POEMS FOR SPAIN:

THE RESPONSE OF BRITISH POETS TO THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR.

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C.J. DILLON

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This thesis examines three main facets of the 1930s poetic movement in Britain. Firstly the nature of the "thirties tradition" in English literature is established, then aesthetic formulations of that period are considered. Both of these areas of enquiry relate principally to the poetic response to the Spanish Civil War. Thirdly the poetry written in response to the Spanish Civil War is surveyed. It is intended that this study should suggest the chief ambitions of the thirties writers examined, namely the formulation of a socially responsible form of literature suiting the demands of their time, and evaluate their efforts to fulfil that ambition.
Prelude

In the early afternoon of July 17, 1936 rebel officers garrisoned in the Spanish Morocco town of Melilla seized control of key points in the town and amid bloody but short-lived fighting in the lower class districts arrested and shot all leaders of left wing groups and those known to have resisted the rebellion, including General Romerales, commander of forces in Melilla. That same morning before dawn General Francisco Franco, commander of forces on the Canary Islands left the island of Tenerife for Las Palmas commencing the first leg of a journey which would lead him from virtual exile to absolute power in Spain. By that evening Melilla was securely under martial law and within the next twenty-four hours similar insurrections would be attempted throughout Spanish Morocco and Spain itself, plunging the country into full scale civil war.¹

No immediate response to the blossoming Spanish conflict appeared to be forthcoming from England. Isolated from the mainstream of European affairs and preoccupied with domestic issues, the English people in general remained unaware of the war developing across the Channel. However this detachment was to be short-lived. The apparent tranquility of the English summer disguised a growing awareness of the events in Hitler's Germany, events which rekindled fearful memories of turmoil during the great depression and intensified a sense of imminent social upheaval.

Many British people feared any possibility of social
change, associating such change with the erosion of their treasured "British way of life". Yet among younger people the possibility of social change was welcomed, being seen as necessary for the continued well-being of an ailing British society. Throughout the thirties liberal belief in gradual change had given way to a developing consciousness of the necessity of struggle - a struggle for the transformation of both England and the wider European society. It was this struggle which was to be epitomised by the civil war in Spain.

To observers in England the Spanish Civil War initially appeared to be the long awaited struggle between Left and Right. In fact such a simple interpretation of the conflict was quite inadequate for it ignored the complex and uniquely Spanish circumstances from which the war developed. Nevertheless for the English the Spanish Civil War seemed to dramatise the issues involved in the clash between the Left and the Right, popularising the political debate in Britain, and sharply polarising public opinion. For the literary left Spain was to become a symbol manifesting the hopes and predictions of their thirties work, and was to provide them with a suddenly enlarged though generally partisan audience.

**INTENTIONS**

This study will be chiefly concerned with the poetry written in response to the Spanish conflict, a response which saw Spain as a realisation of hope and an actualisation of struggle. My intention is to examine the significance of the poetry prompted by the Spanish Civil War to the body of characteristically committed, deliberately responsible poetry of the thirties. It is because writers so self-consciously
strove to meet the demands of their time that their poetic response to Spain is especially significant. By attempting in their poetry both to diagnose the malaise which gripped England, and effectively enter into the action of their era, these writers hoped to achieve a synthesis of the apparently irreconcilable responses to the demands of art and society. Coming at the end of the thirties when such demands were most pressing, the poems for Spain represent not only the culmination of the decades spirit, but also its dying gasp.

The study is by no means a comprehensive survey of all the poetry related to Spain. In choosing poetry and aesthetic theory for examination I have limited myself mainly to the work of the social poets of the decade, poets who wrote with a consciousness of the social and political demands being made upon them, and who attempted to meet adequately these demands. Although this study will deal with many of the lesser figures of the decade the emphasis will be upon the major poets and aestheticians - writers placed most securely in the thirties tradition of politicised literature. My choice has also been guided by the aims of this study, for I seek not simply to examine the poems for Spain as war poetry, but to investigate the extent to which these poems can validly be regarded as an integral part of the tradition of thirties literature, and to further define that tradition.

Clearly such an approach involves the exclusion of a great deal of important poetry written in the late thirties. The established Modernist writers remained aloof from the conflict. Eliot, for example, while sympathetic, asserted that "it is best that at least a few men of letters should remain isolated and take no part in these collective activities". Indeed the old guard were not entirely alone
in so doing: Dylan Thomas and David Gascoyne as major younger poets preserved their poetic isolation (although Gascoyne's sympathies were with the Republican cause\textsuperscript{A}). Even when the Spanish conflict most intensely fired the imaginations of writers, only a fraction of their output was directly concerned with that conflict. Perhaps the most obvious omission from this study is that of the work of the Surrealists (although some work exhibiting affinities with surrealism will be examined). As the emphasis of this study is upon writers who treated the civil war in Spain from a predominantly "social realist" point of view, such an omission is hardly surprising, for surrealist writers regarded the rational reality of the physical world as only part of a wider reality which included the irrational and dreamlike and emphasised unusual perspectives upon "reality". Consequently a surrealist treatment of the Spanish war was likely to emphasise the irrational shocking and disorienting aspects of the conflict rather than suggest a Marxist or even an establishment point of view.\textsuperscript{5} In most cases it was those writers who were sympathetic with the popular front who wrote explicitly of Spain, often seeing the conflict in historical terms for the concerns of the popular front were those which found actualisation in the civil war. Two important exceptions to this generalisation are George Orwell (whose \textit{Homage to Catalonia} remains the finest English prose account of the war) and Roy Campbell. Orwell's nonconformist political views were anathema to the orthodox left, while Campbell found himself ostracised by almost all of the English literary establishment.

\textbf{PRELIMINARY REMARKS}

As a study of poetry and poetics in relation to the
Spanish Civil War this thesis is not the place for a comprehensive background to either social or artistic movements in the thirties, (particularly since both have been the subjects of comprehensive scholarship). Nevertheless a certain amount of background information is necessary for any appreciation of the complex situation poets found themselves in during the decade. While the first chapter of this study deals with the pertinent details of such background information, a number of qualifying remarks are necessary at this stage.

To speak of a literary establishment in the decade can be misleading. It should not be assumed that because the Oxford poets (Auden, of course, being most conspicuous) wrote some of the most enduring poetry to emerge from the period, and to a certain extent dominated the magazines and other channels of publication, that they were either representative of the bulk of thirties writers or universally recognised as pre-eminent by their contemporaries. Indeed there was little consensus among the writers of the era in their aims, or their responses to the demands of the age. Perhaps the greatest danger when dealing with the thirties is that of over simplification.

Accounts of the social situation in England during the decade are also potentially deceptive. While the thirties may seem to be an era of widespread clamouring for radical change, in fact the number of people committed to such action was relatively small, particularly in the early years of the decade. Although a so-called "mass-movement" did exist by 1936 it was still far from a universally popular movement. It is especially important to realise that in the second half of the decade this enlarged movement was composed of people
rather more liberal than communist. The radical core of the early thirties had not grown significantly but had been joined by liberals and mild socialists.

Julian Symons estimates (perhaps rather optimistically) an audience in 1936 (the heart of the thirties dream) of one million, and numbers the hard core of artists at one thousand. Although these figures are impressive when contrasted with the small politicised literary consciousness at the beginning of the decade they clearly belie any impression we might have of the masses poised for action. Yet in any political or literary movement the active few have a larger passive following. While "the movement" in the thirties was of a limited size its influence was nowhere more marked than upon the practising artists.

Of the myriad of historical considerations underlying the war itself, at this stage one has particular bearing upon my topic. While ultimately the Spanish war became a battle between the Left and the Right, due to the extent of foreign intervention on both sides, and the eventual Communist Party control of the Republican forces, the initial nature of the conflict was definitely not so clear cut, and foreign observers often failed to perceive the political complexity of the early stages of the war. The tendency of the English (from journalists to the most sensitive poets and volunteers) was immediately to see the civil war in Spain in terms of black and white, which allowed a projection of English hopes and fears into the conflict, Spain becoming a symbol of what might happen in England. This was directly traceable to their lack of understanding of the history of the conflict which foredoomed the Second Spanish Republic. The midsummer of 1936
witnessed events whose origins spanned the preceding hundred and fifty years; events which were not the simple manifestation of European conflict which they appeared to be. The very complexity of the war's origins aggravated the inability of foreign observers to understand how little initially this was the archetypal conflict between Right and Left.

Any attempt to write about the thirties is fraught with difficulties. Contemporary accounts invariably overstated the case from one side or another, the author being hopelessly carried away with enthusiasm or loathing for a particular political stance. But it is the paradoxical nature of political stances in that decade which poses a more complex problem. While it is only fair to credit the social poets with altruistic motives, it seems clear now that much of the motivation for public political commitment was in fact personal. Some critics have contended that the bourgeois (or rather ex-bourgeois) poets were attracted to Marxism solely as a replacement for the lost values of their youth, Mirski going so far as to claim that all these poets sought was a replacement for "nanny empiricism". Also many of the poets from bourgeois backgrounds were driven by dissatisfaction and guilt over their origins. They were forced to consider the apparent incompatibility of their privileged position in society with what they perceived as a necessary role of social concern and constructive action toward a revolutionary goal.

This paradoxical motivation for political action became more complex when the demands of an active role (at least partially motivated by personal desires) interfered with the demands of poetry. A common and not entirely untrue picture
of the thirties poet depicts a guilt-ridden youth lamenting his not being a miner (though haunted by the nagging suspicion that if he were he would not be a poet). For most of the left-wing poets of the thirties the desire to bridge the gap between intellectual and man of action was compelling (just as it had been for Yeats in Ireland). Enfeebled by their detachment from the world of action, and deserted by their old leader T.S. Eliot, whose isolation was anathema to them, they sought the experience of revolutionary activity in order to validate their existence as poets. The personal need was to be fulfilled by public action. With the onset of the Spanish Civil War these typically thirties traits were intensified. The opportunity now existed to act in the real world: a stand could be taken. Unfortunately the poet who died taking such a stand would have a limited poetic output. For many young poet-volunteers the paradox became acute.

Obviously such generalisations do not apply equally to all young left-wing poets in the thirties, but they do indicate both the mood and concerns of many of these writers. The response to Spain, modified by the consideration outlined above, demonstrates the efforts of these poets to solve the problems posed by the conflicting demands of their age. If it was to be possible to evolve a living socialist literature, could there be a place in such a literature for a poet of bourgeois origins? If the poet was to be a man of action, could his aesthetic ambitions be realised? It was speculation of this nature which the poets hoped to answer with their poems for Spain.

THE SCOPE OF THIS WORK

In choosing to examine the poetry generated by the war
as representative of a tradition, I have not excluded analysis of how the individual poets responded to Spain, or of what they believed about the war, but rendered such considerations secondary to critical rather than historical criteria. Ultimately I seek to ascertain how successfully poets were able to write about Spain, and what factors were significant in their success or failure. Such an evaluation of the social poets' work will imply a resolution (albeit tentative) of a wider critical issue -- whether art is a social product or should so be -- and to this extent will suggest a judgement of the "social realist" movement in poetry during the thirties.

This study seeks to avoid a pitfall which can be found in many writings about the civil war and its poetry: namely the encroachment of a politico-historical criterion upon the literary object of criticism. While political and historical considerations are inseparable from any examination of the effects of the civil war in Spain, some critics have allowed them to assume precedence over concern with the poetry itself. Any study of the period completely excluding such considerations would be defective, but hopefully it will be possible to demonstrate how a response to these externalities was evolved by writers, and to examine the adequacy of that response within the scope of a primarily literary study.

In my first chapter I seek to define and demonstrate the nature of the thirties tradition of which I have spoken. I shall show how a group of artists apprehended the social and cultural condition of England, what they diagnosed as ailing the nation, their proposed remedies and how they sought to put those remedies into effect. After examining the new role with which poetry was endowed and suggesting what conditions demanded this new role, I hope to delineate the nature of
Auden's influence upon the decade and to present some of the
difficulties with which the tradition was faced. It should become apparent in the course of this chapter just how
accurately the civil war manifested the issues of the decade,
and why Spain acquired such tremendous symbolic significance for young artists in England.

A theoretical as well as a practical literary response was evoked by the social diagnosis of the early part of the
decade. This theoretical response sought an aesthetic formulation which would render coherent the new role of
literature, and clarify the means by which such a role could best be fulfilled. My second chapter will be concerned with
the aesthetic structures put forward by artists, particularly the aesthetics of Christopher Caudwell, with the intention of
establishing a critical demarcation by which to evaluate the work of the period. It is particularly important, I feel,
to develop a demarcation drawn from the same response and age as that which produced the poetry here studied. Too often this
poetry has been critically condemned for failure to meet
criteria foreign to the spirit of its genesis and I believe it worthwhile to examine how the poetic expression of the
decade withstands scrutiny on the basis of aesthetic theories formulated by those same poets and their contemporaries.

The central area of this thesis will be the third chapter which deals with the poetry itself. My aim is to investigate
the implementation by the poets of their aesthetic theories, and the integration of Spanish subject-matter with the concerns
of the thirties tradition. It will be necessary to consider through textual analysis of the works, the variety of forms
which response to the war took, the treatment and transformation
of common animating images and ideas, and the methods by which the characteristic difficulties of writing social poetry in the decade were met in the particular instance of the war. Also I shall be concerned to suggest how the work of individual poets was affected by their Spanish sojourn, and how this work relates to the body of work within their own canon and in the wider tradition while not losing sight of a basic criterion of artistic success — the efficacy of the poem itself. With this latter consideration in mind I have not completely limited myself to the works of the "orthodox left" but have also inquired into differing responses to the civil war in Spain.

Finally, in the conclusion to this thesis I shall meet my critical responsibilities and evaluate the success of the poetry in contriving to do as the age demanded. This will involve retracing the more important analytic approaches employed, and evaluating the efforts of poets to transcend their enfeeblement. Just how successfully art can fulfil responsibilities which lie beyond its immediate realm must remain a moot point, but I hope to suggest the possibility of reconciling a pure aesthetic criterion of poetic worth with a view which holds art to the socially responsible.
1. Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London, Pelican, 1965) should be consulted for this and all other historical data.

2. Because many of the responses by British writers to the war were based upon factual inaccuracies, the simplistic interpretation of the war by English observers constitutes a further problem. Few English news sources clearly perceived the initial revolutionary nature of the popular reaction against the right wing rebels, or would have honestly reported it if they had accurately perceived it. Although a minority of observers may have appreciated this revolutionary quality, definition of the conflict in its early stages was beyond most observers although many were unfortunately eager to interpret the war to suit their own purposes.


5. While the work of Surrealist writers may not have confirmed a "social realist" view of the conflict, it should not be assumed that the surrealists were unconscious of the struggle or of its social and political importance. It is significant that *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, a predominantly surrealist magazine published a large advertisement for "Arms for Spain" (see appendix below) and the editor of that journal (Roger Roughton) later ceased publishing to go to Spain as a volunteer.

6. Hugh Thomas is the definitive source for the history of the war and its background, but those daunted by his massive work will welcome Katherine Hoskins's brave attempt to state briefly the issues in her appendix to *Today the Struggle* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1969). For the English social background see Julian Symons's *The Thirties: a Dream Revolved* (London, Cresset Press, 1960) which provides a superb introduction to the moods of the thirties, while Robert Graves and Alan Hodge take a wider view in *The Long Weekend* (London, Faber and Faber, 1940).

7. Examination of a few figures will restore an accurate perspective. While by 1939 the Left Book Club had a membership of 60,000, the British Communist Party had managed to attract only 11,000 members by 1937, one year into the Spanish conflict. By contrast Mosely's British Union of Fascists numbered 20,000 by 1934, only two years after its foundation, although it seems likely that the majority of British intellectuals sided with the left.
8. Auden's Poems (1930) sold approximately 1,000 at its first printing, while two years later New Signatures managed only 300 sales.

9. This initial impression was invariably dispelled by visiting Spain. Even amongst those visitors who were not volunteers (such as the irrepressible Claud Cockburn — alias Frank Pitcairn — a reporter for the Daily Worker who never hesitated to modify his interpretation of the war to suit party needs) experience of the fundamental revolutionary nature of the Republican resistance to the rebel generals showed how far removed from a simple clash the conflict really was. Additionally the strong anti-clerical sentiment among the poor and the attitude toward large landowners suggested the importance of previous Spanish turmoil to the 1936 war. Hugh Thomas, pp.158-161 gives an impressively lucid concise summary of this intricate web of unrest.


11. An interesting analogy could be drawn between Yeats and many of these thirties poets. Not only was the desire for action felt by both, but also their initial response to this desire contrasted significantly with the longer term, retrospective view which both evolved — a view regarding the artist as acting most effectively through his art.

12. Hugh Ford in A Poets War is inclined to allow the political categorisation with which he organised his material to become a critical method, and despite an extensive coverage of the poetry of the war deals more with the poets' views than with poetic merit. Katherine Hoskins in Today the Struggle (dealing with prose as well as poetry) is more clearsighted, demonstrating a subtle grasp of the complexities of the period.
CHAPTER I

THE SHADOW OF HISTORY:

NOTES TOWARD THE DEFINITION OF THE THIRTIES TRADITION

THE NATURE OF THE NEW

If Spain had crystallized only the social and political issues of the thirties, then the decade's artists would have still invested the conflict with great symbolic importance. But for many poets in the thirties Spain was also to become a focus for the artistic issues which had dominated the decade. One poet-critic who accurately identified these artistic issues which were to preoccupy the poets of the thirties was Michael Roberts. In the prefaces to his two important anthologies, New Signatures (1932) and New Country (1933), Roberts defined the issues of immediate concern to his contemporaries and suggested artistic responses to these issues. As well as clarifying the artistic preoccupations of his fellow writers, Roberts furthered a wider acceptance of the importance of these issues among the readers of his anthologies, effectively popularising a socially committed response to the problems of his time. Though the two prefaces argue from shared premises toward a common conclusion, they are dissimilar in one important respect. Only in New Country does Roberts argue for a personal commitment to action - a commitment which in the thirties tradition was regarded as vital to salvation from isolation and from enfeeblement, and which was to be prescribed and exhorted by poetry. While New Signatures is prefaced by an argument for a diagnostic poetic theory, in New Country Roberts unashamedly argues for a practical social and political involvement on the part of responsible artists.
Between them these two prefaces herald a great many of the issues and problems which were perceived to be significant at the time and it is this function of the prefaces which requires consideration.

Good poetry, argues Michael Roberts in *New Signatures*, is not necessarily something which is timeless; in fact the worth of a poem relates to its bearing upon the reality of a particular era. It is only the poetry written by those with whom we share a contemporaneity of experience which can be accepted "as a resolution of our own problems." This, he argues, is because the contemporary situation is without precedent. Men in England have been outstripped by the development of their environment; their perceptions of moral truth have been overshadowed by perceptions of scientific truth. The analytic poets (and Roberts is directing his criticism at Eliot particularly) have abdicated their positions as leaders and sympathetic reporters; the antennae of the race no longer function. This abdication is due to their isolation from the communal realities of life, the sources of animation. The isolated poets, in an effort to retain human contact, have developed poetry for a coterie audience, retreating into a private world inaccessible to common man. Clearly his criticisms suggest a basic reaction against the tenets of Modernism. Consequent upon this lamentable state of affairs Roberts asserts a need for the re-establishment of the poet as a leader who will not simply present common experience in recognisable and communicable forms, but will find imaginative solutions to the problems of the real world. Now the artist has both a diagnostic and a prognostic, curative role. Secondly, to avoid alienating the common reader the allusive complexities of Modernist work must be discarded in favour of
simpler, more accessible techniques. The poems in _New Signatures_ are claimed to be "a reaction against esoteric poetry in which it is necessary for the reader to catch each recondite allusion".²

Roberts takes care to emphasise the relationship between a poet's personal life and his work as an artist. If these two facets of a man are not unified — the poet's work remaining isolated from his worldly life — then the resultant poetry will be a mere lifeless abstraction. Implicit (though unacknowledged) in Roberts's argument is Marx's theory of alienation — the result for the poet of alienation from the product of his labour will inevitably be estrangement from himself.³ With this consideration in mind Roberts distinguishes between the use of "civilisation" material (the world of the social realist: the industrial landscape, city life, schoolrooms and power pylons) to produce "an image or sequence of images of something which is in itself beautiful and that [poetry] in which imagery taken from contemporary life consistently appeared as the natural and spontaneous expression of the poet's thought and feeling".⁴ Here he seeks to suggest that the latter usage is both more sincere and more responsible than the former, for the former evokes only an abstracted beauty without entailing an involvement between the artist's work and his personal life. But poetry must not merely reflect the reality of the poet's life and world — poetry has a social function which is integrally related to artistic ends. "Poetry is turned to propaganda... for a theory of life which may release the poet's energies for the writing of pure poetry, as well as provide him with standards which may make simple and direct satire possible
This notion of a theory of life for which the poet should be an apologist in order to bring about ideal conditions for art is recurrent in the period. The theory of life was social communism which it was believed would solve the problems of isolation and enfeeblement bedevilling poets. Ultimately this life would be fought for in Spain and poets would choose how best to contribute - by action or art.

Turning from New Signatures to the preface to New Country reveals a remarkable change in Roberts's tone. From formulating an artistic stance he has moved to advocating communism as the only responsible course of action for both man and poet. This clear delineation between an artistic stance and a course of political action will create a division of allegiance among many of the thirties poets, and signs of this potential dichotomy are apparent in this 1933 preface. Conflict between the needs of an artist and his duties as a man will exacerbate the problems of the divided man and during the ensuing years, poets will search for an artistic resolution to these conflicts. But it is not simply a change of emphasis which Roberts is advocating. In strident tones the previously responsible critic of New Signatures is now advocating revolutionary change; "there is only one way of life for us: to renounce that system [the established order] now and live by fighting against it."\(^6\) Ironically it is for patriotic reasons - the love of England and all good things English - that he so urgently exhorts his readers. Roberts's confidence in his new belief can be partially attributed to his adoption of a non-individualist point of view. The solitary advocate of New Signatures speaks now for "us" and "we", his words carrying the assurance of collective belief and communal action.
Furthermore this confidence is expressed in rhetoric which is prototypal of the period, revealing the debt which even by 1933 writers owed to Auden for their animating images: "you see clearly enough the symptoms of her illness. Cannot you see that they are all symptoms of the one disease? And can't you see that the only way to save England is to save the world?" Poor mother England, grievously ailing, will require surgery, the clean amputation of infected areas, the necessary murder to be enacted on England's behalf upon the Iberian peninsula.

The most pertinent and unintentionally revealing section of Roberts's preface is found when in summing up he attempts an analogy to explain his vision of social communism:

And by social communism... I mean that extension of personality and consciousness which comes sometimes to a group of men when they are working together for some common purpose. I think some men had just such an experience in the war and to them it seemed almost to justify the filth and inhumanity of war... for myself I can point to only one definite example; a fortnight of wind and heavy snowstorm in the Jura when a dozen of us, schoolboys and undergraduates came to accept each other's faults and virtues as part of the scheme of things, natural as the weather.

This analogy reveals several highly informative characteristics of the period. Like Auden and many of his fellows, Roberts longs for the lost spirit of adolescent camaraderie exemplified by the school-party of boys (just as Mortmere also exemplified this spirit). Also shared with many of his contemporaries (especially those of bourgeois origins) is the perception of unifying links between war or revolution, and the schoolboy world; the loss of personal identity and thus of personal anxieties in the communal experience, and the invigorating quality of such communal action for the lonely man finding vindication and purification within the group.

It was this type of attitude toward war and death which...
produced the "surgical" poetic approach to the Spanish war. As long as suffering could be seen as a means to an end, the common good, then detachment from the horror of actuality was preserved. In his quest for community with his fellows the bourgeois poet often was prepared to subordinate his personal scruples to the needs of the movement, ironically hoping to facilitate his redemption by sacrificing his personal and artistic integrity. For many artists such ambiguous motivation for both the surgical poetic stance and the public role which they enacted would ultimately prove inadequate. Among those for whom personal needs motivated public action, as suggested in the introduction to this study, the strain often became too great to bear and when the committed stance was finally relinquished they reacted by withdrawing almost completely from the world of political and social action. However during the thirties it seemed easy to simplify complex motives and ignore nagging doubts, particularly when individuals found themselves carried along by the movement of socially committed writers. It was the very hope which this movement seemed to hold for the future which was so attractive, and so readily dispelled the doubt of artists. Marking this development of a new critical approach the two anthologies suggested the hopeful nature of the movement by Roberts's choice of titles: firstly the new spokesmen and leaders, New Signatures, then the vision of a transformed society, a New Country.

DIAGNOSIS AND AWARENESS

The sense of imminent change which radicalised the poets of the thirties leading them to redefine their poetic role, and the hope which they placed in both the new society and their
new art can be attributed to two extra-literary causes. Firstly, their diagnosis of the social ills of England - the social causes of their new poetic role - suggested the need for a restructuring of English society, preferably upon Marxist or at least socialist lines, and offered the hope of a new, more vital form of art than seemed possible in their existing society. Secondly, the English were to become far more aware of their European neighbours and of the importance of Europe to England.

In New Country Michael Roberts unhesitatingly prescribed a poetic response to the demands of his age, but it was Cecil Day Lewis, also writing in New Country, who gave the earliest explicit account of the diagnosis of English ills which had prompted Roberts's response. In his "Letter to a Young Revolutionary" Day Lewis extensively delineated his apprehension of England as dead at heart, unanimated and doomed:

Come out for a walk in England's green and pleasant land. We are starting early because it will take us a long time to get clear of the town. In those fine houses the ladies are sleeping, the flowers of our civilisation. Shall we enquire after their dreams? They are dreaming that they are alive and they will wake to find themselves dead;... something has gone wrong. Now they grit their teeth and clutch the terminals; yet are not galvanised to life... Awake my heart to be loved; but it won't wake; it's broken down.

These images of deathly inertia and illness (images introduced by Auden) are central to the bourgeois poet's apprehension of atrophy besetting his class. Britain's best have fallen into a trance, lost contact with the reality of life about them, and are consequently damned. The heart cannot awake to be loved for it is gripped by an inner death, the death of response to experience. Misunderstanding love as solely a personal, selfish experience, the bourgeoisie and aristocrats are unresponsive to the love which could save them and England.
This is brotherly love, undifferentiated and unselfish, a distillation of English virtues contained in a Marxist reformulation. However, Day Lewis does not limit his diagnosis to personal ills. Social forces are responsible for the degradation of man from his noble state of nature to crass pettiness and self interest. Because man has been blinded to the true nature of his external world he is incapable of reacting against it:

The shops are opening crowded with... substitutes for life. We don't really want them, but we can't stop buying them; and anyway it's patriotic to spend money just now. But not to spend money on bricks that the people who are waking seven in a room in the next street may build themselves a better house. No squandering of public money; if individuals like to squander theirs that's a very different matter - boys will be boys.¹⁰

Unfortunately change is not achieved simply by confronting the duped, anaesthetised people with the reality of their fate:

Shall we stop the train? Shall we get in and tell them to drop those grave-sheets?... They wouldn't thank us for our solicitude; what's worse they wouldn't get up and give us a crack on the jaw either. They would just look embarrassed and retire still further into those entrenchments of pulp. Soon they will be settling down to work,... efficient not through the individual will to create, or the communal will to co-operate, but through fear - the fear of losing their jobs.¹¹

The greatest difficulty for the young revolutionary is posed not by the lifeless existence which the people lead, nor by the system within which they function, but worst of all, by their fondness for this inner death: "Before long the whole crew will be scurrying back to their burrows. They will sit in front of football matches, films, radios, novels, inflamed hearts watching action they cannot emulate,... envying a life they haven't the guts to create."¹² Yet the root of this disease lies not in the city (which lacks animation in the precisely Eliotean sense) but in the severance of the city and its dwellers from the source of revitalisation, the country.
Not only is the city dweller severed from the source of life, but also the countryside itself has fallen into neglect:

The country at last. And a poor enough outlook it is. Stunted crops, derelict barns, mills deserted to rats, good land given over to sheep and golfers. Somebody has run away... the children,... their birthright of natural wisdom exchanged for a mess of knowledge. And the parents? The backbone of the country? The marrow seems to have been drained off. Can these dry bones live?... They damn well can't and you know it. And it is up to you... You must break up the superficial vision of the motorist and restore the slow, instinctive, absorbent vision of the countryman.

This then was Day Lewis's diagnosis in which can be discerned the basis for the cure which the social poets were to attempt through both their poetry and their practical efforts. By revitalising their art they hoped to assist the revitalisation of their society, purging old weaknesses and prescribing new, healthier ways of life. Conversely, as they and their society regained health it would become possible once again to produce poetry which involved the felt experience of men and which reached a wide, appreciative audience. Although the demands of their age seemed unique to the thirties poets, their hopes for poetry were not entirely original. Nineteenth century Romantic writers had nurtured similar hopes for their art, and more recently the aspirations of the fledgling Modernist writers early in this century - writers whom the thirties poets saw themselves in reaction against - had been for a revitalisation of language and art in order to liberate letters from Edwardian stagnation and re-establish the artist as the antennae of the race. In all these cases writers were reacting against a fascination with alternatives to reality - a fascination induced by disillusion with that reality - and in so reacting showed an awareness of the stasis gripping art which isolated itself from the "reality" of its time.
significant difference between these reactions was of course the differing perceptions of "reality" which writers emphasised. Interestingly there is another sense in which the hopes prompted by social diagnosis may have misled the thirties poets. The expectation of a new society ushered in by apocalyptic upheaval was far from common. Rather than being in touch with the common experiences and thoughts of Englishmen the poets were nurturing an attractive dream, attractive because it distracted attention from the dismal nature of common reality - the projected fantasy (for fantasy it proved to be) obliterating the squalor of reality. Nevertheless, while with the benefit of hindsight these hopes of the thirties poets may be seen to have been illusory, at the time they were vitally real to the poets and significantly influenced their poetic output before and during the civil war in Spain.

The growing awareness in England of European unrest intensified the concern felt by the English for the future of their society. It was because the crisis in England was part of the concomitant wider European crisis (and the need for drastic change was regarded as possibly even more imperative in other areas of Europe) that the liberal attitude toward change in England had by the middle of the decade given way to an expectation of more sudden upheaval and the belief in the need for some form of struggle had become widespread. The wider consciousness of Europe found expression in thirties poetry, particularly with the advent of the Spanish war:

In Spain is Europe, England also is in Spain... It is us too they defended who defended Madrid. 14

Warner's lines represent a break from the isolation and
pessimism of the twenties when writers had been content to illuminate the horrors of their society while expressing little hope for improvement. In the thirties however, there was a realisation brought on by the international effects of the depression and totalitarian movements, that the English Channel no longer afforded the protection which it had afforded in the past. As the European reality threatened to impinge upon them writers found hope for the future, hope founded upon a belief in imminent radical change. With the rise to power of Hitler in Germany in 1933 the spectre of Fascism invaded the imaginations of thinking Englishmen. War became a talking point among all classes of people. Young people in the thirties were very much a war generation having experienced the first world war in early childhood. Out of this war consciousness evolved two opposed movements. Among those Englishmen who predicted another great conflict, many advocated rearmament to facilitate a strong stand against Fascism. Often it was those anticipating a new conflict who most readily joined the left wing movement of the thirties, desiring to take a stand in the most effective and public manner possible. The other movement arising from this war consciousness was Pacifism, its advocates regarding any move toward rearmament as an invitation to disaster. Not surprisingly in an age of hunger marches and sizeable political rallies these two movements rapidly attracted a mass following and during the early years of the decade effectively polarised public opinion about war. However, while a sizeable body of left-wingers advocated Pacifism (in 1937 the Oxford Union resolved not to fight for King and Country), as the decade progressed many of the pacifists were to join the ranks of the militant left wing movement in Britain, particularly with
the advent of the Spanish conflict when previously uninvolved Englishmen found themselves taking sides in the anti-fascist struggle. The development of the English left wing movement was of particular significance to the war consciousness in England during the thirties, and consequently to the response to Spain. The alignment of intellectuals with the left and even the joining of the communist party was, as Keynes suggested, in keeping with the liberal tradition in English politics, a tradition kept alive not by the fence-sitting humanists but by men of action. It is important to realise that this tradition lent itself readily to left wing adaptation: far more readily than the conservative tradition could assimilate Sir Oswald Mosely's Fascism. Eliot commented upon this when explaining that his discussion of communism in Criterion had been due to the English variety of Fascism being of insufficient intellectual interest. Perhaps, he suggested, this was due to "its inability to graft itself upon the root of British Toryism as communism so easily grows from the 'Liberal root'." With the wooing of liberals and pacifists during the middle years of the decade, the left wing movement changed its composition and orientation. Before 1935 the movement was smaller, more orthodox, largely confined to committed communists and their apologists and united by a vision of change heralding a new era, the life of social communism in which man could achieve community with his fellows and harmony with his environment. The struggle envisaged was to be a struggle for a better life and a purgation of old errors. This pre-1936 British left wing conception of struggle was akin to that of the revolutionary Loyalists in the early days of the civil war in Spain. The Anarcho-Syndicalist C.N.T. and F.A.I.,
the Trotskyist P.O.U.M. and in some areas of the Catalan provinces even the communist P.S.U.C. were initially fighting not for simple victory against the nationalists, but for a fully fledged social revolution. After 1935 the British left wing movement became far more of a popular movement embracing many non-communist liberals and united by anti-fascism. No longer was the expected struggle to be for revolutionary change - it would now be a struggle simply to combat Fascism. From hoping to fight for a greater good the left had moved to accepting the need to fight first against a greater evil. This reduction in the scope of their aims and aspirations is closely analogous to the Spanish left's development, in which revolutionary zeal gave way to pragmatic policy as the war progressed and the communists gained control of the Loyalist fighting forces.\textsuperscript{17} Because the left changed character so significantly during the decade, the English response to the Spanish war was necessarily complex and varied. Dedicated Party members remained unshaken in their faith in "the cause" despite outrages over Stalin's purges in Russia and examples of Party duplicity in Spain. Conversely, many who had joined the movement during the decade (including liberals and expatriats) were soon to be disillusioned by the backstabbing on the left during the Spanish conflict. Ultimately the hopeful confidence exhibited by Michael Roberts in the early thirties was to find various and often contradictory expression in the poems for Spain.
THE IMPORTANCE OF AUDEN

The perception of an imminent upheaval was both articulated and enhanced by a radicalisation of the arts during the thirties. We have seen how Michael Roberts delineated a role for poetry which furthered the interests of a new life, a life in which poetry free from the contradictions bedevilling the works of bourgeois poets could be written. As Day Lewis put it, "many artists today... are beginning to realise that the full exercise of their powers is only possible under a classless society". But the new radical role of poetry entailed multiple literary responsibilities. The poet needed to satisfy the requirements of the revolutionary cause without compromising his art, while striking a balance between the roles of artist, revolutionary preacher and man of action. In order even to attempt the balancing act it was necessary for the thirties poets to evolve new techniques suited to the ambiguous task ahead of them. Forms accessible to the common reader were required, and the content of poems was to relate to everyday life, the felt experience of artists. These commonly shared beliefs about sincerity and content were suggested by Day Lewis when in A Hope for Poetry he said: "Ideas are not material for the poetic mind until they have become commonplace for practical minds... If a poet is going to be receptive of political ideas, it is essential for him as a man to feel strongly about them." 19

Such hopes for poetry involving the poets in dilemmas of allegiance were to be made more readily realisable by the example of Auden. What I wish to suggest is not that Auden simply expressed the thirties tradition especially well, but that he was one of the moulding influences upon it. It is
not his importance as a spokesman nor the brilliance of his poetry upon which I wish to dwell at this stage, but his function in providing the technical precepts and symbollic frameworks with which he and his contemporaries could come to terms with the demands of their age. Among many of his fellow poets Auden was hailed as the Messianic leader who would prescribe new positions for the lost generation. Charles Madge's adulation exemplifies an extreme of this view:

"But there waited for me in the summer morning
Auden, fiercely. I read, shuddered and knew
And all the world's stationary things
In silence moved to take up new positions."

Yet even if it were possible to exclude from consideration the personality cult which grew up about him, Auden would still be regarded as the most influential poet of his decade. His contribution in his early volumes of poetry was to provide a system of coherent imagery and symbols suited to and expressive of the concerns of his fellow poets, and to unite within a common body of poetry the apparently incompatible theories of psychology and politics, while showing how the ambiguous position of a revolutionary bourgeois poet could be made more viable.

Poems (1928) had an initial circulation of fewer than the planned forty five copies and obviously could not have been immediately or widely influential. However Poems (1930) sold almost one thousand copies of its first edition and it was at this stage that Auden began to animate the imaginations of his fellows. Poem XVI in this volume is a tour de force of stylistic virtuosity as Auden ranges from his Nordic crypticism to his most urbane conversational tone. Part four of this poem
will demonstrate many of his influential traits:

It is time for the destruction of error.
The chairs are being brought in from the garden,
The summer talk stopped on that savage coast
Before the storms, after the guests and birds:
In sanatoriums they laugh less and less,
Less certain of cure; and the loud madman
Sinks now into a more terrible calm.

The falling leaves know it, the children
At play on the fuming alkali-tip
Or by the flooded football ground, know it -
This is the dragons day, the devourer's:
Orders are given to the enemy for a time
With underground proliferation of mould,
With constant whisper and the casual question,
To haunt the poisoned in his shunned house,
To destroy the efflorescence of the flesh,
The intricate play of the mind, to enforce
Conformity with the organised bone,
With organised fear, the articulated skeleton.

You whom I gladly walk with, touch,
Or wait for as one certain of good,
We know it, we know that love
Needs more than the admiring excitement of union,
More than the abrupt self-confident farewell,
The heel on the finishing blade of grass,
The self-confidence of the falling root,
Needs death, death of the grain, our death,
Death of the old gang; would leave them
In sullen valley where is made no friend,
The old gang to be forgotten in the spring,
The hard bitch and the riding master
Stiff underground; deep in clear lake
The lolling bridegroom, beautiful there.21

In the first three parts of the poem Auden has been explicating his personal condition and cryptically relating it to the nature of his environment, building up toward the point where action must be embarked upon. This final section of the poem delineates the nature of such action for which "it is time". Auden is typically ambiguous because the situation which he is depicting is itself ambiguous. Bringing in the chairs suggests the retreat of the leisured classes from the activity of confrontation with reality, yet also suggests the actions of the bourgeois revolutionaries in readying themselves for conflict. Summer talk is stopped as action replaces words, the storms of change threatening the complacent who nurture memories of summer idylls. The terrible calm of madness connotes the incurability of the inhabitants of England's houses of nobility, the institutions of the old gang which are threatened by uncertainty. Auden achieves his compulsive, prophetic effects by suggesting the inevitability of the prophesised upheaval: the children know it, children who bear the seeds of the future - a future contrasting with the industrialised and neglected present of fuming pits and flooded grounds. The enemy (at this stage chiefly an internal enemy) will haunt the poisoned, doomed bourgeois, suggesting the relation of personal psychomania to public social decay. Similarly this relation is apparent in the defects of love which entail the defects of society. A fuller, more unselfish love is required, a love of the common good which will allow the necessary surgical pruning
of diseased portions of society; the death of the old gang.
It is the complex personality of the bourgeois protagonist
which is most interesting. Even the revolutionary ex-
bourgeois fighting the leaders of his class still contains
elements of the enemy within himself, as the enemy is not simply
an external force but chiefly a psychomania. The inner psycho-
logical state is emblematic of external social and personal
flaws. With the logic of Catch 22 Homer Lane’s psychosomatic
theories are articulated in the diseased bourgeois. The
bourgeois is trapped in an inextricable teleological pattern of
disease and inflexibility. As he is psychologically flawed,
so this manifests itself in physical illness which he cannot
cure for he is unfit, (unfit for the new life, or any life at
all), and so he is marked (for obsolescence and extermination).
Such a diagnosis is prototypal of the traditional thirties view
of the bourgeoisie. What is needed is love, which is contingen-
t upon the passing away of the old, the impediments to
natural, animated self-fulfillment. It is notable that where
Roberts eulogised the community, Auden envisages an individual
experience (as the earlier, unquoted sections of the poem
reveals) unconsciously revealing the tension between his diagno-
sis and his residual desire for bourgeois individualism.

A key method illustrated by the quoted extract is Auden’s
transformation of one phenomenon to express it in terms of
another. The obvious example of this is his use of internal
and external states as expressive of one another. These trans-
formations culminated in a superb crystallisation in historical
terms of personal and political interests in Spain. It was
thus that he was able to forge an amalgam of politics and
psychology, specifically Marx and Freud. The diagnostic
significance of fantasy legitimised the use of the unreal by endowing it with political importance. Other traits are important also. His characteristic detachment, an almost clinical objectivity, combined with technical virtuosity allowed him to get away with his obscurity which, even with the hindsight afforded by Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows*, remains close to the dream or riddle.

Possibly most important for this study are the images employed to articulate his symbolic structures. The 1928 volume of poetry abounded in complementary images of warfare and school, the Nordic Saga hero fading to O.T.C. adolescent as he grappled with authority. In the 1930 *Poems* three main symbols emerged, all of which figure predominantly in the poetry of the Spanish conflict, albeit sometimes in a disguised form: the frontier - a class barrier, the discrepancy between old and new allegiances, or even an international border between the revolutionised and the decadent: the lone man - spy, saga, hero, secret agent, exile, or even the compromised lonely bourgeois schoolteacher with revolutionary sympathies: and the war - class war, subversive guerilla war, or the international anti-capitalist war.

It was because, as Monroe Spears suggests, "the political revolution was at this time fused for most intellectuals with a vaguely Lawrentian moral revolution" 23 that the figures of the diseased bourgeoisie, the biological misfits from whose ranks Auden knew he himself had sprung (and to a great extent still belonged) persistently loomed over the enactment of revolutionary ideals:

_Summon_

Those handsome and diseased youngsters...

Then ready start your rumour, soft
But horrifying in its capacity to disgust
Which, spreading magnified, shall come to be
A polar peril, a prodigious alarm,
Scattering the people, as torn-up paper
Rags and utensils in a sudden gust,
Seized with immeasurable neurotic dread.24

It was the disturbing realisation that he still bore the marks of his origins which lent an added urgency to the plea for action. Ashamed of the neglect into which England had been allowed to fall, the poet felt more keenly a sense of urgency and the need to vindicate himself:

Get there if you can and see the land you were once proud to own...

Have things gone too far already? Are we done for?

Must we wait

Hearing doom's approaching footsteps regular down miles of straight; ...

Drop those priggish ways forever, stop behaving like a stone:

Throw the bath-chairs right away, and learn to leave ourselves alone.

If we really want to live, we'd better start at once to try;

If we don't, it doesn't matter, but we'd better start to die.25

It is this almost obsessive urgency which manifested itself in the need for action felt by British poets during the Spanish civil war, and reflected in their personalisation of the conflict and equation of it with a fight for all worth preserving in England itself.
In addition to initiating the devices of style and habits of feeling which are those of the thirties tradition, Auden was regarded as personifying the ideals which intellectuals treasured, a personification all the more important because he was the leading poet of the time and the poet's role had become public property. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the devotion by Grigson's New Verse of a double number, November 1937, to Auden: leader, poet and grand example. That it should have been New Verse enhances the significance of such a tribute, for Grigson was unsparing in his inquisitorial criticisms of any and all writers, including those he most admired. Of all the tributes contained in this issue I quote only that by Dylan Thomas, who neatly summarises many of the points I have made and who highlights just how public the role of the poet was seen to be. This is especially significant as Thomas most definitely did not subscribe to the tenets of thirties left wing poetry in his writing:

I sometimes think of Mr. Auden's poetry as a hygiene, a knowledge and practice, based on a brilliantly prejudiced analysis of contemporary disorders, relating to the preservation and promotion of health, a sanitary science and a flusher of melancholies. I sometimes think of his poetry as a great war, admire intensely the mature, religious, and logical fighter, and deplore the boy bushranger.

I think he is a wide and deep poet, and that his first narrow angles, of pedantry and careful obscurity, are worn almost away. I think he is as technically sufficient and as potentially productive of greatness, as any poet writing in English. He makes Mr. Yeats's isolation as guilty as a trance. P.S. - Congratulations on Auden's seventieth birthday.

PROBLEMS IN THE TRADITION

In his rather optimistic introduction to The Faber Book of Modern Verse (1936) Michael Roberts asserted that, "It is not possible to compile an anthology of serious poetry without
reflecting the social and moral problems of our time; but writing may be poetic without being either moral or didactic. Indeed so it may, but whether it would satisfy its committed authors is highly questionable. In short the chief difficulty for the thirties writer was to produce work which would satisfy both his political and artistic aspirations. The attempts of poets to come to grips with this on a theoretical level will be discussed in Chapter Two of this study: all I wish to do at this stage is to suggest some of the complications which made this dilemma so problematic.

Hugh Ford has argued that by choosing sides a poet automatically compromises his poetry. I would reject this. While it is true that many poets did impair their work by allowing propagandist elements to intrude, I would argue that the thirties dream of poetry which united social and aesthetic concerns was realisable, as is demonstrated by the work of Auden and Macneice. "A Communist to Others", one of Auden's most overtly propagandist poems, while not in the class of his finest works is not damaged by its social concern, but rather is delimited in scope by Auden's choice of idiom. Macneice's Autumn Journal, a splendidly sane and honest longer poem lucidly demonstrates not simply the possibility of uniting social and poetic aims in a work, but the inseparability of the two for the sensitive poetic observer in the thirties. Even the ardent communist John Cornford was able to write fine committed poetry. His "Full Moon at Tierz" (which I examine closely in the third chapter of this study) is, if we ignore the closing lines of didacticism, a successful transformation of his subject-matter in terms of an historical dialectic, a transformation contributing to the aesthetic success of the poem.
Yet it cannot be denied that most of the decade's poets were divided men; divided between allegiance to aesthetic or revolutionary aims in their art, between loyalty to the class of their origins or to the class of the revolution, and even between the callings of practising poetry or wholehearted active devotion to the revolutionary cause. Even the poets for whom art came first found themselves being drawn from reporting and translating reality, to diagnosis and curative proposals. The demands of the Party upon those poets who made a public commitment to the revolution often proved excessive. Cecil Day Lewis was the most fully committed Marxist among the Oxford Poets, being a Party member from 1933 to 1938, but finally he broke with the Party, not because he disagreed with the aims of the Marxists but because his poetry was suffering from his devotion to a public role. As he said, "If my poetry had gained by the enlargement of my interest, it was now losing because of the many distractions this border life had brought with it. My poetic habit seemed hopelessly at odds with a genuine public spiritedness." The position of poets in the Party could not be entirely comfortable, especially for those of bourgeois origins: "It certainly must have encouraged my own chronic malady, the divided mind. I never ceased to be aware of the forces in myself which kept pulling me towards the past, the status quo, the traditions and assumptions in which I had been brought up." For the poets who had reservations about joining the Party, this division was even more problematic, although their retention of personal integrity and some form of detachment enabled them to avoid tremendous disappointment if and when the "God" failed them. Such was the position of Stephen Spender, perceptibly detached from the movement as early as the days of his *New Country* essay. While readily admitting his
ambivalence (although never dedicated to the Party, Spender was well aware of the conflicting demands it made. He was particularly sensitive to the reservations his fellows had about Party exigency, and felt the attraction of old values from the past, yet responded to the hopes of his time as shown by his preface to *Poems for Spain* for he himself called his contemporaries a "divided generation", he did not later rescind his position:

I think I was probably right to enter deliberately into a confused situation, and reject the great simplifications of a deeply felt but impersonal public point of view. The truth of my own existence was that, in spite of everything, I did not plunge myself wholly in public affairs. Therefore a poetry which rejected private experience would have been untrue to me. Moreover, I dimly saw that the conflict between personal life and public causes must be carried forward into public life itself: it was my duty to express the complexity of an ambivalent situation.

In fact Spender's commitment to the orthodox left was at best tenuous, his beliefs stemming from the liberal tradition despite his brief flirtation with the Party at the behest of Harry Pollit, Party secretary at the time.

It is necessary to question the generally accepted level of politicisation on the part of many of the thirties writers, particularly those from bourgeois origins who did not join the Party. Obviously there exists a rather thorny problem of motivation, as intimated in the Introduction to this study. Class guilt cannot be measured, unfortunately for the critic, but it is clear that recriminations were significant in prompting poets to assume a pose of commitment, even if only to provide a sense of ritual sanctification and purgation of past diseases. Hugh Ford seems particularly accurate when he suggests that as well as their verse containing reference to the coming social revolution, it "abounded with allusions to personal shame and rebellion which probably provided more, or at least as much imaginative stimulation as the rather vague sort of socialism
they had adopted". Not only did the vitality of the verse stem more from internal than external inspirations, but so, I would suggest, did much of the political posturing.

Unfortunately retrospective comments by the thirties writers on their political views are notoriously suspect for often they later submitted themselves to what Louis Macneice regretfully described as "so much self-flagellation [which is] going on on the literary left". Particularly during the Spanish war poets felt a clash of interests between their personal rather anarchistic attitude toward authority and organisation, and Party exigency. I would suggest that from this discrepancy between the felt and the professed, criteria of poetic merit can be distilled. Spender's emphasis upon felt experience and personal truth is the obvious clue, for often the finest poems of the conflict state the personal reaction rather than the doctrinaire line, or express the tension between the two. When dealing with the poems themselves I shall show this as leading toward two distinct views of war: the pity of war and suffering versus the surgical necessity of war. For these reasons assuming a uniformly high level of politicisation amongst the poets could obscure useful critical distinctions.

Robin Skelton asserts that the poets of the thirties were posturing in another way too. As well as acknowledging that "much of their political activity was born of private necessity rather than public conviction" he suggests that they were carried away by their belief in the prophetic effectiveness of the poet: "They talked in an almost empty theatre as if it were a packed Wembley Stadium. They argued, proved, disproved and judged as if the whole nation were listening. They had, in
fact, discovered a drama and invented an audience." While his assertion is fair when applied to the early years of the thirties and should serve as a qualification of the wave of enthusiasm which carried away many writers, it is not strictly true after the middle of the decade. By 1936, as I have already shown, the left wing anti-fascist movement was quite widely based. Also the literary establishment, notorious for its usual sectionalism had achieved temporary coherence. At no other time could Virginia Woolf have been writing for the Daily Worker. In England immediately prior to the outbreak of hostilities in Spain the time was right for an event which would further unify and animate the imaginations of both artists and audience. The seriousness with which poets regarded their role would be validated and it would be possible for men to prove themselves with the whole world watching.

This high seriousness and sense of urgency can be attributed to a perception derived from Marxist dialectics, more specifically from historical determinism. This was the view of History as a force in men's lives. Because the moment was perceived as crucial it was assumed that History was watching and judging the conduct of protagonists. Before the eyes of all mankind it was the duty of these protagonists to fight the good fight. But History was an ambiguous force. A great temptation was posed for History allowed man to legitimise or betray his right to existence simply by his actions, actions which would override personal vacillations, disguising the morass of self-doubt beneath the absolute act of commitment. Consequently bourgeois poets found the cause of the Party particularly attractive.
Existence could be simplified, purged of disquieting human characteristics and refined into a pure, objective, controllable entity. Additionally, History was on the side of good in the struggle, be it struggle against the old gang or Franco. To be on the side of the Gods, assured of your descendants' thanks and admiration was not unattractive. These considerations may illuminate the choice of historical constructs by many of the decade's poets, particularly in writing of the war, as the struggle assumed the dignity of a new crusade, and for the committed Marxist, victory became historically inevitable. It was such attitudes with which artists proceeded to set about the poetic, aesthetic and practical tasks which faced them in the second half of the thirties, when they lived under the shadow of History.
NOTES:


3. See Karl Marx, "Alienation" reprinted in The Modern Tradition edited by Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson: (New York, Oxford University Press, 1965) pp.741-744. Here Marx anticipates the problem of the divided man, providing useful insights into this malady which was to trouble many poets during the thirties.


17. At the time of initial revolutionary activity in Spain the alliance between Russia and France dictated that as the French did not desire a revolutionary neighbour in Spain, the Spanish communist party, directed by the Party in Russia, was called upon to perform an anti-revolutionary function. The consequent bourgeoisification of militias and agricultural resources is generally held to have enhanced the military efficiency of the Republic, although George Orwell argues convincingly for the opposite view in Homage to Catalonia (p.67.) Orwell also vividly recounts the communist suppression of the P.O.U.M. indicating with regard to the Barcelona fighting early in May, 1937 that the Party was not exactly scrupulous in its methods. (p.158)
22. Auden had assimilated Horner Lane's rather eccentric extensions of Freudian theory into a psychosomatic theory of illness, which suggested that emotional impairments, particularly perversions of love, were the cause of physical disabilities. Taken to its logical conclusion this extended theory legitimised the "surgical" elimination of the neurotic bourgeoisie.
26. The polemical tone of New Verse indicated the sense of vocation felt by Grigson who seems at times to have believed himself personally responsible for the health of English poetry. A notorious, though not untypical example of his zeal is the panning given to Day Lewis for joining the Book Society. (See Appendix to this thesis). It is a measure of the respect in which New Verse was held, that despite Grigson's juvenile outbursts, Day Lewis can be found contributing to the issue which followed his panning.
29. See Ford: A Poets War p.128 for explicit statement of this view. His analysis of poems written by those on the extreme left suggest an inability on his part to distinguish between "held opinion" and doctrinaire adherence to an uncompromising Party line. His assumption that the poet must completely distance himself from his art is misplaced in any dealings with thirties poets.
32. C.f. The God that Failed edited by Richard Crossman, (New York, Bantam Harper and Brothers, 1950). This is an illuminating collection of essays by figures from the
thirties on their experiences of communism.


34. Ford: A Poets' War, p. 85.

35. "Replies to 'The Leaning Tower'": New Writing (Autumn 1940) p. 41.


37. Poetry of the Thirties p. 36.
Among poets working within the thirties tradition of socially committed literature efforts devoted to poetic creation were often accompanied (and in some cases rivalled) by efforts to formulate a theoretical basis for their creative writing. Such a theoretical basis was wanted not merely to justify socially committed art, but also to provide critical standards. As Marxism was the social theory which seemed to offer the most pertinent analysis of the maladies of their time it was appropriate that young poets should employ Marxism in formulating literary theories for their age. Yet Marxism was not the only major analytic system familiar to these theorists. Freudian psychology was widely discussed and many literary theorists were fascinated by the possibilities which Freud offered for literary innovation and analysis. Initial examination seems to suggest that these two great analytic systems have little in common. Freudian psychology, based upon observations of bourgeois neuroses emphasising the inner state of the individual and formulated from an upper-class viewpoint, would appear to be incompatible with Marx's historical determinism and dialectical materialism which takes a wider, impersonal view of man as a social creature, a member of a class identified by his productive role. However, during the thirties poets were to be influenced by both of these theories and many hoped to synthesise these two analyses into a comprehensive basis for literature.1 (Auden was more
successful than most, his blend of fantasy and diagnosis
offering the advantages of both theories, as demonstrated in
the first chapter of this study). While such attempts to
achieve a synthetic theory proved interesting, often the most
useful critical distinctions arose out of conflict between
variously based theories. The principal (though not
exclusive) concern of this chapter will be with the range and
adequacy of theories formulated in economic and historical
terms, particularly the theories of Christopher Caudwell.

Much of the aesthetic theory formulated during the
thirties (aesthetic theory dealing with the broader critical
issues of describing, interpreting and evaluating poetry
rather than with a "pure" aesthetic analysis of the nature of
beauty) was not a prognostication of the poetry to be written
in a future, classless society but an explanation and defence
of the poetry written in the existing British society.
Responding initially to the felt need by poetic creation,
poets and poet-critics then consciously structured their
theory to fit both the needs of their time, and their mode of
poetic expression. Because this theorising was so self-
conscious and deliberate it is especially applicable to the
poetry of the time (although the critic ought to beware of
self-fulfilling prophecies).

While the Spanish conflict intensified many of the
artistic difficulties of the thirties, most notably the con-
flicting demands made upon the artist, there is also an
important sense in which the war in Spain crystallised the
aesthetic and critical issues of the thirties. Having found
themselves writing about a genuine revolutionary situation
poets were able to test far more fully the critical pronounce-
ments of the thirties. They explored the extent to which a conflict could be expressed in terms of the Marxist view of history, they tested the adequacy of the bourgeois poet as an agent of social change through his poetry, and they examined the relation of poetry to political and social beliefs and stances. If Marxist literature could be written which would satisfy the artistic and social aspirations of the poet, then it seemed that the civil war in Spain offered the ideal conditions for such an achievement.

That this achievement seemed not merely possible but likely during the Spanish war is suggested by the opening comments of Stephen Spender's introduction to *Poems for Spain*: "We do not claim that these are the best poems written in English during the last two and a half years; but we do claim that any anthology selected purely for merit would be bound to overlap with the poems printed here". Yet this overlap is far from being the only distinction of the poems for Spain. The traditional concerns of thirties writers are brought into sharp relief by the war situation as the new critical role of poetry seems to manifest itself:

"In a world where poetry seems to have been abandoned, become the exalted medium of a few specialists, or the superstition of backward peoples, this awakening of a sense of the richness of tomorrow with poetry is as remarkable as the struggle for liberty itself". Enthused by the poetic output of the war situation Spender progresses from delineating the inspiring effects of poetry to specifying the actual function of poetry in a time of conflict: "The ideas that inspire such poetry are fundamental, political and moral ideas of liberty, justice, freedom etc... [these] are only kept alive and
Thus the poet is a preserver of values, his canon of work a repository of ideas which only at times of revolution or national resurgence are incorporated into affirmative public policy: "This is the sense in which poetry is political; it is always concerned with the fundamental ideas, either because they are being realised in action, or satirically to show that they are totally removed from public policy". This political function for poetry is not hypothesised but assumed by Spender and Lehmann. Clearly the criterion suggested is not unique to the thirties poets, yet it does provide a useful critical demarcation for their work.

The diagnosis of a social and political malady (such as that undertaken by Cecil Day Lewis in *New Country* and quoted in Chapter One of this study) which underlies the critical assumptions quoted above, was accompanied by a diagnosis of the malady besetting poetry, this latter diagnosis directly influencing critical responses. In *A Hope for Poetry* (1934) Day Lewis gives his version of this latter diagnosis. Giving an historical account of the causal relations between social change and the neglect of poetry; an account indebted both to Marxist theories of class development and to Modernist analyses of the desolate modern city, Day Lewis argues that man's environment has outrun his psychological development and man's isolation from his fellows has led to the enfeeblement of the modern artist. Lacking a homogeneous community (from which, traditionally, the best art has always grown) artists have created private worlds (both the Eliotean and Audenesque being criticised here) which are
inaccessible to any popular audience. The argument is familiar and Day Lewis reveals his debt to Auden when he suggests a cure for the current malady: a new start from kinship and love. This cure was proposed in 1934, and we can discern a significant change in Day Lewis's views during the middle years of the decade. In 1933 he had written, "It is for you (the revolutionary) to prove the new life, for him (the poet) to record it. That is my case for the poet as a sensitised instrument, an impartial observer". By 1937 Day Lewis was far more radical. Arguing that the introspective poet would discover his own impotence he asserted that the poet must "set about removing the obstacles which prevent the full development of [his] work". In case any doubt is left as to what these obstacles are he tells his reader that change is necessary for the survival of culture and that as the working class has the most to gain from change, "the working class has now become the guardian of culture". Separated by four years of "development" on Day Lewis's part, these quotes show clearly the two positions which could be taken by thirties artists.

The most trite attempt at a theory of literature during the decade was Edward Upward's "Sketch for a Marxist Interpretation of Literature". Starting from the quite reasonable (albeit dangerously simple) proposition that literature reflects life, Upward arrives at conclusions which damn any contemporary work which fails to correctly interpret bourgeois disintegration as the rebirth of a new, classless society. Ulysses is roundly condemned for this very "failure", Joyce failing to see with the "true per-
spective". Sadly for Upward history has not vindicated his criterion of "true perspective" - in fact if accuracy of prediction is to be used as a criterion then Joyce succeeds where many thirties prophets failed. The point to be taken from Upward's failure is that any literary theory which relies upon the accuracy of a specific interpretation of "reality" is flawed. Useful and valid literary theories will be those which employ the method and structure of a socially prophetic analysis but remain independent of the outcome of events in the real world.

A far more balanced and reasonable discussion of the role and status of poetry was given by Stephen Spender. While not allowing his judgement to be impaired by enthusiasm for the new, evolving poetics of his time, he did conclude that good art was a criticism of society. "The whole point of artists adopting a revolutionary position is that their interests may become social and not antisocial, and that their criticism may help to shape a new society".\textsuperscript{11} Clearly poetry is a social force but in the society of the thirties it had to be recognised that the poetry then written was itself shaped by the society which produced it. "... the art which is being and which can be created today is not in any sense proletarian art".\textsuperscript{12} Not until long after the revolution would a tradition of proletarian art exist. Consequently, "the contemporary writer is faced by this primary difficulty if he sympathises with Communism... in order to get a hearing at all he has to enter into the tradition of bourgeois art".\textsuperscript{13} However, Spender argues, this by no means precludes art having a revolutionary function. Indeed artists may have a revolutionary function
which could not be performed by practical revolutionaries:

... it is not true that this art [bourgeois art] has all been counter-revolutionary propaganda, indeed it would seem far truer to say that bourgeois art has contributed largely to the breaking up of capitalist society... Propaganda has not been a function of art in society but psychoanalysis is one. For this reason it is still very important that we should have good artists today, and that our artists should not be led astray into practical politics, because art can make clear to the practical revolutionaries the historic issues which are in the deepest sense political. 14

In the pre-revolutionary situation the poet has his own unique and valuable role. If he should be called upon to write war poetry he also has a job to do, a job which goes beyond reporting and propagandising:

To another generation, a post-war generation... the poetry is only in the pity when the motive for pity is quite overwhelming... The external circumstances of his suffering were forced on to him [the poet of the first world war], and it was his job to create a synthesis by which he could accept them: he could not do more than accept them. But another generation cannot just accept the war as though it were a purely natural disaster. In order to achieve our synthesis, analysis is required as well. And it seems that the analysis must be in historical and in psychological terms. The difficulty is to reconcile the history and the psychology. 15

Here Spender (who was to write primarily personal poetry about the Spanish war) lucidly presents the argument for objectified, detached, analytic war poetry (as exemplified by Auden's Spain), pointing to both the method of analysis and its characteristic difficulty. Despite his own poetic preferences in response to Spain this remains a valid justification for analytic war poetry, suggesting a criterion for such poems: the efficacy of analysis and transformation. Spender's criterion for his own poetry is given in his introduction to The Still Centre, the volume containing his Spanish poems. "... a poet can only write about what is true to his own experience, not about what he would like to be true
to his experience".16 Here Spender sought to defend his work against critics who felt he ought to have written more overtly propagandist poetry. Both of these criteria are valid and can be usefully employed in examining other poetic responses to Spain.

Of all the Oxford poets W.H. Auden is the most difficult to pin down to a clearly stated aesthetic stance. He was never deceived by the rigidities of communism and just as his poetic styles defy rigid classification, so also do his aesthetic theories. Nevertheless some of his aesthetic stances can be discerned. Clearly Auden did not subscribe to a propagandist view of poetry. In 1935 he wrote that "poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity of action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to make a rational and moral choice".17 His practised blend of fantasy and diagnosis was accompanied by an explicit theoretical statement which cleverly allowed for a synthesis of Communism and Psychoanalysis: "There must always be two kinds of art, escape-art, for man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep, and parable art, that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love".18 We shall see below that Christopher Caudwell was to take exception to "escape-art" in an interesting and still valid argument in Illusion and Reality. Notice should also be taken of Auden's response to Surrealism. Writing in New Verse under the pseudonym of John Bull19 (a pseudonym suggesting Auden's "patriotic" disapproval of Surrealism as foreign and irresponsible) he questions the aesthetic and political implications of Surrealism. The inference can be drawn from Auden's "Honest Doubt" that he approves of the utilisation of
communism and psychoanalysis by poets though more importantly
the tone of his article suggests that Auden believes the
artist to be responsible for the effects and effectiveness of
his work (though Auden is habitually elusive about this
point). When reviewing Illusion and Reality Auden gave
explicit approval to Caudwell's Marxist book on aesthetics:
"I shall not attempt to criticise Illusion and Reality firstly
because I am not competent to do so, and secondly because I
agree with it". 20 Such approval was certainly justified and
by stating his agreement Auden indicated with unusual
precision his aesthetic stance at that time with regard to the
demands of political creeds upon poetry.

Louis Macneice stands in marked contrast to his contem-
poraries. He was the most balanced and consistent of the
Oxford poets, adhering to his belief in the value of honesty
in poetry, despite the urgent demands of critics for
propagandist verse. In Autumn Journal, his long and very fine
poem of the late thirties, he exemplifies this stress on the
honesty of the poet, presenting a rich and accurate interpreta-
tion of his age free of propagandist intrusions. Macneice
made an explicit statement of his poetic views in an issue of
New Verse devoted to "Commitments":

The poet at the moment will tend to be moralist rather
than aesthete. But his morality must be honest; he
must not merely retail other people's dogma. The world
no doubt needs propaganda, but propaganda (unless you
use the term, as many do, very, very loosely indeed) is
not the poet's job. He is not the loudspeaker of
society, but something much more like its still, small
voice. At highest he can be its conscience, its
critical faculty, its grievous instinct. He will not
serve his world by wearing blinkers... The poet... should
be synoptic and elastic in his sympathies. It is quite
possible therefore that at some period his duty as a poet
may conflict with his duty as a man. In that case he
can stop writing, but he must not degrade his poetry even
in the service of a good cause; for bad poetry won't
serve it much anyway. It is still, however, possible to
write honestly without feeling that the time for honesty is past.¹¹

Not all the poets and critics who were to respond to Spain subscribed to the orthodoxies of the social realists. Herbert Read, who (like George Orwell) sympathised with the Anarchists on the Spanish left, stated his dissatisfaction with communism in *Poetry and Anarchism* (1938).²² Read propounded an anarchist's theory of the function of poetry, a theory which while at odds with the assumptions of the orthodox left, was to prove applicable to the Spanish conflict:

In order to create it is necessary to destroy; and the agent of destruction in society is the poet. I believe that the poet is necessarily an anarchist, and that he must oppose all organised conceptions of the State, not only those which we inherit from the past, but equally those which are imposed on people in the name of the future. In this sense I make no distinction between fascism and marxism. The work of art... is a product of the relationship which exists between an individual and society, and no great art is possible unless you have as corresponding and contemporary activities the spontaneous freedom of the individual and the passive coherence of a society. To escape from society (if that were possible) is to escape from the only soil fertile enough to nourish art.²³

Surrealist aestheticians during the thirties nurtured hopes for poetry which were radically different from the hopes of the social realists. In 1935 David Gascoyne wrote that "Surrealism... has conceived poetry as being on the one hand... a perceptual flow of irrational thought in the form of images... and on the other hand a universally valid attitude to experience, a possible mode of living".²⁴ Despite the obvious discrepancies between this view of the function of poetry and the Marxist view (basically the difference was between narrow and wide views of reality. The surrealists, starting from psychoanalysis, aimed to shock and disorient by use of madness, dream and the irrational, to reveal reality. The Marxists regarded this as highly irresponsible at a time when poetry should be exhorting revolutionary fervour) some
surrealists argued that the two views were compatible:

It should by now be clear to Marxists that the Surrealist attitude is totally in accord with the Communist philosophy of dialectical materialism with its insistence on the synonymy of theory and practice, and that only the imminence of the proletarian revolution allows surrealism to hope that its aims will ultimately be fulfilled. The surrealist cause is the revolutionary cause...”

The most adequate Marxist criticisms of surrealist poetic theory and practice were made by Christopher Caudwell and will be examined later in this Chapter. Auden also formulated objections in his "Honest Doubt" article. He questioned the artistic merit of the automatic, repressed and fantastic and also questioned the "revolutionary" nature of the automatic presentation of repressed material. The surrealist reaction to the war in Spain was to hail the conflict as the much-needed apocalyptic upheaval which would disorient man, provoking a "crisis in consciousness" and thus paving the way for a new, more liberated perception of reality.

CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL: A SYNTHETIC VIEW

While many critics during the thirties attempted a Marxist prescription for the role of literature only Christopher Caudwell successfully formulated a comprehensive Marxist aesthetic; an aesthetic which emphasised the social function of literature rather than the function for individuals in society. Many of the critical theories advanced in the decade were loosely (and often inaccurately) described as "Marxist criticism". However genuine Marxist criticism is based not upon a simply social view of poetry but upon the theories of Marx and Engels. The starting point for Caudwell's aesthetic was Marx's famous (and fundamental)
statement suggesting a social view of the arts:

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of man that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. This basic statement that "being determines consciousness" was interpreted by most aspiring thirties theoreticians as meaning simply that our society and our productive role determines our thought and awareness; a conclusion which came as a surprise to nobody. Caudwell went beyond this simplistic interpretation to explain the interaction of being (the external reality of our lives) with consciousness (our instincts and desires which need to be adjusted into congruence with the external reality) and to demonstrate how and why such interaction happens. His use of a dialectical method in this explanation distinguishes his aesthetic as based not solely upon Marxist principles but also upon Marxist methods. Furthermore, Caudwell's criticism is a functional criticism, the fullest type of Marxist criticism as it involves the relation of all literature to all society.

Caudwell gives an account of the origins of poetry and explains the nature of modern, bourgeois poetry. At the level of primitive culture language was polarised into two forms, rhythmical and non-rhythmical. Rhythmical language, the language of collective speech, functioned as the language of private persuasion. Notably, even in primitive culture, the poetic function of language (to direct the instincts toward such economic ends as hunting) was opposed to the persuasive function. Rhythmical, poetic language, the language of collective illusion, aided adjustment to reality by organising the collective emotion of the tribe. With the differentiation of society and the development of distinct
classes the previously homogeneous tribal community became sectarian. A dichotomy arose in men's lives between thought and work, a dichotomy manifested in the division of the thinking class from the working class. Because of its separation from the reality of collective experience, art became formalised and lifeless, passed through a transitory stage in which formalised work coexisted with folk art and finally became modern bourgeois art. Just as capitalist society depends upon constant change of the means of production and of social relations, so does the art of capitalist society, bourgeois art, depend upon a constant revolutionising of its conventions, changing its forms and methods with the growth and decline of successive "movements". The bourgeois culture idealises the individual against the mass (for the coercive relations uniting such a culture reside in the individual right to public property) producing the classic bourgeois illusion which opposes freedom to determinism, and the individual to society. The bourgeois sees his unadapted instincts as a source of freedom and regards himself as free not through but in spite of social relations, rather than realising that his adapted instincts - adapted by the relations of society - are the means by which he secures freedom (through the struggle of society with external reality). In fact, "the true nature of freedom... involves consciousness of the determinism of the environment".²⁹ It is this illusion which is responsible for the theories of the isolated artist. "All bourgeois poetry is an expression of the movement of the bourgeois illusion" (Illusion and Reality p.68). Yet although founded on an illusion bourgeois poetry is not a worthless art. Bourgeois poetry expresses man's
struggle with nature for freedom, a freedom which is 
"... man's phantastic and poetic expression for the economic 
product of society which secures his self-realisation"
(Illusion and Reality p.69). It is because of the wide and 
complex struggle involved in the working out of the bourgeois 
ilusion that "... bourgeois poetry is the glittering, subtle, 
complex many sided thing that it is" (Illusion and Reality 
p.70). Clearly Caudwell's Marxist criticism does not damn 
bourgeois poetry because of its essential nature but rather 
explains why bourgeois poetry is so constituted, while looking 
forward to communist poetry which will express the freedom of 
all men.

To establish the function of literature Caudwell first 
quotes Marx's famous comment from Theses on Feurbach: "The 
philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; 
the point however is to change it" (Illusion and Reality 
p.220). The philosophers' view of language is that 
"language exists to be a passive photograph of the universe" 
(Illusion and Reality p.218). Caudwell argues that Marx's 
criticism of the philosophers applies also to their notion of 
language as a tool for presenting facts. From the beginning 
of primitive culture language has not merely described the 
world but has created the potential to change the world by 
realising fantasies and thus exposing the possibilities for 
new realities. In primitive culture men's instincts were 
directed toward economic ends, poetry aiding the adjustment of 
the instincts to reality. In modern society language is a 
tool for changing the world, effecting such changes through 
science and art. Thus the functions of science and art are 
established. Both are guides to action - action which will 
change the world.
Caudwell is careful to distinguish between propaganda (persuasion) and "guides to action". Just as in primitive society persuasive language, the language of everyday speech, was not the language of collective emotion, so in modern society persuasive language is not the language of science and art. "In daily life all conversation which is not informative of outer reality... or of inner reality... is rhetorical in the Aristotelian sense, that is it is designed to persuade others to act in a certain way and feel in a certain way" (Illusion and Reality p.173). Science and art are however not persuasive. They guide action by presenting reality in a special way. Science is the consciousness of the necessity of outer reality and art is the consciousness of the necessity of the instincts, inner reality. The world of art, a world "of organised emotion attached to experience, makes available for the individual a whole new universe of feeling and desire" (Illusion and Reality p.172). Art reveals the various ways in which the instincts may adapt themselves to experiences. Because art is achieved by men in association (being a social phenomenon) it allows men insight into the hearts of their fellows, so that paradoxically we withdraw into art to establish contact with our fellow men in collective emotion. The function of art then is not propagandist, because rather than persuade, it reveals the truths of our instincts and experiences. This distinction is especially useful for application to that thirties poetry which was not propagandist. It provides a justification in terms of social responsibility for that poetry and links the artistic efficacy of a work with its function of guiding action to change the world.

Poetry guides men's actions in order that through a process of adaptation they may obtain freedom. Adaptation is
the result of conflict between the heart's desires (the instincts) and the reality of the external world. When such conflict occurs, the dialectical relation of art and society ensures that not only are the instincts adapted to reality, but the external world is modified to more closely resemble man's inner vision of desired reality. It is this dialectical relation of art and society, and the concomitant dialectical relation of man's subjective feelings to his objective environment that determines the direction which adaptation will take. Idealist psychoanalysts see personal misery as caused by personal problems rather than as caused by social conditions. Caudwell disagrees:

If the root causes of broad areas of human misery are due to the surroundings in which the psyche develops, and the obstacles, possibilities, adaptations and attractions offered by the social relations of that environment then they can only be eliminated by a material change, which will make possible a change of heart. This view is opposed both to that of religion and of psychoanalysis. (Illusion and Reality p.190).

These related changes - a change of society and a change of heart - can be achieved through the affective function of poetry. Poetry modifies our emotions on both personal and social levels. Personally we are made conscious of the necessity of our instincts while socially the collective emotion which generates the common ego leads to the achievement of economic results. Poetry has a manifest content (the paraphrasable image of the real world) and a latent content (the emotive, affective tones embodied in the words of the poem - tones which are lost in paraphrase). The latent content is the "poetic" element, existing because poetry is an adaptation of the instincts to external reality. Such an adaptation is a reorganisation of emotions made public through the poem. "The purpose [of a poem] is the specific emotional
organisation directed towards the manifest content and provided by the released affects" (Illusion and Reality p. 244). Thus the scope of this emotional reorganisation provides a criterion of poetic success. "Art adapts the psyche to the environment and is therefore one of the conditions for the development of society" (Illusion and Reality p. 293). The most successful art will be that which most comprehensively remoulds external reality to a likeness of the genotype (Caudwell's label for the instinctual model of reality).

Caudwell's rejection of Surrealism as a viable poetic method is based upon his criterion for art of emotional reorganisation. Like poetry, dream has both manifest and latent content. "The manifest content is imagic phantasy, the latent content is affective reality" (Illusion and Reality p. 237). But whereas the affective reorganisation of art is social and conscious, in dream this reorganisation is personal and unconscious. Dream adapts the instincts to reality rather than adapting reality to the instincts. The poet's job is to make public an emotional reorganisation but the Surrealist cannot do this for his feeling is undirected and his affective organisation is personal. In fact the Surrealist is duped by the bourgeois illusion - his "freedom" is the unconsciousness of necessity (Illusion and Reality p. 238). Free association, automatic writing, disorder and irrationality do not lead to an emotional reorganisation which can be accessible to others. Because the reorganisation is not externalised (and therefore is incommunicable) no adaptation can take place - the art is personal not social. 30

Caudwell's aesthetics also suggest how poetry and culture interpenetrate with the events of history. Just as poetry
produces a personal emotional reorganisation, so its effects are compounded in a society. While the emotional experience of a poem passes, a memory trace remains to modify action, and as a culture becomes more historic, so it accumulates experience. Culture, like a wise old man, ripens as wisdom is acquired through experience. This wisdom inheres in both science and art. Men's personal emotional reorganisations initiate a chain of dialectical relations between man and nature:

Energy is always flowing out to the environment of society, and new perception always flowing in from it; as we change ourselves, we change the world; as we change the world we learn more about it; as we learn more about it, we change ourselves; as we change ourselves we learn more about ourselves; as we learn more about what we are, we know more clearly what we want. This is the dialectic of concrete life in which associated men struggle with Nature.

Unlike most thirties critics who attempted a Marxist criticism Caudwell did not sweepingly condemn bourgeois art. He appreciated the achievements of bourgeois art while recognising that the bourgeois assumptions which it worked from (especially the illusion of negative freedom) had outlived their usefulness and no longer accurately applied to society. During the pre-revolutionary situation which the thirties seemed to be, Caudwell asserted that proletarian art could be of only limited usefulness. Because any art requires a common emotional consciousness to reorganise, proletarian art could only become truly effective when there was a development of the old consciousness into association with common proletarian living. But when this occurred consciousness would have been raised to communist consciousness. Paradoxically there could not be a period of great proletarian art, only a transitional period between bourgeois
art and communist art. Caudwell was especially careful to
distinguish between true proletarian art (which would expand
consciousness) and the so-called proletarian art of the
thirties which was nothing more than massage art (which
deadened consciousness) and kept the proletariat adjusted to
the current economic situation.

Clearly the revolutionary task during the thirties was
to alter the environment; namely to abolish bourgeois social
relations. David Margolies, normally a sympathetic critic
of Caudwell, argues that Caudwell contradicted himself by
asserting both that art has a continuing function, and that
art has little function in the immediate struggle. But it
seems clear that for Caudwell the function of literature in
a revolutionary age was the same as at any other time - the
emotional reorganisation of men. If that emotional re-
organisation is aimed at sending readers out to the barricades,
surely it still comes within the scope of an emotional re-
organisation to facilitate a greater knowledge of reality and
a greater consciousness of necessity. In this way all good
art, art effecting a comprehensive emotional reorganisation,
is in a sense revolutionary. Caudwell argued that art which
expanded man's consciousness of necessity and freedom is
functional in the thirties struggle, and that it is no
coincidence that the most functional art is that which is of
the greatest aesthetic value, for the aesthetic criterion is
the extent of emotional reorganisation. Thus there is a
congruence of artistic and revolutionary effectiveness for
poetry.

Many aesthetic theories put forward during the thirties
as "Marxist" were in fact examples of bad Marxism...
simplistic applications of Marxist theory to the seemingly unique thirties conditions. Caudwell showed that a valid Marxist criticism is possible, grounding his theories upon a sound aesthetic theory of poetry and then applying this to produce a comprehensive and synthetic response to his environment.
NOTES

1. When, in October 1934 New Verse published responses to an enquiry in which poets were asked (among other things) whether they were influenced by Freud and if they took their stand with any political or politico-economic party or creed, out of twenty two replies (October and December 1934) six poets admitted psychoanalytic influences upon their poetry and six other poets conceded that their allegiance was with the left. Notably the poets replying were not a typical group of young social poets, nor did the replying group include Spender, Day Lewis or Auden. As Grigson commented, "The English Individual-romantic let us affirm without ill will, dislikes the catagorical prod of any question". (New Verse 11, October 1934 pp.2-22).


16. The Still Centre (London, Faber and Faber, 1939) p.10.


19. John Bull: "Honest Doubt" in New Verse 21 (June-July


28. My account of Caudwell's theory is greatly simplified and by no means comprehensive. I have sought merely to isolate the salient features for the purposes of this study. For further understanding Illusion and Reality must be consulted.


30. Paul C. Ray in The Surrealist Movement in England (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1971) pp.204-5 argues that Caudwell fails to see that Surrealism discredits bourgeois reality and "reintegrates the human consciousness with external reality from which it has been dissociated, thereby extending freedom by extending the consciousness of necessity". However the methods by which Surrealism hoped to reintegrate consciousness with reality were at odds with Caudwell's theories, and Caudwell's criticisms of Surrealism remain unaffected by Ray's point.


CHAPTER III

POETIC RESPONSES

Discussion of the literature of an historical period often emphasises the pre-eminent figures of that time at the expense of the multitude of lesser writers working with the same purposes and aspirations, and may, in some cases, obscure the variety of work produced in that period, presenting a misleading appearance of consensus and homogeneity. That this has often been the case in discussion of the poems concerned with the Spanish conflict can be largely attributed to a significant discrepancy between the publicity given to the responses of the Oxford poets (particularly W.H. Auden's Spain) and the publicity which the responses of the other thirties writers received. This publicity gap has disguised the range of responses to Spain and the concomitant complexities of those responses. While the final section of this chapter will deal with the Oxford poets' output, many of the works of less well known poets deserve consideration, as they embody characteristic features both of the body of civil war poetry and of the wider thirties tradition.

Two poems typical of their type will introduce these lesser works. W.B. Mallalieu's "The Future is Near Us" announces the imminence of the future to those groups of Englishmen who have yet to respond to the new life symbolised by Spain:

Those on the wooded highways, in the towers
Out on their islands carressed by the ignorant ocean,
Those tongue-tied with the mad alphabet of flowers,
Those deeply involved with love or with the sun:

Love caught the signal of the sentinel dead
who had renounced the precious taste of words.

The signal was Spain:
Many typical images abound: the wooded highway, fallen into neglect, the lonely tower and idyllic island (England of course) offering short-lived retreat and most importantly, the poet who wastes his talent on lyric decoration - "the mad alphabet of flowers". Spain signals the new era of struggle embodied by those who renounce the taste of words for the taste of action. The war in Spain ushers in an age of new realities. The frontier is closer now that "The Grey bomber has set limits to the air". New allegiances have been shaped and new necessities made clear - "Spain continues our fight" (my emphasis). Not unexpectedly we are already familiar with the animating forces which will strengthen us for this struggle ahead:

Love is too large for that short day before us,
The islands beyond our reach. Sight is sure.
Words must have the discipline of the chorus,
Dreams leave us for a new pasture.

Reshuffle the alphabet and order words as guns
To discharge their shells into the doubtful ear.²

Love will break the unnatural bonds with which we circumscribe it. The poet who was previously engaged in futile activity now acquires the discipline of the chorus - communal not personal discipline - rejecting dream for committed poetry which will contribute to the struggle. Mallalieu's technique is noteworthy. The ambiguity which he allows to remain in his lines widens their significance, as he avoids the pitfall
of too precisely pinning his poem to a specific externality. Some of his lines acquire a symbolic resonance from this ambiguity and from the crypticism with which he expresses himself (a crypticism reminiscent of Auden's Nordic Mask). "Light revealed in woodland unexpected dearth:/ Towers have been cut off and no seeds sown". Such phrases portend a widening menace which threatens all hopes for the future, an effect desired by Mallalieu for he here depicts the bleak future for the world if it does not change its blind old ways.

Like Mallalieu, Jack Lindsay also wrote of the civil war from the safety of England's shores, but Lindsay envisaged the new life in Spain far more concretely than Mallalieu, hoping for the communist society which he dreamed of as a Party member. Lindsay's response to Spain took its most fervent (and least artistic) form in a 350 line poem for mass recitation entitled "On Guard for Spain" which eulogised the Spanish worker fighting "wolves of death" and "fascist vultures". Lindsay was more temperate in "Looking at a Map of Spain on the Devon Coast". Initially the link between England and Spain is established and the poet's concern seems to be chiefly humanitarian

The waves that break and rumble on the sands gleaming outside my window, break on Spain. Southward I look and only the quick waves stretch between my eyes and ravaged Santander moaning with many winds of death, great blackening blasts of devastation and little alley-whispers where forgotten children die.

The map of Spain bleeds under my fingers, ...
This pity for the victims of the civil war is reiterated throughout the poem as the Spanish people are developed into a symbol embodying the heart of the Spanish struggle - its essential human truth. Behind the "moneymask that hid the jackal-jaws, the mask of fear/ that twisted the tender face of love" lies the human truth of the war and the hopes in which it is fought. Lindsay's revealing of images - the true behind the false - is apt for the deceptive Spanish situation and is also used by Rex Warner. (Warner's obscuring mist parts to reveal the close relation of England and Spain in "The Tourist looks at Spain").

The scroll of injustice, the sheet of paper is torn, and behind the demolished surface of the lie the Spanish people are seen with resolute faces. They break the dark grilles on custom's stuccoed wall and come into the open.  

The quietly deliberate tone of this depiction suits the special significance of the event. The cities on Lindsay's map are "Sierras of history/ granite above time's stream". Time past has led up to this conflict which is historically inevitable and will go down in history. Indeed the Spaniards are stopping the old time (putting an end both to the old regime and its way of measuring).

Sandbags are piled across the tramlines of routine. A bullet has gone through the townhall clock, the hands of official time are stopped. New clocks for the Spanish people: New springs and cogwheels for the Time of Freedom.
Typical of these ensuing changes is the nailing of the notice board of the People's University over the face of the Virgin in a shrine. A community of learning replaces the false communion of the hierarchical Catholic Church.

However, while aptly embodying many of the vivid and honest images of the Spanish war situation, Lindsay's poem often suffers from an excess of blatantly romantic vision of the revolutionary struggle. When we read of a "girl in overalls with young breasts of pride/ bearing the great banner down the street" and of the militiamen whose efforts are redoubled by the thought of this girl, we can accept this as a valid use of the analogy between "healthy" love and the revolutionary spirit (just as John Cornford avowed). Yet as Lindsay becomes more enthusiastic our approval must be qualified:

... there sounds the pulse of work,
the hum of factories in communal day.
The girl with the cap of liberty at the loom
weaves the fate of Spain,
the web of brotherhood on the warp of courage.
The factory windows crimson with the sunset
flash signals to the fields of toil;
the slow echelon of sickles
advance upon the wheat. 6

While attempting to develop the vision of the new country Spain will become as a stimulus to greater efforts in the war, Lindsay falls for the well established cliche of the Russian revolutionary movie, complete with crimson sunset and sickles. We expect a party of singing workers to march bravely westward into the sinking sun as a finale. Lindsay was not alone in his tendency to romanticise the Spanish
conflict, people, or anticipated new society. Dennis Birch in "Incident 1938" also exhibits this failing.

Guilt was an important characteristic of many poets who remained behind in England while still writing of the civil war in Spain. J. Bronowski's "Guadalajara" 7 first seems to be concerned with the fate of the common soldiers on either side of the conflict who suffer while their commanders live in relative comfort. Examples from antiquity are cited to show this Spanish situation as yet another repetition of the injustice.

Caesar with Spanish slingers shivered in Gaul; but knew the beds at home would yet be warm. The slingers died. And Caesar - Caesar whored in Rome.

In Libya the shaken sword aches in the sun. The conquering boor sweats and grows hoarse. But here his men cough death beside the dying Moors. 8

Bronowski's bitter pessimism has a more personal motivation however:

What is my pity worth? I fret
no frozen body, but my mind;
... Forgive me, men at posts, who stiffen
for furies such as kings or mine;
and suffer me no more than speak
the words your lips will never form, 9

It is his personal guilt at not partaking in the struggle and his doubts over the validity of his poetic role at such a time which lie beneath his horror at the inequalities which war magnifies. He realises that he is as secure and
privileged as the rulers and generals he castigates. Typically of many of the poorer poems motivated by personal reactions, "Guadalajara" exhibits little sign of artistic finish, effecting no transformation of the personal reaction into a meaningful public symbol.

A different type of guilt plagues K.J. Raine (Mrs. Charles Madge). Her poem "Fata Morgana" endeavours to explicate the guilt of an enfeebled member of the upper class, one of the old guard who cannot perceive the state of things to come. The nature of the personal conflict which Spain raises for her is stated in her opening lines:

While those who on the march to their desires
Through painful brilliance of Iberian day
These arguing remained by their home fires
Still living in the old, unhealthy way.¹⁰

Raine then goes on to examine her relations with her old way of life. She has experienced very little of "real" life, in fact her idle hours have laid waste to her will. The equation of sexual freedom with political health is again made. "The younger ones do better on the whole; They still are free, they lie with whom they please,..." For Raine the dream of marching in Spain is a dream of potency. She is realistic about the Republic's chances of victory, yet still desires the opportunity to achieve community among the committed, real men and women, and to relinquish her privileged status. Thus she dreams of joining the forces in Spain:

I am no longer, alas, a charmed life,
One whom the gods will favour, ill can spare
But target for the bullet and the knife
Like any other soldier, wolf or hare. 

Alas her background necessitates that this must remain a
dream. She cannot escape this bondage so must "wake up to
spend another day/ with all the people I can only touch/
with tales of long ago and far away.

Bernard Spencer's "A Cold Night" presents a very
different approach to the circumstances which trouble
Bronowski and Raine. After a cleverly ambiguous opening
stanza which could be written from the position of a soldier
in Spain or from that of an Englishman at home depending
upon the interpretation of the line; "The world/gets
lopped off at the radius of my fire". (fireside or gun-
fire), Spencer links the cold night of England to that of
Spain, leading us to expect a stance of commitment or at
least sympathy. Instead he attempts to justify his
isolation:

I turn back to my fire. Which I must.
I am not God or a crazed woman.
And one needs time too to sit in peace
Opposite one's girl, with food, fire, light,
And do the work one's own blood heats,
Or talk and forget about the winter,
- This season, this century - and not be always
Opening one's doors on the pitiful streets
Of Europe, not always think of winter, winter,
like a hammering rhyme
For then everything is drowned by the rising wind,
everything is done against Time. 

His argument is self-consciously flawed for he realises that
in time Europe will reach even to his fireside, yet he truthfully admits his fear of facing such a reality. Such a statement of the stance of the fearful isolationist although artistically unremarkable is sufficiently uncommon to be noteworthy.

As the war in Spain developed the Loyalist side acquired a number of Martyrs (unwitting and otherwise) to its cause. While the most frequently lauded of all the heroes of the Spanish struggle were the Spanish people themselves, the heroic mantle was more readily assumed by individuals. As well as those who died fighting for the Republic (and these were to include the Englishmen Ralph Fox, Charles Donnelly, Julian Bell, Christopher Caudwell and John Cornford) such figures as "La Fasionaria" (an impassioned and fiery revolutionary woman speaker) and Garcia Lorca (the popular and prominent Spanish poet shot in mysterious circumstances\(^{13}\)) were to become symbols in the Loyalist struggle, as in fact were artists generally (see appendices III and IV to this study).

Geoffrey Parsons rather unsubtly suggested the status of Lorca: "The Fascists have only one answer for a poet - Their stuttering lead syllables".\(^{14}\) Though the poet's death was a mystery Parsons eulogised Lorca, investing him with the virtues attributed to the Loyalists. Both struggle bravely for ideals which are more durable than human flesh.

But the bullfighter's friend was not afraid of their hate...

His friends, the people, the peasants remember his songs
And chant them through Spain. And to them there will be no end.\(^{15}\)
Bronowski treats the matter slightly differently mythologising the event and protagonist to evoke wider significances beyond the immediate Spanish setting. "The picador is Don Quixote, the gipsy begs, and the poet's mouth is bloody. Blood reddens the windmill arms of Armageddon". The affirmative note is struck by Bronowski also, although his affirmation does not necessarily suggest a military victory but rather the persistence of the values fought for.

Picasso also acquired symbolic stature for the Loyalists and supporting poets. Albert Brown is prompted by the magnificence of a painting of a woman by Picasso to question the consequences of a Spain in which such art can no longer be painted. He decides that this too, an artistic value and freedom, is part of the values fought for in the civil war:

Think of those few,  
Finer in faculty,  
Farther in imagination -  
Manipulators of words, materials, colours, sounds,  
motions

(Whose category all our descendants might join) —

Margot Heinemann expressed her personal grief over the death of John Cornford in two poems which show the hero as a human being rather than a mythologised figure. The tragedy of any young man's death in Spain is evoked by her depiction of Cornford:

Any movement, going north or south,  
Can find a place for charm and open shirts,  
The sun-bright hair, the lovely mouth,  
But needs as much the force that hurts  
And rules our sapphire dreams.
Ironically it is this personal force needed to mould the hopes of the future which marks the bravest young men as candidates for death. Meinemann's reaction to the death of a hero is not to glorify his sacrifice but to draw strength from it - strength which may help her to come to terms with her horror and grief:

Fearing still the images of corruption,
To think he lies out there, and changes
In the process of the earth from what I knew,
Decays and even there in the grave, shut close
In the dark away from me, speechless and cold,
As in no way left the same that I have known.

All this is not more than we can deal with. 19

Of all the volunteer poets John Cornford produced the most successful poetic analysis of the Spanish conflict in Marxist terms in his "Full Moon at Tierz: Before the storming of Huesca". Mastering the analytic methods of Marxism Cornford presents the Spanish struggle in terms of inter-penetrating images of time, space, light and dark. The inextricable involvement of all these dimensions with each other becomes a powerful metaphor for the life process resolving itself in Spain and the images from his initial objective analysis animate the remainder of his poem.

The past, a glacier, gripped the mountain wall,
And time was inches, dark was all,
But here it scales the end of the range,
The dialectics point of change,
Crashes in light and minutes to its fall.

Time present is a cataract whose force
Breaks down the banks even at its source
And history forming in our hands
Not plasticine but roaring sands,
Yet we must swing it to its final course.

The intersecting lines that cross both ways,
Time future, has no image in space,
Crooked as the road that we must tread,
Straight as our bullets fly ahead.

We are the future. The last fight let us face. 20

This is a scientific analysis in which history is prominent
unifying the theoretical basis of the real event with the
personal action of the poet and his fellows in an effective
dialectic. The second section of the poem deals with the
reality of the physical situation. The contest is a crucial
one; "Our testing has begun". Yet the protagonists of the
International Brigade do not fight alone. The lone pro-
tagonsists in previous struggles - "Three years ago Dimitrov
fought" - have been joined by an army which fights where there
was one (fighting as a community in action). Preparations
were undertaken; "We studied well how to begin this fight"
and now, "We plunge into the dark alone/ Earth's newest
planet wheeling through the night". Cornford's use of
analysis is enhanced by his accurate relating of the public,
detached view of the conflict to the essential, personal truth
of his own experiences. He reviews his early days with the
Party when "Communism was my waking time", and develops an
honest admission of the fears and doubts which plague the
volunteers; "my private battle with my nerves" resolving
these experiences in the community of will among the volunteers
in Spain: "the welded front our fight preserves". Another
characteristic of Spanish war poetry revealed by Cornford is in his consciousness of the necessary links between all the countries in Europe. The same night falls over Germany's concentration camps and the "gutted pits of Wales". England is silent and neglected but she cannot remain silent:

Here too, our freedom's swaying in the scales.

... Here, too, in Spain

Our fight's not won till the workers of all the world
Stand by our guard on Huesca's plain
Swear that our dead fought not in vain.21

Cornford succeeds with "Full Moon at Tierz" because of the sophistication of his use of Marxism and his involvement of all aspects of the response to Spain within a synthetic pattern of themes and images. The poem successfully transforms the Spanish war into a multi-symbolic event encapsulating and shaping the myriad of associations evoked by Spain to produce a unified controlled evocation which because it functions smoothly poetically also has considerable value as "propaganda" for the revolutionary cause.

While many poets clearly regarded the conflict in Spain as a fight also for England's future, few applied their poetic transformative skills to this relationship between the two countries. Rex Warner in "The Tourist looks at Spain" argues for a defect of vision on the part of English viewers of the Spanish civil war, a defect which prevents these observers from realising that their view is obscured not by Spanish ambiguities but by an English malaise. The tourist sees Spain through a figurative sea mist, an obscuring fog which acts as a distorting lens. Warner develops this image cluster of vision and perception to suggest elements com-
posing the old distorted view of Spain. That he views through gauze ambiguously suggests the softening loss of focus; the trid of the map of Spain, and the war wounds which ravage the real Spain lying beneath these illusory appearances. In fact the tourist comes to realise that he has been romanticising Spain.

[We] holding the mirror see what we did not think, see sierras indistinct, see something like sea over the comfortable scene, hear hiss of water and find the whole view moving.

What we saw was dead was all the time alive, and what we see is living. It is over our own eyes that the mist holds. Say clearly: Spain has torn the veil of Europe.

Having revealed the true source of the distorted view Warner parts the veil to let the real Spain speak, delineating the nature of the conflict. The Catholics have forsaken Christian virtue for naked aggression; "Their love is aimed at man's destruction". Typically the Loyalist resistance embodies brotherly love in its hatred of the old regime. With the resolution to action of the Spanish people and their supporters; "It is we who feel the future flowing in our veins" comes the comparison of these hopes for the future with the English situation:

It is rather around us that the mist is clinging, and our oldest landmarks that have become a veil.

See in the mirror rather our most holy buildings, our smoothest kindest words, our most successful pageantry, our parades as trash and blots and blurs on the moving truth.
The treasured English way of life has become an excuse for old lies, a dead, outmoded existence. The future promises struggle for the English too. Warner predicts an austere future - "Not for many years now will love be guiltless, or boating or autumn leaves". Finally the poet unifies the Spanish conflict with the English disease.

See Spain and see the world. Freedom extends or contracts in all hearts.

Near Bilbao are buried the vanguard of our army.

It is us too they defended who defended Madrid. 24

Cecil Day Lewis responded to the Spanish war in a generally conventional manner, writing of the struggle as applied to England and dealing with the pity of war as well as arguing for a committed stance. His long narrative poem The Nabara is an exception to this typical response. In The Nabara Day Lewis attempts a discursive narrative depicting the bravery of Basque seamen in their one sided battle against the Nationalist cruiser Canarius. The most significant feature of The Nabara is that rather than being concerned with the usual Spanish war poetic subject-matter it deals with the values of freedom and bravery, values not unique to the civil war. Day Lewis remains detached from his subject matter using the conflict as a basis for a defence of and eulogy upon the good man fighting the good fight. The ideal, although rooted in its actualisation remains independent of the event and the consequences, and can exist beyond that actualisation. Rather than a treatment in terms of space and time, a Marxist analysis, Day Lewis emphasises the human traits of the sailors, allowing the affinations to be transferred to any analogous setting, although the sailors do
act under special circumstances as "history's hand was upon them". While the bulk of the poem relates the incident, in the first and last sections Day Lewis uses poetic transformation to depict the values embodied:

Freedom is more than a word, more than the base coinage
Of statesmen, the tyrant's dishonoured cheque, or the dreamer's made
Inflated currency. She is mortal, we know, and made
In the image of simple men who have no taste for coinage
But sooner kill and are killed than see that image betrayed. 25

The coin of life has two faces -- freedom and tyranny. The image of freedom is phoenix-like, it is stamped on men's hearts. Especially significant is the fact that the sailors are Basques for their image of freedom is the obverse of the religious (tyrannical) image which as Basques they had repudiated. We realise that as the Basques are fishermen they acquire the status of disinterested, pre-catholic fishers of souls, guardians of beliefs in opposition to the religious and political netters on the Nationalist side of the coin. The Basque fishermen animate the image of freedom: "For these I have told of, freedom was flesh and blood - a mortal body". This contrasts with the sterile images of the non-interveners, "politicians hiding behind the skirts of peace". The sailors aboard the Nabara immortalise their image of freedom by consecration in active love -- "Its light through time still flashes, like a star that has turned to ashes,". In The Nabara Day Lewis successfully overcomes
many of the pitfalls bedevilling his fellow poets. He achieves an aesthetic success with his coin metaphor (c.f. Hugh Selwyn Mauberly) erecting resonant symbols of hope for the future, yet retains the integrity of actuality, the central area of the poem being purely narrative. Noticeably, although non-didactic the poem argues lucidly for the loyalist cause without needing to resort to overt propaganda.

Stephen Spender advocated a fusion of public policy with poetry in his introduction to Poems for Spain yet his own poetry does not embody such a fusion. Rather his practised criterion is honesty to felt experience. Spender did not believe that at the time of the Spanish war another attitude could be viable: "One day a poet will write truthfully about the heroism as well as the fears and anxieties of today; such poetry will be very different from the utilitarian heroics of the moment". His own poetry reflects his attitude toward the horror of war:

The dead in wars are not heroes: they are freezing or rotting lumps of isolated insanity... to say those who happen to be killed are heroic is a wicked attempt to identify the dead with the abstract ideas which have brought them to the front, thus adding prestige to those ideas, which are used to lead the living to similar "heroic" deaths... not the least of [war's] crimes is the propaganda which turns men into heroes. In "Two Armies" Spender poetically restates this view:

Finally they cease to hate: for although hate burst from the air and whips the earth like hail
Or pours it up in fountains to marvel at,
And although hundreds fall, who can connect
The inexhaustible anger of the guns
With the dumb patience of these tormented animals? He does not hesitate to attribute blame for this horror:
there is a clear antithesis between capitalist wars and human beings:

The guns spell money's ultimate reason
In letters of lead on the spring hillside,
But the boy lying dead under the olive trees
Was too young and too silly
To have been notable to their important eye.
He was a better target for a kiss. 29

Clearly this is a decidedly anti-heroic view - almost unpatriotic to the cause of Loyalist Spain (as many of his critics argued). However Spender does not despair at this war - hope persists in the seeds of the future, the children.

But somewhere some word presses
On the high door of a skull, and in some corner
Of an irrefrangible eye
Some old man's memory jumps to a child
- Spark from the days of energy.
And the child hoards it like a bitter toy. 30

Consequently it is a horror of even greater magnitude when children die in war for not only do humans perish, but the hope for the future is destroyed. Technology is particularly indiscriminate in death-dealing as the bombing of Cavendish showed.

This timed, exploding heart that breaks
The loved and little hearts, is also one
Splintered through the lungs and wombs
And fragments of squares in the sun,
And crushing the floating, sleeping babe
Into a deeper sleep. 31

Spender's most successful analytic war poem is "Port Bou".
More markedly structured than most of his responses to the war, this poem uses the physical geography of Port Bou to project an image of the choice embodied in Spain. Firstly Spender introduces his persona in the Spanish environment:

As a child holds a pet
Arms clutching but with hands that do not join
And the coiled animal watches the gap
To outer freedom in animal air,
So the earth-and-rock flesh arms of this harbour
Embrace but do not enclose the sea
Which, through a gap, vibrates to the open sea
Where ships and dolphins swim and above is the sun.
In the bright winter sunlight I sit on the stone parapet
Of a bridge; my circling arms rest on a newspaper
Empty in my mind as the glittering stone
Because I search for an image
And seeing an image I count out the coined words
To remember the childish headlands of this harbour.\textsuperscript{32}

The two arms of the headland represent disunited Spain, two arms between which the sea (hope, regenerative power and love) vibrates in search of freedom and realisation. The poet sits safely on a stone parapet (as opposed to risking his neck on a war parapet) speculating, the bridge he straddles spanning the two sides of a river - the two worlds between which he must choose (action or art) and also the two sides in the conflict. The immediate reality breaks into his reverie. A lorry-load of militiamen ask, "How do they speak of our struggle over the frontier?" before passing on into the world of action, over the headland (here Spender echoes Auden).

The third section of "Port Bou" is a prelude to action. An
old man, children and women pass the poet by, stranding him "at the exact centre, solitary as a target". His position is still neutral but in trying to preserve his detachment he runs risks anyway, not the least being the risk of condemnation by the Spanish people who pass him by. Finally the poet chooses the two headlands again evoking his dilemma and endeavours to assimilate experience into his person in accordance with the precepts implicit in his poem. Spender ends with a vivid, metaphoric transformation of the poet's body into the body of Spain and her people, absorbing himself the poet into sympathy with his transformed persona:

And my body seems a cloth which the machine gun stitches
Like a sewing machine, neatly, with cotton from a reel;
And the solitary, irregular, thin 'puffs' from the carbines

Draw on long needles white threads through my navel. 33

Of all Spender's poems about the Spanish conflict this is the most effectively synthetic of the multiple concerns of the poet faced with war, succeeding particularly in its symbolic usage of the landscape and people to evoke the abstractions discussed.

In Cantos VI and XXIII of Autumn Journal Louis Macneice presents his own highly personal reaction to Spain. Unique among his contemporaries for his personal style, a precise, deliberately evocative conversational manner which in its low keyed seemingly casual tone pierces right to the heart of the issues dealt with in Autumn Journal Macneice displays a primarily personal understanding of Spain, rendering the sensuous texture of the Spanish experience with remarkable lucidity. Macneice echoes the same analytic precepts as his
better contemporaries – the road runs downhill into Spain
denoting the inevitability of the conflict and English
aspirations find their manifestation in Spain. But it is
his technique which sets him apart from his fellows:

   Now I must make amends
   And try to correlate event with instinct
   And me with you or you and you with all,
   No longer think of time as a waterfall
   Abstracted from a river. 34

This is characteristic of Macneice, channeling all experience
through the self as a transforming filter to combine extreme
personalisation with objectification. Also remarkable is
the sheer density of Macneice’s textural evocations. He
nominally appears to talk of the environment in Spain, but
effortlessly constructs an elaborate pattern of significant
images out of that environment:

   With fretted stone the Moor
   Had chiselled for effects of sun and shadow;
   With shadows of the poor,
   The begging cripples and the children begging.
   The churches full of saints
   Tortured on rocks of marble –
   The old complaints
   Covered with gilt and dimly lit with candles. 35

This passage analyses the religious and social problems of
Spain in stark simplicity. Poverty and riches, light and
dark, Moor and Christian are juxtaposed so that a catalogue
of opposites is created. The sunlight opposes the candle-
light, the fretted stone opposes the gilded complaints
(ambiguously the old religious complaints and the valid
social grievances in modern Spain), the begging poor are contrasted with the richly decadent decoration of the church, and beggars (modern saints?) are tortured by the racks of modern Spanish life. Aurally too the passage succeeds, the void after "marble ..." being resolved by the loosening sense of the last line and a half which projects the religious metaphor for the contemporary illusion repressing the truth of Spain.

The purpose of W.H. Auden's _Spain_ was simply to lead men to the rational and moral choice which the Spanish war demanded. The triumph of _Spain_ is the technique employed. The detested objectification with which Auden transforms _Spain_ into a symbol of the Englishman's conflict is the technique which Auden had been perfecting throughout the thirties. Criticisms of that objectification are totally misplaced for the poem deals not with the event of the war, but with the meaning and significance of that war in the wider view of mankind's historical development. This conception of war is developed through a résumé of man's past:

Yesterday all the past. The language of size
Spreading to China along the traderoutes; the diffusion
Of the counting frame and cromlech;
Yesterday the shadow reckoning in the sunny climates.

... The trial of heretics among the columns of stone;
Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns
And the miraculous cure at the fountain;
Yesterday the Sabbath of witches. But today the struggle.
toward today. Today is not the culmination of past achievements but rather a struggle to preserve them and retain the hope of future development. Faced with this crisis man invokes the life-force (History, God, time, science) begging an answer in any guise. "O descend as a dove, or/ A furious papa or a mild engineer but descend". Alas Christianity, Freud and technology do not have an easy answer. Life is the actions which we dare to take.

'What's your proposal? To build the just city?

I will.

I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the romantic Death? Very well, I accept, for I am your choice, your decision. Yes I am Spain'.

Neatly Auden counterpoints the two facets of men's motives in Spain, throwing mankind back upon its own resources to present lines on that arid square. History will be the judge. Idle pursuits and happiness are postponed. The task ahead is neither heroic nor pleasant but totally necessary. It is fitting that Auden, the finest poet of his era should produce the most satisfactory poetic response to Spain. Always a great synthesiser he unites the views of his thirties tradition under a brilliantly structured comprehensive proposal for commitment, which is finally confirmed by his statement of the outlook for the thirties:

The stars are dead. The animals will not look.

We are left alone with our day, and the time is short, and History to the defeated

May say also but cannot help or pardon.37
NOTES:


2. Mallalieu; "Future".

3. Jack Lindsay; "Looking at a Map of Spain on the Devon Coast". Poems for Spain pp.60-64.

4. Lindsay; "Looking".

5. Lindsay; "Looking".

6. Lindsay; "Looking".

7. At the battle of Guadalajara Italians fought their countrymen as Italian forces on the Nationalist side went into action against the Garibaldi Battalion of the International Brigade. Typically the battle was hailed as a victory for the Republicans but was ultimately of little strategic value.


9. Bronowski; "Guadalajara".


11. Raine; "Fata Morgana".


13. Even Hugh Thomas (p.225) is unable to fully explicate Lorca's mysterious death at the hands of the Civil Guard.


15. Parsons; "Lorca".


17. Albert Brown; "From a Painting by Picasso" in Poems for Spain pp.64-65.


21. Cornford; "Tierz".
23. Warner; "Tourist".
24. Warner; "Tourist".
30. Spender; "Fall of a City" in The Still Centre pp.65-66.
32. Spender; "Port Bou" in The Still Centre pp.71-73.
33. Spender; "Port Bou" in The Still Centre pp.71-73.
34. Louis Macneice; Autumn Journal London, Faber and Faber, 1939 p.91.
A brief selection of articles, statements and advertisements pertaining to the war in Spain and the literary background to that war.
APPENDIX I

SURREALISM AND COMMUNISM

The foundation of an English surrealist group, and the publication of its bulletin, are matters of some importance to revolutionary culture. Surrealist work, while not calling directly for revolutionary intervention, can be classed as revolutionary in so far as it can break down irrational bourgeois-taught prejudices, thus preparing the mental ground for positive revolutionary thought and action. Therefore it is all the more necessary that this revolutionary essence should not be adulterated by the contradictory attitude of individual surrealists.

A short and comparatively accurate analysis, in the Bulletin, of the position of the artist to-day acknowledges the importance of unity: "... the movement of our government towards Fascism threatens to put a stop to all creative activity. Against this, it is absolutely necessary to combine". Herbert Read states that "the notion of an art divorced from the general process of social development, is an illusion", and he quotes Breton: "the surrealists entirely rely for the bringing about of the liberation of man upon the proletarian Revolution". All this is encouraging and it is therefore the more unfortunate that the bulletin should also contain less responsible statements. When Mr. Read wrongly paraphrases the Unity of Theory and Practice as: "the validity of theory must be tested in the field of activity", the mistake is not very important; but when he says "(the surrealist) generally claims that he is a more consistent Communist than many who submit to all manner of compromise with the aesthetic culture and moral conventions of capitalism", he is exposing a dangerous tendency among certain surrealists. This Trotskyist 'more communist than the communists' attitude must be carefully guarded against. The Communist Party, with its policy of instant recall and maximum discussion of all issues before decisions are taken, is the most democratic organisation to-day, and those who, claiming to be communists, remain outside the party and criticise it, show not their independence but their irresponsibility. Mr. Read, however, merely states this claim of some of the surrealists without comment, and it would be wrong to suppose that he is generally opposed to the Communist Party.

The attitude of the surrealists to the United Front also needs clearing up. To-day, when the building of a United Front is the major issue in every capitalist country, it is particularly important that the intellectuals should understand all its implications. Compromise with all progressive parties and people is essential and does not entail, as some surrealists seem to think, any betrayal of principles. And when they attack "our enlightened priests, with their pacifism and their science degrees", it is to be hoped that they will nevertheless be willing, if necessary, to work with those same priests to achieve immediate demands. For though christian-
ity is generally a weapon of counter-revolution, it still has a democratic rôle to play in certain circumstances, as can be seen in Nazi Germany.

On the whole, however, the Bulletin shows a strong desire for co-operation with the revolutionary movement both in the ultimate overthrow of capitalism and in the immediate struggle against fascism. As long as the surrealists will help to establish a broad United Front (and not delude themselves, as one member did, into imagining that there is any revolutionary part to be played outside the United Front - a theory which has been quashed once more by the example of the Spanish civil war), there is no reason why there should be any quarrel between surrealism and communism. In the meantime it is good to learn that the Artists' International has invited the surrealists here to affiliate to it, and it is to be hoped that they will accept without reservation.

(Reprinted from Contemporary Poetry and Prose edited by Roger Roughton: Aug.-Sept. 1936, pp.74-5.)
APPENDIX II

DAY LEWIS JOINS UP

Cecil Day Lewis, the poet (a member of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture) has joined the selection Committee of the BOOK SOCIETY.

The Hon. Chairman of this Committee is Mr. Hugh Walpole. The members are

1. Professor George Gordon, President of Magdalen College, Oxford. ("In this position he is in direct succession to a line of scholars and men of letters... He served with distinction in the war").

2. Clemence Dane. ("Her play, A Bill of Divorcement, had a long run in London, and was followed by Will Shakespeare, which, in the opinion of many critics, was a yet more remarkable performance. She is regarded as one of the most brilliant women of her generation").

3. Sylvia Lynd. ("Before adopting literature as a career she passed through the Slade School and the Academy of Dramatic Art").

4. Edmund Blunden. ("Primarily a poet, his sensitiveness to the world around him, linked with his love of the traditions of English writing, drew him into prose").

Ex-Committee member: Mr. J.B. Priestley.

"The Book Society system solves the problem of personal selection"...

"You receive, on the day of publication early each month, a first edition of a book which has been chosen by the Cttee from the advance proofs sent by all publishers. It may be an excellent novel, a first-class biography, or a lively, well-written book of adventurous travel".

"I live in a remote district, and one of the greatest thrills I now have is the monthly reception of a neat green box, containing I know not what book. But I do know it will be something as fresh as the first primrose".

Recent primroses:

Autobiography of Noel Coward.
News from Tartary, by Peter Fleming.
The Fountain, by Charles Morgan ("The Charles Garvice of the Upper Classes").
Katter's Castle, by A.J. Cronin.
Bengal Lancer, by F. Yeats-Brown.
Some recommendations:

Ego, by James Agate.
Victoria of England, by the Old Jane.
Shakespeare as a Dramatist, by (Sir) John Squire.
The Uncelestial City, by Hambert Wolfe.
The Friendly Tree, by C. Day Lewis.

(Also Shakespeare's Complete Works).

The Book Society is a Limited Company pimping to the mass bourgeois mind and employing 'distinguished' members of the literary underworld, adopters of literature as a profession, writers each of no more real existence than a tick lost in the last five minutes of a cuckoo clock. On this Committee, Mr. Day Lewis no doubt will be Change, Revolution, Youth, the Rising Generation. But this ends his stance as the Poet writing thrillers (result: respectful, knowing reviews of each thriller) and establishes him as the Thriller Writer, the Underworld Man, the yesterday's newspaper, the grease in the sink-pipe of letters who has been posed for ten years as spring water.

Think of Hardy, Yeats, Housman, Flecker, Pound, Lawrence, Eliot, Graves, Auden, Spender, Madge - could one have gone so treasonably against what is real? Mr. Day Lewis and his Legend are now liquidated: the liquid has flowed to its oily shape and low level in the old sardine tin of Respectability. Mr. Lewis has drained himself off, a Noyes, a Binyon, a Squire, a dullard.

We can get along without him.

Geoffrey Grigson

"When I hear the word Culture I reach for my Browning", says the Nazi Stormtrooper in the Nazi play amidst Nazi applause - and when a fascist reaches for a revolver he pulls the trigger. In Granada early in September the fascists murdered Federico Garcia Lorca, Spain's greatest modern poet. Lorca was not a communist or a socialist and took no active part in politics, but he was admired throughout democratic Spain, so fascism reached for its Browning.

There is no longer a fence for intellectuals to sit on: they must choose between fascism and anti-fascism; and magazines of modern poetry can no longer pretend they are Something Apart. The Spanish people are fighting against fascism; they need money, food, arms; "non-intervention", when the fascists are being armed by other fascist countries, is criminal; "non-intervention" means active help to fascism. And fascism means torturing of liberals, socialists, communists, pacifists, intellectuals, the burning of books and pictures, the negation of art and liberty. 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. Fascist or anti-fascist: which is it to be?

(Reprinted from Contemporary Poetry and Prose edited by Roger Roughton: Oct. 1936, p.106.)
He (Federico García Lorca) was at Granada at the time of the revolt, and had taken refuge with a friendly shopkeeper called González. But the man had two sons who were fascists. Federico was denounced, dragged away with ignominy, and condemned to death for having in his possession a letter from Don Fernando de los Ríos — from a university professor well known and greatly respected in England and America, and one who had been the honoured guest of Heads of Houses both at Oxford and Cambridge.

The murder took place between August 10 and 15.

It was useless to intercede with the rebel "authorities", and the people of Granada had the privilege of seeing a poet's books publicly burnt in the Plaza del Carmen as a new auto da fé. The circumstances of the arrest, the trumped-up charge and the barbarous detail of the burning of books of verse show what the attitude of military-clerical reaction in Spain is likely to be towards literature and art. The least an English friend can do is to make these things public.

(Reprinted from Contemporary Poetry and Prose edited by Roger Roughton: Nov. 1936, p.138.)
Against the appalling mental and physical suffering that the Spanish Civil War is involving, we can already offset certain gains to humanity which will remain whether the Government of the People conquers or not; gains of knowledge which have been purchased far too dearly, but which for that very reason have an imperative claim on our attention. They are these:

1. No one can continue to believe that, if a People's Government is elected constitutionally, Capitalism will be content to oppose it only by constitutional means.

2. No one can continue to believe that violence is the special weapon of the proletariat, while Capitalism is invariably peaceful in its methods.

3. No one can continue to believe that Fascism is a merely national phenomenon. It is now abundantly clear that in a crisis the Fascist countries emerge as parts of an international whole, the International of Capital. German and Italian arms are killing the people of Spain.

4. No one can continue to believe that Fascism cares for or respects what is best in humanity. In Garcia Lorca, the foremost modern poet of Spain, they have assassinated a human life which was especially valuable. Meanwhile the People's Government have made Picasso director of the Prado, hoping to widen still further the scope of his work for humanity.

5. No one can continue to believe that our National Government has any right to speak in the name of democracy. It has assisted in the crime of non-intervention; it has refused to allow the export of arms to a Government democratically constituted, and has regarded with equanimity the assistance given by Fascist powers to the rebels. There can be no more conclusive proof of its real sympathies than its conduct towards Portugal. Portugal is a British financial colony, and depends on British arms for the protection of its overseas possessions. A word from our Foreign Office would have secured her immediate adherence to the pact of non-intervention. Evidently that word has not been given. The National Government has permitted the Portuguese dictatorship to assist the rebels in complete freedom; at every stage of the campaign the rebel armies have been based on the Portuguese frontier.

If these things are clear, we are the gainers in so far as we know inescapably where we stand with regard to Fascism, to the People's Government, and to the National Government of Britain. And in the light of this knowledge we support the popular demand that the ban on the export of arms to the Spanish Government be lifted. We accuse our National Government of duplicity and anti-democratic intrigue, and call upon
it to make at once the only possible reparation

ARMs

FOR THE PEOPLE OF SPAIN


ISSUED BY THE SURREALIST GROUP IN ENGLAND.

(Reprinted from Contemporary Poetry and Prose edited by Roger Roughton: Nov.1936, pp.130-131.)
APPENDIX VI

1914-1938

BE WARNED

BY RUPERT BROOKE

In 1913 and 1914 Rupert Brooke declared:

I want to walk 1,000 miles, and write 1,000 plays, and sing 1,000 poems, and drink 1,000 pots of beer, and kiss 1,000 girls, and - oh, a million things.

May, 1913.

All I want is life in cottage, and leisure to write supreme poems and plays.

March, 1914.

I want to live in a hut by a river and pretend I'm Polynesian.

April, 1914.

I'm so uneasy - subconsciously. All the vague perils of the time - the world seems so dark - and I'm vaguely frightened.

July, 1914.

But there's a ghastly sort of apathy over half the country and I really think large numbers of male people don't want to die - which is odd. I've been praying for a German air raid.

Xmas, 1914.

Are you wiser than Rupert Brooke?

Winston Churchill delivered a funeral oration over Brooke in The Times. The Old Fury is still under age for a funeral oration about you.

TAKE CARE

(Reprinted from New Verse 29, March 1938, p.25.)
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