living a virtually animal

*Gog, the Encyclopaedia Britannica reminds us, is a 'hostile power that is to manifest itself in the world immediately before the end of things'; perhaps it is virtually identical with what David Gascoyne called 'The Diabolical Principle'.

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existence, merely running, drinking, and sleeping. The world in which he finds himself is one where the natural order is thriving and satisfied—where 'the lichens' are 'fat' and 'The air wants for nothing.' He himself shares this mindless satisfaction, presided over by the 'motherly weeping' of Mother Earth; his world is one where 'rocks and stones' are invested with human powers (they can 'see'), and in which 'Darkness ... all night sings and circles stamping' like a primitive tribe in a ritual dance: this is the pre-civilised, primitive Man living under the animistic power of the natural world.

In contrast to this, in section II of the poem, the world of civilised Man is presented. It is a place where 'The atoms of saints' brains are swollen with the vast bubble of nothing', and where 'Everywhere the dust is in power.' Man has become a thinking creature, and has consequently cut himself off from the natural world in which 'The grass-head ... will never know it exists' and where 'The stones are as they were' during his pre-logical state as described at the beginning of the poem. The result of Man's move away from the primitive animistic phase is that the 'quick peoples' of the 'Grass and stones' (possibly insect-life but, in the spiritual context of the poem, more likely pagan deities) are turned into 'Death and death and death', and even 'Sun and moon' become 'death and death'.

The final section of the poem describes the moment of crisis for civilised Man, when Gog is galvanised into action before Armageddon. The poetic terms of the description are interesting: the hostile power is described as rising from the soil 'through the dark archway of earth, under the ancient lintel overwritten with
roots,' and also rising from the human generative organs--'Out of the blood-dark womb'. This Gog is the spirit of the rugged landscapes of earlier poems, the 'seraph of the bleak edge', rising to destroy Man's world: he is depicted as a rampant, primal natural principle finally overwhelming humanity's 'monstrous "I"'.

One is strongly reminded here of the theme of David Gascoyne's Surrealist poem 'The Diabolical Principle' (analysed earlier), in which is enacted the destruction of the world by a hostile force inherent in the natural universe. If the images in Hughes's poem are never so fragmentary and dislocated as Gascoyne's, if the technical aspect of the writing is not especially surrealistic,* then at least the basic poetic situation created, and the poet's state of mind,** seem the same.

The threat embodied in the poem 'Gog' seems to be directed primarily at a humanity which has withdrawn from nature into a fragile and sterile world of overbearing intellect such as that described in the poem 'Egg-Head'. In this latter poem Man is shown as having ignored the mysterious natural forces represented by 'A leaf's otherness,/The whaled monstered sea-bottom,' and as having concentrated instead on the 'eggshell head's' round of arid logic which produces only 'deft opacities,' 'feats of torpor,' 'circumventing sleights/of stupefaction,' and 'juggleries of benumbing'.

*There is in Hughes's poem, as I shall show later, an example of surrealist catalogue-poetry.
**One remembers that Cyril Connolly described surrealism as 'a state of mind' ('Surrealism', Art News Annual, No. 21 [1952], 133).
Consequently, to right the balance, and to avoid the disaster described in 'Gog', the poet puts some considerable emphasis on the natural world denied by the 'Egg-Head'. Hughes justifies his insistence on wild natural landscapes (what he calls 'the uncivilized earth') on the grounds that 'It is only there that the ancient instincts and feelings in which most of our body lives can feel at home and on their own ground.'

Hughes's ideal seems to be the state described in the final poem of his most recent collection, the title-poem of Wodwo. The poetic spokesman is a 'Wodwo' or, in the poet's own words, 'a sort of half-man half-animal spirit of the forests': this creature is perhaps half-way between the unthinking being at the start of 'Gog' and the hyper-cerebral 'Egg-Head'. In particular the wodwo has an active inquisitiveness (which was lacking alike in the animal-like man in the first part of 'Gog' and in the 'juggleries of benumbing' of the 'Egg-Head'). He has an advantage over the civilised being inasmuch as the natural environment in which he finds himself is potentially fertile, containing 'roots roots roots and ... water' instead of the 'dust' and the 'vast bubble of nothing' depicted in the second part of 'Gog'. Mr. Hughes writes of 'Wodwo', 'I imagine this creature just discovering that it is alive' in the lush natural world. Thus the environment created by the poet offers an opportunity for the sort of freshness of response once sought by Surrealism. A harmonious and fruitful

*What we have here once more is, in psychological terms, the poetic sublimation of potentially dangerous instinctual forces which, if repressed, might produce a psychic imbalance in the individual.
contact with nature, outside the strictures of a civilised world, seems possible in the situation described in the poem. The individual freedom cherished by Surrealism, by the New Apocalypse, and by Maverick-poetry is guaranteed in that the wodwo has 'no threads/fastening ... [him] to anything ... [he] can go anywhere'.

It seems, in effect, that the wodwo is a surrealist being.*

Wodwo undoubtedly contains Hughes's most surrealist subject-matter.** In this collection he seems to me to be more clearly surrealist than the Mavericks of the late fifties and early sixties.

* * * * *

In addition to the presence of the surrealist spirit in Hughes's subject-matter and themes (notably in his opposition to intellectualism as the guiding principle of existence, in his insistence on the instinctual life of Man, and in his intermittent evocation of a surreal world) there are also certain technical concerns that might be described as surrealist.

The old language problem recurs yet again. In Poetry in the Making Mr. Hughes points out, 'It is when we set out to find words

* A comment made by Wallace Fowlie about Lautreamont's 'Maldoror' helps to support my suggestion here. He wrote that 'Maldoror, who is in many respects the outstanding surrealist hero, is conceived of as a man still very close to his memory of animals, still very close to the time when he himself participated in an animal existence' (Age of Surrealism, 1950, p.34). This description of 'the outstanding surrealist hero' is eminently applicable to Hughes's 'wodwo'.

** One might particularly instance 'Cadenza' (Wodwo, 1967, p.20), 'Ghost Crabs' (ibid., pp.21-22), 'The Green Wolf' (ibid., p.40), and 'Gog' (ibid., pp.150-3).
for some seemingly quite simple experience that we begin to realize
what a huge gap there is between our understanding of what happens
around us and inside us, and the words we have at our command to
say something about it.' 38 Later he concludes that 'words tend to
shut out the simplest things we wish to say', adding that 'In a way,
words are continually trying to displace our experience.' 39

The poetic language which seems to interest him most is that
which aspires to catch 'the incomprehensible cry/From the boughs,
in the wind', that which 'Sets us listening for below words'. 40
Conventional modes of expression are unsatisfactory for this, since
natural events leave 'The head with its vocabulary useless'. 41
Consequently the poet tries to give an extra dimension to these
conventional modes, in an attempt to reach 'below words'. Mr.
Rosenthal speaks of Hughes's use of language in some cases in terms
of 'magical incantation,' or as 'a conjuring up of another possible
kind of self', pointing out that 'otter and pike ... are given
supernatural attributions by the language that Hughes sometimes
employs'. 42

Certainly, in the poem 'Phaetons', 43 Hughes seems to subscribe
to a magical (almost alchemical) view of poetic description. At
the outset we have a description of poetic possession, in which the
poet, a 'near-madman', is assailed by 'the horses of the sun' which
make his senses 'hurtle and thunder'. In the latter half of the
poem Hughes describes this frenzy being conveyed to the reader: the
possessed poet's vision transforms the reader's world so that 'The
world has burned away beneath his book' and 'A tossing upside-down
team drags him on fire/Among the monsters of the zodiac.'

The 'mystery' element in poetry includes not only its effect, but its inception too. In the poem 'The Thought-Fox' the poet examines the nature of poetic inspiration, in terms which suggest something very close to the automatism of Surrealism. Through the first stanza, and into the first line of the second stanza, the poet is consciously contemplating. Then he receives the hallucination of the fox, which becomes explicit in stanza three, and continues in four and five as it writes the poem.* In stanza six the poet comes out of his trance, and finds that 'The page is printed.' This poem appears to be an interesting account of automatism in terms of a natural and animal force working through the poet's consciousness. One is struck here by the appropriateness of Louis Aragon's description of Surrealist automatism—'L'homme qui tient la plume ignore ce qu'il va écrire, ce qu'il écrit, de ce qu'il le découvre en se relisant, et se sent étranger à ce qu'a pris par sa main une vie dont il n'a pas le secret.'

Other surrealist devices are intermittently in evidence. One of these is the technique of rapid juxtaposition, as brilliantly illustrated in the poem 'Cadenza':-

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*The fox 'Sets neat prints into the snow/Between trees' (The Hawk in the Rain, 1967, p.14). I am indebted to Dr. P.A. Tanner of the University of Cambridge for the suggestion that the 'neat prints' in the 'snow' are the strokes of handwriting on the blank page, and that the 'trees' are margins.

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The violinist's shadow vanishes.

The husk of a grasshopper
Sucks a remote cyclone and rises.

The full, bared throat of a woman walking water,
The loaded estuary of the dead.

And I am the cargo
Of a coffin attended by swallows.

And I am the water
Bearing the coffin that will not be silent.

The clouds are full of surgery and collisions
But the coffin escapes--as a black diamond,

A ruby brimming blood,
An emerald beating its shores,

The sea lifts swallow wings and flings
A summer lake open,

Sips and bewilders its reflection,
Till the whole sky dives shut like a burned land back to its spark--
A bat with a ghost in its mouth
Struck at by lightnings of silence--

Blue with sweat, the violinist
Crashes into the orchestra, which explodes.

In this poem the action is framed by reference to a violinist (in the first, and penultimate, lines) and in view of this, together with the hint in the title, one assumes that the 'action' is thus a train of thought occurring in the mind of a person listening to a violin solo: the poetic action, in fact, embodies the description of a 'stream of consciousness'. Apparently the images are unconnected, but on close scrutiny there appears a complex continuity.

The starting point of the poem, the violinist, gives rise to two images; his movement and the scraping of his bow suggest that he is a huge grasshopper rubbing its wing-cases, and the sound of his violin as he plays up the scale suggests the whirling moan of a distant cyclone. Then, as the noise fades into the background--becomes 'remote'--the theme of the reverie is posited in the surreal vision of a woman walking on water which is covered with floating corpses. Henceforward three strings of imagery recur--those of death, water, and storm (the latter possibly representing the 'remote cyclone' of the violin sound continuing in the background of consciousness).

The theme of death gives rise to the image of the poet in a coffin, and then of the poet carrying a coffin whose shape suggests
a black diamond, which itself gives rise to gem imagery—the red ruby and the green emerald (the latter linked with the water/sea reference of the poem). Then the coffin's shape suggests a bat, and the body in the coffin becomes a ghost in the bat's mouth.

The water imagery is carried from reference to an 'estuary' at the outset, to the conception of the poet as water (on which the coffin floats), then to the sea as an 'emerald beating its shores,' to the strange image of sea billows as rising and falling birds' wings, and finally to a summer lake whose surface reflects an approaching storm.

The storm appears initially as a cyclone, then broods over the total vision of the poem in the form of 'clouds ... full of surgery and collisions,' until the whole sky becomes overcast—'dives shut'—and the threat of the 'lightnings of silence' erupts in the final explosive and thunderous storm of noise at the climax of the poem, as the day-dreamer comes out of his trance, the violin solo ends, and the orchestra takes over.

Thus, as with the best Surrealism (and the poem is strikingly surrealist in the way it works through sudden transformations, and flashes of vision revealing a fragmented grotesque world in the individual's entranced mind), the apparently irrational flow of images is ultimately amenable to reason. The poem has a fairly close-knit texture in spite of its lack of regular form, and the poetic effort produces a total effect through what Eliot described as 'a logic of imagination'.

Another common surrealist device sometimes employed in Hughes's poetry is that of the
catalogue-poem sequence, as in 'Gog', where 'the smile' is described as 'the judge's fury', 'the wailing child', 'the ribboned gift', 'the starved adder', 'the kiss in the dream', and so on.\textsuperscript{33}

The occasional use of headlong rhythms and of composite words (similar to those in the thirties poetry of Dylan Thomas) is reminiscent of the sort of urgent, plastic language once sought by Surrealism:—

Though that Jack Horner's hedge-scratched pig-splitting arm, Grabbing his get among your lillies, was a comet That plunged through the flowery whorl of your womb-root .... \textsuperscript{48}

However, it would be wrong to over-emphasise these technical elements in Hughes's writing. The preoccupation with the efficacy of poetic language is a theme common beyond the realms of surrealism, as well as within them. The description in 'The Thought-Fox' might easily be of a more general poetic inspiration rather than specifically of psychic automatism. The other devices, though interesting, are rather isolated examples.

As was the case with the Mavericks' poetry in the fifties and early-sixties, in fact, technique is, in general, not eminently avant-garde in Hughes's poetry. If there is sometimes what Edwin Muir calls 'an admirable violence' in 'His images', \textsuperscript{49} there is also a 'crisp and uncompromising intellectual' element \textsuperscript{50} to keep the violence well under control: the outré techniques of Surrealism's
irrational manner in the thirties are not generally in evidence.*

* * * * * * * *

With Hughes's poetry, determination of the origins of his surrealism is more beset with ambiguities than is the case with the work of any other of the poets discussed in the thesis. It seems to me open to speculation as to whether the surrealist element comes consciously through the direct influence of Surrealism itself (as was the case with the New Apocalypse movement), through the indirect influence of Surrealism (via another group's interpretation, or by reaction away from such an interpretation, as was the case with the 'Mavericks'), or less consciously through what one might call the zeitgeist of contemporary poetry.**

At this stage there is definitely no group allegiance: Hughes's surrealism is undoubtedly an individual thing. Any suggestion of a formalised surrealism would be even less appropriate now than it was to the poetry of the 'Mavericks'.

Even so, there can be no doubt that Hughes is a surrealist poet at times, although the surrealist elements in subject-matter and in

* Whereas Surrealism would have advocated certainly an element of critical consciousness and of the logical mind in its poetry, it would nevertheless have been at some pains to ensure the primacy of the irrational imagination (if only as over-compensation against the existing state of affairs in the world at large). In Hughes's poetry (and in that of the Mavericks) most often one feels that the balance is attempted on a different pivot, and that the emphasis is almost reversed.

**I am tempted to opt for the last of these possibilities, though I can provide no evidence. A letter that I sent to Mr. Hughes, asking for information on this point (amongst others), went unanswered.
technique are only a small proportion of the total body of work in which they appear, and although they are seldom concerted. There are poems in Wodwo which I find more surrealistic (within the terms of the definition I formulated in Chapter Two above) than any other poems written in England in the last fifteen or twenty years.

Of course, Hughes is only one of a vast number of poets now writing, so it would be foolish to make any large claims about a resurgence of surrealism in the late sixties on the strength of this one collection of poems by one poet. This remains so, even granted that Hughes is by contemporary standards an eminent poet, and likely to influence a significant percentage of the young poets now beginning to write.

Perhaps the most that one can say is that this poetry at least keeps the discussion open; the search for evidence of a surrealist spirit in the English poetry being produced at the moment may not be wholly fruitless. On the strength of Wodwo one feels able, like the protagonist of the title-poem of that collection, to 'go on looking ....' 36

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3 Hughes, Chapter headings for Chaps. 5 (pp.74ff.), 2 (pp.32ff.), and 1 (pp.15ff.), Poetry in the Making, 1967.
4 1967, p.11.
5 op. cit., p.211.
7. The Hawk in the Rain, p.12.
10. 'Fourth of July', Lupercal, p.20.
11. 'Meeting', The Hawk in the Rain, p.39.
12. 'Mayday on Holderness', Lupercal, p.11.
13. 'An Otter', ibid., p.47.
16. ibid., p.21.
17. ibid., p.20.
20. 'Lupercalia', Lupercal, pp.61-63.
23. op.cit., p.226.
27. pp.104ff.

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30 ibid., pp. 45ff.
31 ibid., pp. 21-22.
32 *Poetry in the Making*, p. 78.
33 *Wodwo*, pp. 150-3.
34 *The Hawk in the Rain*, p. 35.
35 *Poetry in the Making*, p. 76.
36 p. 183.
37 *Poetry in the Making*, p. 62.
38 p. 119.
39 ibid., p. 120.
40 'A Wind Flashes the Grass', *Wodwo*, p. 29.
41 'Stations', IV, ibid., p. 39.
42 *op. cit.*, p. 230.
43 *The Hawk in the Rain*, p. 34.
44 ibid., p. 14.
46 *Wodwo*, p. 20.
48 'Complaint', *The Hawk in the Rain*, p. 33.
49 *New Statesman*, quoted on the back dust-cover of *Wodwo*.
50 Anon., *The Times Literary Supplement*, quoted on the front dust-cover of *The Hawk in the Rain*. 
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: General Conclusion.

... you have probably heard it said that surrealism is dead. When I was still in France, I had promised myself to display in public one day everything which I had been able to collect in the way of newspaper articles built on this theme: surrealism is done for. It would have been rather piquant to show that they have followed upon one another almost monthly since the date of the foundation!

--André Breton, 'The Situation of Surrealism between the Two Wars', Yale French Studies, I (Fall-Winter 1948), 67.

It would be pleasant to end on an apocalyptic note, predicting expansion into fresh areas of conquest for a risen Surrealism—pleasant, but impossible. For a sober view of the facts prevents this.

There can be no doubt that Surrealism in England is dead. Henri Peyre was undoubtedly justified when in 1948 he remarked of Surrealism, 'The English seem to have written little on the subject since 1936, when Herbert Read's Surrealism and David Gascoyne's A Short Survey of Surrealism appeared in London.'\footnote{The situation has remained virtually unchanged in the twenty-two years since M. Peyre's comment.} However, as we have seen during the course of this thesis, it
does not follow from the movement's death in England that the essential spirit is dead also.* Indeed one might reasonably apply to the state of affairs in England (from the latter part of the thirties onwards) Cyril Connolly's comment that 'the Surrealists were disbanded but surrealism began to sow itself spontaneously.'

Charles Tomlinson noted something of the kind when he wrote that 'the yeast of surrealism' which (he said) began 'working' in the thirties went on into the forties, and 'even beyond the 1940s'; he concluded in 1963 that 'Surrealism ... has exercised, however indirectly, an influence on our poetic climate.'

Wallace Fowlie would certainly agree with this latter comment; in 1960 he noted that though 'The last vestiges of a movement or a school' have disappeared, nevertheless 'a surrealist attitude still survives'.

In fact Mr. Fowlie went so far as to suggest that only now can we begin to see the surrealist spirit in a true perspective, since 'With the passage of time, the revolutionary aspect of surrealism fades and we are better able to see its relationship with romanticism.'

He supported this opinion by pointing out that 'In its acceptance of the mysteriousness of life, and of the secret correspondences which exist between matter and spirit, between the conscious and the subconscious, surrealism is clearly one manifestation of romanticism.' Undoubtedly this is the most fruitful way of looking at surrealism.

*That the spirit remains alive is presumably M. Breton's justification for making light of obituaries concerning Surrealism.

**Though Mr. Fowlie's comment was directed primarily at French literature, one feels it to be eminently relevant also to the state of affairs in England.
To summarise the growth of this surrealism briefly, what one might describe as a surrealist spirit, that had been working through Pound and Eliot, was promoted in the native tradition by the crisis of the Great War and its aftermath, and reached its extreme point in Surrealism in England from about 1933 onwards. Surrealism reached its peak in 1936 but then began to disappear rapidly, giving way to a more general surrealist spirit which itself became much less prominent towards the end of the decade. At the turn of the decade and into the first years of the forties there was a resurgence of the surrealist spirit in the guise of the New Apocalypse movement. This latter movement’s energies became progressively dissipated in the second half of the decade, giving rise only to the shapeless New Romanticism and then virtually falling into abeyance. In the early fifties surrealism was to all intents and purposes dormant, until the Maverick-poets began writing in about 1957. In these poets’ work a surrealist spirit was detectable but by no means dominant. This has generally remained the case to date, though it is worthy of note that in Ted Hughes’s work (particularly in his most recent collection, Wodwo) the surrealist spirit seems to be much stronger again.

A graphic presentation of the fortunes of the surrealist spirit as I see them in the period under study would look as follows*:

*It must be emphasised that this graph has no pretensions to a scientific accuracy. The vertical axis cannot be statistically graduated: the relative heights of the peaks and depths of the valleys are both approximate and a matter of opinion. The graph is, in fact, not a statistically precise document, but merely a visual suggestion on my part of the rises and falls of a surrealist spirit between 1900 and 1970.
The direct literary value of the Surrealist movement seems to me to be small. It produced little poetry that is likely to survive as a permanent contribution to English literature. Perhaps its greatest significance from our point of view is as the extreme manifestation of the spirit of surrealism. It revealed in an exaggerated manner the potential and limitations of an art form based on the irrational. It constituted an attempt to systematise or at least formalise the artistic manifestations of the surrealist spirit.

It is this spirit which is of more importance to literature. It pre-existed, co-existed with, and survived the short-lived 'lettre' of Surrealism.

Julien Levy wrote that 'Although there may be a particular group of surrealists in Paris active in a consistent work of experiment and research, there are others, both of the past and of today, and of every nation, who, by reason of the character of their work, may justifiably be termed surrealists.' While agreeing entirely with this opinion, I have found it necessary during the course of my work to limit in some way such an enormous potential field of research. The field was initially cut down by the bounds of my prescribed topic—English poetry in the twentieth century. I have further reduced the size of the study in the only practical way possible—by taking what I consider to be a representative selection of relevant poets: I have examined the most important predecessors of Surrealism, then the main figures
of the Surrealist and New Apocalyptic movements, the most significant
of the 'Mavericks', and the most important of the latest poets one
might describe as surrealist. The survey, of course, is by no means
exhaustive, but is, I hope, full enough to provide an outline of the
history and the significance of both 'la lettre' and 'l'esprit'.

*       *       *       *       *

There remains to be made a prognosis of some sort. This can
reasonably be attempted only from a review of the circumstances of
the surrealist spirit in the most recent period under discussion
--the fifties and sixties.

Certainly the need for a surrealist literature seems to remain.
Jean-Louis Bédouin wrote in 1961 that 'on peut reconnaître que la
crise de civilisation qui s'ouvre au lendemain de la guerre de 1914
est loin d'être terminée'; he added that 'La reconquête d'une
unité primordiale qui, dans tous les domaines de la vie, fait
cruellement défaut aujourd'hui, reste plus que jamais à l'ordre
du jour.¹⁸ In 1967 Alan Burns echoed M. Bédouin's sentiments,
explaining that 'The surrealist incursion into the unconscious is
again relevant and necessary.'⁹

There are indeed certain indications of fresh growth (in
addition to the poetry examined in Chapters Twenty and Twenty-One
above). M.L. Rosenthal, for instance, suggests that 'the
Concretist movement' 'bears a certain relationship to ... an older
modernism—the European movements of Dadaism and Futurism, for instance'.

More significant than this, at any rate from our point of view, is a resurgence of the surrealist spirit in the work of David Gascoyne, in his *Night Thoughts* collection of 1956. Kathleen Raine considers the poetry in this book to be 'informed with a content not only supremely imaginative but infused with the imagination of the collective mind of which it is an eloquent, if unconscious, expression'. According to Miss Raine, Gascoyne 'emerges as a prophet whose subversive message is what it has always been: to live by the truth of the imagination'. A more level-headed and valuable comment is that 'in his latest work,... Mr. Gascoyne returns to a realization which characterized surrealism ...; an enchanted dream-like consciousness which created ...[its own world], by a confusion and inter-fusion of inner and outer worlds, in which the waking world was experienced symbolically, fraught with meanings and messages of the soul.' Miss Raine goes on to suggest that *Night Thoughts* is the final expression of a theme the poet had already attempted in two long poems, "Phantasmagoria" before 1935, in his surrealist period, and

*Since Dadaism was the precursor of Surrealisme one assumes that the 'modernism' to which Mr. Rosenthal refers would include the surrealist spirit.*
"Noctambules" (1938).  

Other evidence of the surrealist spirit is less clearly positive.

The survival of surrealism in superficialities (mostly graphic, or visual), such as 'Advertisements and posters, movies, ladies' dresses and especially hats, cartoons ...', 14 is in itself not particularly relevant; but the persistence of this survival does tend to indicate that the surrealist spirit continues to strike a responsive chord in a fairly large audience.

The fact that Maurice Nadeau's standard Histoire du Surréalisme was translated into English in 1968 might possibly indicate a resurgence of interest in surrealism. However, by the same token, it might just as well indicate historic curiosity over a dead movement.

* * * * * * * *

Ultimately, perhaps, the only conclusion that one can reasonably arrive at is that the fate of surrealism in modern

*This is a good point, which cannot really be adequately illustrated by quotation, since all the poems here depend on an overall effect, created by the fragmented hallucinations thrown up by night in the city from 'the roaring labyrinth deepsunk in Night below' (Megalometropolitan Carnival', Night Thoughts, 1956, p.25).
poetry hangs in the balance. Julian Levy in 1968 requoted M. Breton as saying, 'The drift of surrealism has always and chiefly been towards a general and emphatic crisis in consciousness and it is only when this is happening, or is shown to be impossible that the success or historic eclipse of the movement will be decided';¹⁵ as neither of these circumstances currently pertains, one may assume that neither success nor eclipse is as yet assured.**

In the final analysis, I think Robin Skelton puts forward the most valid possible generalisation about surrealism. He writes,

On the whole, it must be regarded as an influential idea rather than as another movement in the history of twentieth-century English poetry—at least, so far.¹⁶

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¹One feels that M. Breton in this quotation had in mind 'l'esprit' rather than 'la lettre' of Surrealism.

**If the situation in America were any guide there would be grounds for assessing the spirit of surrealism in rather more positive terms. Mr. Levy, reprinting his important thirties volume Surrealism in 1968, could write, 'Thirty years after the first appearance of this anthology, long out of print, ... one is happily reassured of its continued relevance' (p.v); his justification for this statement is that 'The younger poets and artists ... turn again to the enigmas originally signaled by the early Surrealists, continuing the mythic progress, although they may not call themselves "Surrealists"' (ibid., p.v). Even long-established poets seem to be involved, since Robert Lowell admits to being 'devoted to surrealism' (Time, 6 June 1969, p.70), and John Berryman's 77 Dream Songs (with their synthesis of a poetic vision from juxtaposed fragments) suggest a surrealistic spirit at work.
1. 'The Significance of Surrealism', Yale French Studies, I (Fall-Winter 1948), 35n.

2. 'Surrealism', Art News Annual, No. 21 (1952), 168.


4. ibid., p.466.


6. ibid., 368.


8. Vingt Ans de Surréalisme, p.17.


12. ibid., p.59.

13. ibid., p.53.


15. op.cit., p.27.

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