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Martin John Fletcher

The view from *The Waste Land*: how Modernist poetry in
England survived the Great War

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For Ana, my wonderful Carioca wife, and my loving son Edward

For my mother, Grace May, who has supported me in all I have done,
and my brother Graham, a true friend

In memory of Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen and all the Great War
poets who gave their lives selflessly and gifted us with their poetry

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RESUMO

O poema icônico de T. S. Eliot *The Waste Land*, publicado em 1922, é indiscutivelmente o texto principal de poesia moderna em inglês. Eliot residia em Londres no momento da sua composição, e embora o poema contenha numerosas citações literárias e culturais, *The Waste Land* não é considerado como tendo sido influenciado por nenhum dos poetas ingleses que foram contemporâneos de Eliot. Pelo contrário, o poema é tido como um afastamento radical e uma reação contra, a poesia inglesa escrita antes e durante a Primeira Guerra Mundial (1914-1918). Neste artigo, eu argumento que *The Waste Land* contém ecos da obra dos poetas ingleses Harold Monro e Herbert Read, ambos os quais conheciam Eliot bem. Olhando retrospectivamente a partir de 1922, tendo *The Waste Land* como meu texto modernista base e ponto de partida crítico, eu conduzo uma reavaliação da cena poética inglesa do período 1910-1922, a partir dos Georgian Poets do pré-guerra até o aparecimento, no pós-guerra, da obra-prima de Eliot. Ambos Monro e Read foram influenciados pelo movimento radical 'Imagism' de Ezra Pound, que formou um elemento central na cena da poesia progressiva de Londres nos anos que antecederam a guerra. Portanto, utilizo ambos *The Waste Land* e os experimentos 'Imagist' de Pound como modelos de prática modernista através dos quais comparar e contrastar a obra dos Georgian Poets (especificamente Wilfrid Gibson), a poesia produzida durante a Primeira Guerra Mundial, e a obra de Monro e Read. Os princípios orientadores da minha abordagem analítica são dois: em termos de prática poética, eu avalio o trabalho de Eliot e seus contemporâneos, comparando as suas abordagens quanto à forma, a fim de demonstrar como a forma poética não apenas define o conteúdo, mas também revela mudanças nos valores culturais. Em segundo lugar, minha abordagem teórica é baseada nos conceitos mutantes da função estética da poesia, buscando demonstrar como valores estéticos estão historicamente relacionados a, e determinam, a produção e a recepção da poesia, expondo como os experimentos modernistas de Eliot e Pound estão historicamente relacionados com princípios estéticos românticos.

Palavras-chave: T. S. Eliot; Ezra Pound; Imagism; Georgian Poetry; Herbert Read; Harold Monro.

ABSTRACT

T. S. Eliot's iconic poem *The Waste Land*, published in 1922, is indisputably the key Modernist poetry text in English. Eliot was living in London at the time of its composition, and although the poem contains numerous literary references, *The Waste Land* is not thought to have been influenced by the poetry of Eliot's English contemporaries. On the contrary, the poem is regarded as a radical departure from, and reaction against, the English poetry being written before and throughout the Great War (1914-1918). In this paper, I argue that *The Waste Land* contains echoes of the work of English poets Harold Monro and Herbert Read, both of whom knew Eliot well. Looking back retrospectively from 1922, with *The Waste Land* as my exemplary Modernist text and critical starting point, I carry out a reassessment of the English poetry scene from 1910 to 1922, from the pre-war Georgians to the post-war appearance of Eliot's masterpiece. Both Monro and Read were influenced by Ezra Pound's radical 'Imagism' movement, which formed a central plank in the progressive London poetry scene in the years leading up to the war. I therefore employ both *The Waste Land* and Pound's 'Imagist' experiments as models of Modernist practice by which to compare and contrast the work of the Georgians (particularly Wilfrid Gibson), the poetry produced during the Great War, and the work of Monro and Read. The guiding principles of my analytical approach are twofold: firstly, in terms of poetic practice, I evaluate the work of Eliot and his contemporaries by comparing their approaches to form, assessing how poetic technique both defines content and offers insight into shifts in cultural values; secondly, my theoretical approach is based on changing concepts of the aesthetic function of poetry, revealing how aesthetic values are historically relative to, and determine, the production and reception of poetry, ultimately exposing how Eliot and Pound's Modernist experiments are historically related to Romantic aesthetic principles.

Keywords: T. S. Eliot; Ezra Pound; Imagism; Georgian Poetry; Herbert Read; Harold Monro.

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Introduction

Though Eliot is unquestionably a central figure in the development of modern poetry, his achievement cannot be isolated from that of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries: in codifying the aims of the twentieth-century poet and clarifying his intentions, he pointed the way ahead, but his direction had already been determined by those who preceded him. John Munro (MUNRO, 1968, p. 34)

The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future. Jorge Luis Borges (IRBY & YATES, 2000, p. 236)

When a work of literature appears which transforms the landscape of imaginative writing, a shadow is cast over existing works which can suddenly find themselves exposed as naïve or out-of-date. We might think of Sterne's 18th century novel *Tristram Shandy*, which, amongst other things, radically challenged the concept of temporal representation in fiction. We may also cite Joyce's *Ulysses*, which, in a sense, advanced the issue of representation by revealing an inner world of random thought processes hitherto ignored by the purveyors of realism. The publication of *The Waste Land*, however, (subsequently referred to as *TWL*) revolutionised not only the reading and writing of poetry, it also played a major role in establishing English Literature as a legitimate academic subject.¹ Before *TWL*, the close reading of poetry, what we understand today as the *exegesis* of the literary text, had been considered neither appropriate nor necessary. At a stroke, Eliot's 1922 poem symbolises the emergence of Modernism after the Great War and ushers in a new era of critical analysis. The attention received by *TWL* in academia has hardly diminished in the century since its publication. In stark contrast, the lack of attention now given to Eliot's English contemporaries, who were writing and publishing poetry before, during and after the war, is lamentable. One of the unfortunate consequences of *TWL* is that its striking originality intoxicated critics and scholars to such an extent (as it does to this day) that they began to reject Eliot's immediate predecessors as irrelevant.

¹In her recent course on Modernism, Elisa New, Professor of American Literature at Harvard University, says "the experience of reading an Eliot poem tells readers of his day and ours that poetry is an art form that merits and maybe even requires study. Eliot's poetry plays a role in establishing the academic subject of English as we know it today. It is partly thanks to Eliot, for instance, that entire class periods are now devoted to the close reading of a single poem, and that there are even entire courses focusing on English and American poetry." <https://courses.edx.org/courses/course-v1:HarvardX+AmPoX.6+2T2016/courseware/92454bc31fa2495b8d409f29267546a7/cb49ad4d97ce4da0aeb3ab97f22e0a98/> accessed on 09/05/2016

TWL is widely interpreted as a revolutionary text that represents a complete break with the poetry being written by Eliot's English contemporaries. The work of the Georgians in particular is looked upon as derivative and ineffectual when compared with Eliot's masterpiece. This outlook has been forged partly because of the critical elevation of Great War poetry, none of which appears to suggest that a Modernist upheaval is about to take place. The fame of war poetry rests on its appropriation as either patriotic propaganda or graphic realism. The truth is that *TWL*, although ground-breaking and highly accomplished, does bear the imprint of the contemporary English poetry environment into which Eliot was integrated. Eliot's poem contains resonances of the work of two poets in particular: Harold Monro and Herbert Read, both of whom he treated as friends. I intend to examine these similarities and to contextualise *TWL* by presenting a portrait of the poetry scene in England in the decade before the poem was published.

In the process of comparing *TWL* with the work of his English contemporaries, I came to appreciate the sophistication of Eliot's poetic technique, the subtlety of his shifts of tone, and in particular the effort he expended on rhythm in the composition of the poem. Consequently, Eliot's poem influenced the way I judged the efforts of his predecessors and contemporaries. Even though, in some instances, I was examining poems that were written more than a decade before *TWL* was published, I found that I was using the poem as my touchstone of quality. I was, in fact, reading *backwards*, a process identified by Borges when he says "every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future." (IRBY & YATES, 2000, p. 236) In effect, *TWL* had become a prism through which I was examining the work of poets who had gone before. For this reason, I have settled on the title *The View from The Waste Land*, as that encapsulates my retrospective approach, looking back from 1922 when Eliot's poem was published and examining his precursors from that standpoint. Although there was a temptation to discriminate between Eliot and his contemporaries by suggesting that Eliot was the better poet, I have, for the most part, chosen to avoid such value judgements. However, my admiration for Eliot's accomplished technique is clear in many of the comparisons I make, in particular the work of the Georgian poet Wilfrid Gibson, who was not a member of Eliot's circle and where there is little evidence that Eliot had read much of Gibson's work. My intention is not to give the impression that Eliot was *imitating* the work of poets such as Monro, Read and Gibson, either consciously or unconsciously, but rather, in the Borges sense,

that my reading of *TWL* has allowed me to notice similarities and echoes that I would not have been aware of otherwise.

The second part of my title, *how Modernist poetry in England survived the Great War*, is designed to reflect how Ezra Pound's experiments with Imagism were not completely ignored by the poets writing during the war, as is often thought, whether they were soldiers in France or writing at home. In fact, as I will demonstrate, Imagist ideas managed to seep into the literary culture of London in the years leading up to the war. For this reason I also employ the Imagist method and Pound's aesthetic ideas as another kind of touchstone with which to make comparisons with both the work of my three chosen poets and that of the Georgians. The sense of *survival* inferred by my title alludes to the fact that the first shoots of Modernism which began around 1910 with Pound, T. E. Hulme and the Imagist circle, did not wither and die once the war came, but blossomed invisibly, as it were, unseen or ignored by poetry anthologists. Pound undoubtedly plays the lead role in the emergence of Modernism in England as he not only launched Imagism, he also edited *The Waste Land*, radically pruning Eliot's manuscript and profoundly influencing the manner in which the poem was interpreted. The poetics and critical ideas of both Pound and Eliot, therefore, form the basis of my reassessment of the work of the English poets who were both writing during this crucial period leading up to and including the war.

My critical approach specifically engages with the issue of *form* in poetry, considering how metrical frameworks, rhythm techniques, line lengths, sound patterns and tones of voice all play a crucial role in achieving aesthetic effects which determine the reception of the poem. This has particular significance in my evaluation of *TWL*, the interpretation of which has been dominated historically by what I call "content-heavy" analyses. By examining form in this way, and making comparisons between the styles of poetry which appeared in England in the years surrounding the Great War, it was also necessary to engage with the complex issue of aesthetics. One of the guiding principles of this study, therefore, is to consider the role of aesthetics in both the production and reception of poetry, especially as it applies to different categories or "movements" in poetry: for example, Romantic, Imagist, Georgian, Modernist.

My approach prompted a division of the thesis into two parts, a thematic rather than chronological division. It was important to examine the advent of Modernism by placing Pound and Eliot together in *Part One*, despite the leap of time between Imagism and the

publication of *TWL*. Pound and Eliot are so inextricably linked in terms of the Modernist phenomenon that any chronological accuracy had to be sacrificed. This re-ordering corresponds with my critical approach: examining Pound's Imagism and Eliot's *TWL* before moving on to a reassessment of English poetry to demonstrate how the view I am taking is retrospective. *Part Two* of the thesis is an assessment of English poetry from 1910, the beginning of the Georgian era, until the publication of *TWL* in 1922, a twelve-year period which included World War One (WWI) from 1914-1918. The war undoubtedly casts a shadow across the early Georgian period and much of the poetry written during the period was either in response to the conflict or a reaction against it. Although several of the poets who became soldiers were associated with the forward-thinking Georgian movement, there is clear evidence to suggest that formal experimentation in poetry was, in a sense, suspended for the duration of the war, and this is exemplified by the war poems I have chosen to examine.

Modernism inevitably provokes questions about aesthetics; reminds us, in fact, of the fundamental issue of aesthetic categories and their relevance for the appreciation of literature. The aesthetic dimension is always speculative: the best we can hope for is to present thought-provoking questions, rather than satisfactory answers. My thesis begins with a brief consideration of the historical development of aesthetic notions concerning the status and function of literature, especially when applied to poetry. The American critic, M. H. Abrams, wrote a seminal essay in the 1950s, *Orientation of Critical Theories*, in which he takes a historical view of categories of the aesthetic function as they have applied to the study of poetry. Abrams' exposition demonstrates how the relationship between the artist, the work of art and the audience is both complex and historically relative; during different periods the status of each of these categories has oscillated. When the *mimetic* function of the work of art was considered paramount, for example, the artist's role was accordingly insignificant; in other periods, the audience has ascended to primary position when literature has been promoted as a medium for moral instruction. Eliot's poetry and his critical proclamations present us with a number of aesthetic difficulties, not least of which is his idea of the "objective correlative", the means by which the poet uses language symbolically to represent emotion: the poet *encodes* his feelings for the reader to decode or decipher. This emphasis on the artist as the source of the emotional content of the poem is essentially Romantic, and yet Eliot was not only an outspoken critic of Romantic poetry, he also claimed his poetry was "impersonal". It seems therefore, that, at least for Eliot, the Modernist experiment did not signify a radical transformation of the aesthetic dimensions of poetry, but a modification of

Romantic notions. This frustrates the idea that Modernism represents a radical restructuring of the aesthetic coordinates, or indeed a complete break with accepted aesthetic ideas. What the intimidating erudition of *TWL* introduced into the critical appreciation of poetry was a rigorous intellectual dimension which appeared to demand extensive thematic interpretation. Thus, the drive towards producing definitive readings of the poem detracted attention away from its status *as poetry*, as a rhythmical performance.

Despite the persuasiveness of many of Eliot's critical opinions, he is ultimately unable to delimit the variety of responses to his poetry. Probably the closest we can get to a workable definition of the Modernist aesthetic is to suggest that the response is heightened by the *form* of the poem, rather than its content: it is the formal qualities of the language itself that excites us as readers; the rhythms, soundscapes, tonal modulations and unpredictable juxtapositions. As I repeatedly claim, we need to train ourselves to appreciate the music of poetry, rather than ponder its potential meanings. It is Eliot himself who tells us that poetry should be considered as poetry and not another thing. If our aesthetic response to a Beethoven sonata does not depend on rhetorical translation, then surely we are doing poetry a disservice if we reduce it to paraphrase. Eliot also makes another assertion which serves as a leitmotif throughout this study when he says that "the work of art cannot be interpreted" because "there is nothing to interpret".² Unfortunately, Eliot's maxim has not prevented an endless proliferation of interpretations of Modernist literature, many of which have been expended on his own poetry.

The emergence of Modernism in England has one man at its centre: Ezra Pound. Pound was debating and experimenting with new ideas for poetry more than a decade before *TWL* was published. Although T. E. Hulme was also a crucial figure in the development of Imagist ideas, holding poetry soirées and discussing the image and French Symbolism in London before Pound had met him, it was Pound's determination and energy that launched Imagism as a new movement in poetry. Pound's name has been irrevocably tarnished by his Fascist sympathies during the Second World War, though this should not preclude an assessment of his enormous influence on the direction of poetry in the early 20th century. As the relationship between an artist's political convictions and his or her work is a complex and

² Eliot makes this observation in his essay on Hamlet published in 1919, three years before *TWL*. "*Qua* work of art, the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret; we can only criticize it according to standards in comparison to other works of art." See KERMODE, Frank (Ed.). *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1975, p. 45.

emotive topic,³ Pound's Fascism would have to be the subject of another dissertation. I am not suggesting that Pound's politics are irrelevant to any interpretation of his work, but that there is a danger in using his wartime pronouncements in the 1940s as a prism through which to judge work he did more than twenty years before. Pound's experiments with the Image and his striving for new aesthetic categories can be seen as a campaign to elevate poetry to the status of music; Pound believed that poetry was at least as technically complex as music and that it was crucial for poets and critics to study poetic form. In a sense, Pound's Imagism forces us as readers to reflect upon both formal technique and on the aesthetics of reading because the poetry refuses to offer easily-digestible meanings; there is always an indeterminate residue which escapes the interpretive process in Imagist poetry. According to Frank Lentricchia, "The 'image' is lyric, it tells no story." (LENTRICCHIA, 1994, p. 191) Imagism had its roots in French Symbolism, a belief that language does not depend on a rhetorical voice to convey its meaning: the meaning is language itself, with its visual, tactile and allusive qualities. The Imagist manifesto was a call to action for poets to strip their verses of flowery adjectives, hackneyed phrases and what Pound called "emotional slither". The new poetry would be hard as crystal, emptied of sentiment, reduced to a state of juxtaposed images which couldn't be easily resolved, but which flickered in the process of reading. Pound believed poetry should be considered a "pure" art form, an idea that resonates through the crystallised language experiments produced by the Imagists, which elevated language to become the aesthetic object of contemplation. Imagism is now looked upon as a kind of literary *fashion*, a moment of intensity that soon lost its impact and became just another historical movement. Today, even people who specialise in poetry would be hard-pressed to name a handful of Imagist poets. However, though the poetry itself may have dropped off the radar, Pound's innovative ideas have not lost their imaginative and critical force. Imagism exposed the limitations of poetry which presumes that beauty resides in the unified, lyric voice; that reading is a process of identifying a meaning or meanings; that poetry is a means of *transferring* emotion through the transparency of its language. Pound's approach to poetry before the war deliberately challenged the intellect, and his Imagist experiments serve to remind us that language is not directly representational, technique is of primary importance in poetic composition and the aesthetic dimension of poetry is defiantly enigmatic.

³ In the highly-charged political atmosphere of the 1960s, Pound's Fascism was sometimes looked upon as reason enough to disparage his work. According to Michael Schmidt, "When Robert Lowell read one of the Pisan Cantos at New College, Oxford, in 1968, half the audience walked out in protest." See Schmidt's *Lives of the Poets*, London: Phoenix, 1999, p. 690.

Despite the inevitable diversity of much poetry deemed to be Modernist, I think it is important to try and establish at least some of its distinguishing features at this stage. It is fairly safe to say that Modernist poetry, particularly of the kind pioneered in England by Pound and Eliot in the early decades of the twentieth century, is deliberately difficult to consume, a self-conscious literary form that provokes reflection and debate. We might also say, aesthetically speaking, that it elevates technique and formal experiment and thereby complicates the emotional reader response normally associated with poetry. Eliot's juxtaposition of various poetic forms and mixing of speech registers in *TWL*, for example, along with allusions to myth and symbolism all contribute to an image which is defiantly enigmatic. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Modernist poetry emerged at a time not only of huge technological advances, but also when the European powers were threatened by the social upheavals of mass labour and mass society; a time of war and moral and spiritual crises when human values (and old cultural forms) were being severely questioned; a philosophical moment of severe instability following the iconoclastic grand narratives of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, when certainties about social class, political power, religious ethics and the human condition had imploded.

Modernist poetry provoked many important questions about the status of literature in the 20th century. With the emergence of oblique, experimental forms, the mimetic function of poetry was frustrated and its linguistic materiality foregrounded. Although poetry had always contained extra-semantic elements such as rhyme, rhythm and metre, modern forms alluded to the possibilities of appreciating poetry as a kind of linguistic performance that somehow held meaning in check; poetry could be enjoyed sensuously, in a similar way to the contemplation of music or a work of sculpture. It is not surprising that following the seismic ideological crisis of world war the speaking voice normally associated with poetic diction was viewed with suspicion. Even before the war, however, Pound's Imagist experiments followed a path which suggested there could be an aesthetic encounter with poetry which fractured the semantic logic of the words themselves. As I argue throughout this study, poetic form, in all its incarnations, is the key to a greater understanding of not only the cultural significance of Modernism in the early 20th century, but also assumptions about the aesthetic function of poetry itself. When meaning is placed in parenthesis, or at least fiercely debated, as it is with much Modernist poetry, form offers a privileged insight towards a deeper understanding of the poetic text.

Writing about *TWL* is always fraught with difficulties as it is impossible to be inclusive: so much has been written and said about Eliot's poem that fresh attempts to engage with the text merely add to the mass of critical discourse which surrounds it. My chapter dedicated to *TWL*, therefore, is not another interpretation⁴, but a contextualisation of the poem as a text which invites interpretation at the expense of its lyrical, formal and musical qualities. In the first half of the chapter I examine various political readings of the poem to highlight the futility of such interpretive attempts; I then concentrate on the poem *as a poem*, as an aesthetic object whose beauty rests in its sophisticated formal technique, rather than any paraphrasable meaning. The proliferation of attempts to *explain* the poem has provoked a series of paradoxes concerning the poem's iconic status, and these I attempt to deconstruct. The most salient paradox about *TWL*, however, is that all interpretations attempt to paraphrase the inexplicable; to define an aesthetic object which needs to be *experienced*; to interpret a work of art when, as Eliot says, there is nothing to interpret. In the wake of the poem's notoriety, Eliot, who had considered publishing *TWL* as separate poems, nonchalantly dismissed the fanatical attention his text had received by saying it was "just a piece of rhythmical grumbling".⁵ Nevertheless, the poem is still widely interpreted as a vital piece of social commentary, as representing a consistent "voice" with a "message" and as an evocation of the spiritual crisis which followed WWI (my title for this section is *Fusing the Voices*, a reference to the fact that the poem is invariably interpreted as a continuous utterance).

Political interpretations of the poem forced Eliot to make public denials about the existence of such themes, despite the fact that part of the poem's effect depended on its references and citations from classical literature: although the poem was integrally bound up with history by its contents, Eliot refuses to accept that it might be read as a conservative response to the post-war *existential* predicament. Part of the problem is the insistence on "close reading" as the definitive analytical approach to the poem; the belief that *TWL* is a text that demands *exegesis* to unearth its deep significance. This is despite the fact that in several places the poem clearly descends into parody and Eliot has his tongue firmly in his cheek. That the poem might have a comic streak running through it is considered disrespectful to its grandeur. Eliot insists the poem is personal, though it is insistently interpreted as impersonal:

⁴ Any attempt to carry out a thorough thematic or formal analysis of *The Waste Land* would have been protracted and inappropriate for the purposes of my argument. I engage with the text of Eliot's poem throughout the thesis, however, most particularly in the final chapter when I compare it to the efforts of Gibson, Monro and Read.

⁵ Eliot writes: "Various critics have done me the honour to interpret the poem in terms of criticism of the contemporary world, have considered it, indeed, an important piece of social criticism. To me it was only the relief of a wholly insignificant grouse against life: it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling." See KERMODE, 2003, p. xix.

as an objective literary rendition of a historical moment. The historical value of the poem, however, is essentially *formal*, as a textual record of the state of poetic technique in 1922. There is no secret in *TWL*; it is a poetic *performance* that was never intended to be understood. The poem demands to be read not as a statement, but as a poem. The critical discourses within which *TWL* has become entangled are perpetually reproducing interpretations of the poem at the expense of its formal, poetic qualities: the musicality of the poem, as performance, as entertainment, has been neglected.

In *Part Two* I begin with a reassessment of the Georgians, a misunderstood and maligned group of poets whose work first appeared in the years leading up to WWI and continued until 1922. The Georgians have been so widely disparaged that it is difficult to examine their work without prejudice, especially as Eliot's poetry, which subsequently stole the lamplight, was written partly in reaction against what he saw as their pastoral complacency and post-romantic shortcomings. At the time, however, many of the poets who found their way into Edward Marsh's five anthologies were looked upon as audacious rebels who trampled on tradition. There is a sharp division, then, between critical evaluations of the Georgians even to this day: on the one hand they are seen as narrowly English in outlook, derivative in style and with an outdated focus on nature. Other critics have identified marked contrasts between the ornate verbosity of the Victorians, and the innovative Georgian approach to poetic composition, with an emphasis on plain language, directness and realism. Comparisons have been made between the Imagists and the Georgians who were their contemporaries, noting similarities in approach, such as the pruning of poetic diction, the absence of any doctrinal tones, and the subordination of the poet's personality; as with Imagism, Georgian poetry is designed to stand on its own, rather than act as a rhetorical lyric device.

Rupert Brooke's poetry often appears to fit into a negative Georgian stereotype: a light-hearted lyric tone depicting scenes from rural England or making declarations of love. These critical reductions, however, never fully encapsulate each poem's idiosyncrasies. In *Dining Room Tea*, for example, Brooke's language takes a tangential shift into the oblique when he attempts to portray a transcendental moment frozen in time. Isaac Rosenberg's *Ah, Koelue!* is striking in its enigmatic complexity, defying any easy interpretation. Much like an Imagist poem, *Ah Koelue!* presents itself as soundscape of words which resist logical meaning; an aesthetic object for contemplation rather than explication. The poem is composed like an exotic song, hinting that it should be appreciated in its "purity", as music. John

Drinkwater's meditation on light and colour, *Moonlit Apples*, appears naïve in its simplicity and traditional poetic form. The poem, however, is essentially a lullaby which depends upon the subtleties of its rhythm and rhyme patterns, the form determining the effect, with the lyric *presence* of the poet suspended. These poems illustrate how any attempt to unify the Georgian style is misguided. Eliot, whose enmity towards English Romantic poetry is well known, identified a parochial and post-romantic Englishness in the Georgians, dismissing them as "inbred". However, as a highly-influential critic, Eliot also contributed to the stereotyped image of the Georgians as dull dabblers in the pastoral. As Drinkwater's "lullaby" highlights in particular, any attempt to discriminate between the quality of aesthetic responses to poetry is highly questionable: *Moonlit Apples* may appear thematically simple and formally traditional, yet the images it distils are arguably as effective as those contained in many Imagist poems.

The coming of the Great War in 1914 provided a unique opportunity for budding English poets to portray their responses to the conflict in verse form. The proliferation of poetry produced at the time and its popularity with the reading public has produced a unique phenomenon in English culture: the war is understood through poetry, rather than history books. What is highly significant about this development is that much of the poetry inspired by the conflict is not considered for its aesthetic qualities, but as *reportage*. Wilfred Owen's poems, for example, are taught today in English secondary schools not in Literature classes, but as part of History courses; not as literary (aesthetic) artefacts, but as historical documents. Like the fate of *TWL*, the poetry of WWI is not read as poetry, but interpreted as rhetoric. The status of Great War poetry in England, which has fluctuated in popularity over the century since the fighting ended, has been dependent on the indiscriminate choices of editors who published numerous anthologies during and after the war. Because anthologists chose to promote patriotic verse from the beginning, they played a fundamental role in endorsing the recruitment drive for volunteer soldiers, and in producing representations of the war in the public imagination. Poetic responses to the war are now accepted as following a historical trajectory: initial patriotic enthusiasm giving way to disillusion and resentment, culminating in protest and anti-war sentiments. This established historical interpretation, however, is exclusive and misses much poetry which falls outside these categories.

Rupert Brooke's iconic war sonnet *The Soldier* is a prime example of how a poem was exploited for political purposes in the early part of the conflict and has since become a national treasure, representing a selfless and noble English patriotic spirit. That the poem is a

technically accomplished Petrarchan sonnet with an exemplary iambic pentameter rhythm, subtle cadences of tone and complex imagery is hardly considered relevant to its interpretation. The poem is still read today as a patriotic representation of the glories of English life, the images from which have been fixed in the public consciousness and have helped to cement patriotism as an appropriate response to war. Another famous poem, *In Flanders Fields* fictionalises the “voices” of dead soldiers who “speak” from their muddy graves, urging the reader to avenge their deaths by joining the conflict, or face the guilt of ignoring a deathly cry for help. The poem is still widely read during *Remembrance Day* services, again as an appropriate, heroic response to warfare. Such poems do not question, but romanticise the selfless heroism of dying for one’s country. By the end of 1915, however, after hundreds of thousands had perished, the mood changed and poets began to portray the futility of war.

Army captain and poet Siegfried Sassoon infamously made a statement in *The Times* newspaper in “wilful defiance of military authority” urging those in power to consider their “insincerity” in prolonging the slaughter for political reasons.⁶ Sassoon’s poem *Glory of Women* is an embittered attack on the deluded attitudes of soldiers’ wives who view their husbands’ battle wounds as emblems of heroism. Despite the poem’s sonnet form and iambic pentameter pattern, Sassoon’s sarcastic tone is in stark contrast to the flavour of Brooke’s *The Soldier*: Sassoon uses the traditional form ironically, disjuncting the mould and filling it with bile. A friend of Sassoon’s, Wilfred Owen, who has since become England’s most famous Great War poet, declared in the Preface to a collection of his work that it was “not concerned with poetry” but with war. This phrase epitomises the cultural reception of war poetry in England: the poetry most revered today is read as directly representational, even when the realism does not make logical sense. Owen’s iconic poem *Dulce et Decorum Est*, easily one of the most famous poems in England, has been memorized by millions of school children as a vision of war’s horrors, despite its unrealistic images. The poem is undoubtedly powerful, but its force is derived from its *poetics*, from its technical adroitness; the images are stark and harrowing, but their encasement in poetic form is what triggers the powerful effect. Owen has now become an antidote to Brooke; the latter’s misguided patriotism at the start of the war giving way to the former’s anti-war protesting at its close. However, what unifies all the poems I examine in 2.2 is how they have been appropriated for rhetorical reasons, for their doctrinizing “messages”. This treatment of war poetry in England exemplifies, in a sense,

⁶ A longer version of Sassoon’s *Times* statement appears in 2.2. See MURRAY, 2010, p. 115.

how politics can stifle aesthetics. It also explains how, for the duration of the war, poets with experimental tendencies were deemed inappropriate for publication and for public consumption.

Of my three chosen poets, Wilfrid Gibson was inextricably linked with the Georgians, an association which ultimately led to his work being considered naïve and outmoded. One of the consequences of the Modernist upheaval was that much poetry deemed traditional was, at least by the progressive elements of the critical establishment, relegated to the status of insignificance. Nevertheless, Gibson was considered something of a pioneer before the war, attempting to reduce poetry to “plain language” and make it relevant to the social realities of everyday life; to bring poetry up-to-date and down-to-earth. My reading of Gibson’s work exemplifies Borge’s idea that the critical approach I take has been “modified” by my reading of *TWL* and Eliot’s other poetry. Rather than suggesting that Gibson was a kind of pre-modern Modernist before *TWL*, there is a sense in which I see Eliot’s work as setting a standard to which Gibson’s poetry cannot aspire. Clearly, however, the two poets were very different practitioners and my approach is an attempt to find some common ground.

Despite Gibson’s repeated attempts to enlist in the army, he never saw action; his war poetry is a response to the conflict from the home front, how he imagined people in England were reacting to events on the Western Front. In his poem *Strawberries*, he depicts the internal monologue of a soldier’s wife, the colloquial tone of which has echoes in parts of *TWL*, particularly the pub scene from *A Game of Chess*. The salient difference between the two poetic techniques, however, is in the tone: Gibson is incurably sincere, which in itself is a mark of the pre-modern. Eliot’s tone is essentially ironic⁷; his voices are disparate and detached, donning masks and shifting into parody. When Gibson imports images of urban decay and squalor into his pastoral play *On the Threshold*, his intention is to expose the injustices of post-industrial human suffering. Eliot’s preponderant use of images of grimy city streets and domestic ugliness are not part of a coherent *protest*, they are his way of

⁷ Throughout this paper I make numerous references to Eliot’s use of *irony* in *TWL* and to what I call Eliot’s detached, *ironic* tone in the poem. I also suggest that other poets (Monro and Read, for example) at times achieve an ironic distance in their lyric tones, and in their detachment from the substance of their poetry. The concept of irony in literature presumes that there is an identifiable meaning that is not ironic in order for the irony to succeed: the narrator or lyric voice is deliberately expressing the “opposite” viewpoint to that which we expect as readers, given the context. This would presume that there is a serious meaning, or set of meanings, within *TWL* that Eliot is intentionally mocking by his lyric approach. However, my use of the terms irony and ironic distance are not intended to imply that there is always a serious “message” within a poem; rather that Eliot and other early Modernist poets challenge the rhetorical status of poetry by their departure from *sincerity* and their *disengagement* with the content; and it is this elusiveness of tone which characterises the irony in their work.

representing the disparity between high and low culture, and how the two co-exist uneasily in the modern world. Where Gibson's voice is engaged, Eliot's is detached. Eliot's technical mastery of poetic form also has a tendency to expose Gibson's shortcomings. In *Air-Raid*, however, Gibson exhibits adroitness with his juxtaposition of oblique images and vocabulary which clearly sets him apart from more traditionally-influenced Georgians. Ultimately, my comparison of Gibson and Eliot allows the latter poet's work to grow in stature, though it also serves as more evidence that the Georgians should not be so easily written off. Gibson's work is unique and unusual rather than derivative; he was not a Modernist, but neither was he one of the post-romantic pastoralists that Eliot so objected to. Gibson also didn't have Ezra Pound, "il miglior fabbro", as his mentor and editor.

Much like Pound, Harold Monro was a formidable champion of experimental poetry in England before the war, sponsoring and supporting numerous young poets eager to see their work published. As an editor, publisher and the owner of *The Poetry Bookshop* in London, Monro was at the epicentre of the Modernist movement for more than a decade, counting both Pound and Eliot as personal friends. Monro published Pound's *Des Imagistes*, the five volumes of Georgian verse and organised some of the first readings of many famous poems including Eliot's *TWL*. Like Gibson, Monro was turned down by the British army and spent the war as a civilian, though his work shows signs of a deep despondency which reflects the existential, post-war crisis. Eliot and Monro clearly admired each other's work, with Eliot claiming Monro had made headway in his poetry in ways no one else had at the time. War poetry expert Dominic Hibberd claims there are identifiable influences between the two poets that go both ways and spring from their mutual admiration. Eliot's infamous "carbuncular" young man in part III of *TWL*, for example, appears to have a forerunner in a "vacillating clerk" who appears in Monro's poem *Suburb*, the importance difference being that Monro's character engages in courtship before consummation, whereas Eliot's commits a form of sexual assault. One of Monro's most significant efforts, *Strange Meetings*, written in the early part of the war, is series of short poems separated by Roman numerals, the shape of which suggests a link with *TWL*. The separate poems appear to have only tenuous links with each other, suggesting Monro is exhibiting a kind of fractured viewpoint which reflects the historical uncertainty. These similarities between *Strange Meetings* and *TWL*, although notable, are ultimately frustrated by Monro's *tone*: there is an intimate and accessible quality to Monro's voice in these poems, a kind of English, middle-class timidity which sets it apart from Eliot's urbane and ironic detachment.

Monro's work, however, is not without irony or shifts of tone. *London Interior* shows the influence of Imagism in its apparently haphazard juxtaposition of disparate images; there is also a detachment in the voice, a kind of world-weariness we expect from Eliot. Monro still relies on traditional habits of poetic form (as does Eliot, to a large extent), but the domestic setting of the poem and its disengaged tone show how Monro is attempting to break new ground. Monro's book of poems *Real Property* was published in 1922, the same year as *TWL*, making comparisons more historically significant. The poem *Introspection* from the collection contains a number of thematic elements which hinge around the impossibility of communication, a leitmotif we recognise from *TWL*: intellectual ineffectualness, muteness, ghostly presences, and, ultimately death. Inevitably, the two poets diverge stylistically and this becomes evident with the examples I employ. However, there is considerable evidence that Monro is beginning a process of *disengagement* of his lyric voice, drawing away from the "ghostly" characters that people the poem and capturing in his tone something of that ineffectualness that he is trying to locate in the verse. Ultimately, however, compared to Eliot's ventriloquism, Monro appears to be hampered by a misplaced loyalty to a post-romantic lyric sensibility, as if he is constrained by an English gentlemanly timidity that prevents his voice from cracking or from descending into parody or sarcasm. The impression that lingers from Monro's verse is that of an experimenter who was bold in approach and in subject matter but, in his quiet reasonableness, unable to match that boldness in his lyric tone.

Herbert Read is the most recognisably Modernist of the three poets I have chosen to reassess, though as a self-confessed Imagist, it is difficult to determine exactly how he may have influenced Eliot's composition of *TWL*. Read began to engage with issues of aesthetics, poetics and the function of art early in his life and never wavered from this path, becoming a professional art critic, academic and public intellectual. His dedication to aesthetic issues in poetic composition is particularly remarkable during the war years, when he served in France as an Army Captain; by experimenting with form and imagery he was predictably ignored by the compilers of war poetry anthologies. Like Monro, Read was a good friend of both Pound and Eliot and his poetry reflects both these relationships in unique ways. Read describes his poetry as a compromise between dream and reality and his disjointed verses and oblique imagery often appear as the scattered impressions of a disinterested observer. Although his distinctive detachment of tone (something Monro lacked) and ability to adopt personas and don masks makes comparisons with Eliot enlightening, it was the physical shape of his poetry, his decision to publish series of poems together that initially provokes comparisons

with *TWL*. *Eclogues*, for example, is a set of twenty poems separated by Roman numerals and without clear thematic links between them. With a *solidity* of language and juxtaposition of nebulous images, many of the verses defy easy interpretation; the experience of reading becomes an “aesthetic encounter” with the text, in line with Pound’s Imagist principles. As war poetry, however, *Eclogues* exemplifies the gulf between Read’s experiments and the work of the mainstream published poets.

Dominic Hibberd identifies clear connections between Read’s series of poems *Scene of War*, published in 1919, and *TWL*, published three years later. Apparent similarities include the separation (again) of verses by Roman numerals, citations from other poets and a variety of forms and tones in the poetry itself. The predominantly oblique mood of the *Scene of War* poems also gives the impression that Read might have intended to convey a deeper significance, that the poem may have an allegorical undercurrent worth unearthing, in the manner in which *TWL* has been plumbed for its cohesive “message”. However, there are significant differences between Eliot’s poem and *Scene of War*: Eliot is obsessively engaged with the iambic pentameter in *TWL*, whereas Read displays an openness to rhythm, his verses evolving organically; Eliot’s poem is also peppered with rhyme and alliteration, while Read’s poems often appear to dispense with traditional poetics. Where the two texts do resemble each other, for example, is in the detachment of the lyric voice: despite the predominance of stark battle imagery, Read displays a dexterity for switching tones, from the engaged to the comic, from the sincere to the ironic. This, perhaps, is the essence of the Modernist touch: to avoid any consistency of lyric voice that might suggest authorial *presence*; the meaning is in the disparity, the irony, the masquerade. As critics, Eliot and Read agreed that poetry does not require a verifiable meaning, and that language has symbolic and musical qualities which reach beyond any simple definitions. Read’s courage in experimenting with language, image and tone in the face of war is remarkable, and for that alone he is unique; whilst neither a distinctive Modernist nor a consistent Imagist his work has elements of both and reminds us, perhaps, that the labels we use to categorize poets are always inadequate.

Although we inevitably engage in critical discrimination when judging whether a particular poet or a particular text is worth studying or teaching, I think it is crucial to acknowledge that the aesthetic contemplation of poetry is a highly complex issue and it is extremely dubious to suggest that a reader’s response to a poem such as *TWL* could be judged as richer or more profound than another reader’s response to a much less taxing poem. My aim in presenting a number of Eliot’s English contemporaries for critical analysis, therefore,

is not to make value judgements, but to produce a version of the literary context within which Eliot was composing his influential poem. I hope to show that, contrary to popular opinion, *TWL* was less a leap into the conceptual dark or an inscrutable avant-garde experiment, and more a product of its immediate literary environment. Eliot's poem is famous for its literary allusions and citations, though the influence of any of the English poets writing during the period leading up to its publication is thought to be non-existent. I hope to show a different version of that story.

A footnote regarding research:

One of the difficulties of researching material for this project was not merely the lack of available published poetry by my three chosen poets, but the problem of determining the exact dates of publication. This was important as all three continued writing poetry after *TWL* and I needed to be sure the poems I chose to examine and compare with Eliot's poem were written at the time of the war or just after. Some of my source material, including the *Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (one of the key books which inspired this project) and various websites that I used did *not* include details of the publishing dates of the poems. I would like to register my concerns about this for future researchers who may be embarking on similar studies of Modernist or WWI poetry which require chronological accuracy. The most useful websites I used for research are the following: <http://www.warpoets.org/> was useful for biographical information but contained no poems by Monro, Read or Gibson; <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/> has the source of each poem and the publication date, but only contains two poems by Gibson and none by Monro and Read; <http://allpoetry.com/> contains several poems by all three poets, but most of them are not dated; <http://www.poemhunter.com/> also features poems by all three of my chosen poets, but appears to contain no dates.

PART ONE

Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and the birth of Modernism

‘If Modernism is essentially...the art of anthology, of selection and collocation of material from the Imaginary Museum, responsible Modernists will respect the integrity of what they borrow and protect it by deploying it within a system of ironies which indicate what it means in itself and what it is being used to express in the new context, about the other material gathered in that context. This is how Eliot works. This is how Pound works.’

Michael Schmidt

(SCHMIDT, 1999, p. 693)

1.1 ‘Hiding behind form’: Modernist poetics and the escape from personality

Romanticism...has profoundly altered our practice as readers, the ways in which our expectations of what poetry should be have been altered or even created by the Romantic aesthetics of selfhood and self-expression, emotionalism and sincerity, encapsulated in Wordsworth’s famous dictum that ‘Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity’.

Matterson & Jones (MATTERSON & JONES, 2005, p. 53)

The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluent and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak...The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.

(James Joyce, 1916)⁸

The English poet Philip Larkin, who came to prominence in the 1950s and 60s, was deeply sceptical about the Modernist movement in poetry, especially as it was epitomised by Ezra Pound and his acolytes. Larkin’s main gripe about experiments in form which emerged in the early decades of the 20th century, whether in poetry, painting or music, was that a preoccupation with technique had alienated the audience. In an introduction Larkin wrote in 1968 for a collection of his own jazz reviews (Larkin was a fan of early, ‘classic’ jazz) he berated the purveyors of free-form, avant-garde jazz, which he found cacophonous and self-indulgent. Conflating the jazz musician Charlie Parker with Ezra Pound and Picasso as the principle *enfants terribles* of Modernism, Larkin uses his introduction to pour scorn on what he calls the “irresponsibility” of experimental art in the 20th century.

My own theory is that it is related to an imbalance between the two tensions from which art springs: these are the tension between the artist and his material and between the artist and his audience, and that in the last seventy-five years or so the second has slackened or even perished. In consequence the artist has become over-concerned with his material (hence an age of technical experiment) and, in isolation, has busied himself with the two principal themes of modernism: mystification and outrage. (LARKIN, 1985, p. 11)

Larkin is exhibiting a common response to abstract or defiantly enigmatic forms of art: audience frustration and boredom (which in Larkin’s case has turned to cynicism). This is an understandable reaction against any artist who has abandoned convention and denied easy access to the art object. However, Larkin’s analysis of the relationship between the artist, his or her material and the audience is historically particular: in complaining that through

⁸ This quotation from Joyce is spoken by Stephen Daedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, first published in 1916. Quoted in Whitworth (Ed.), *Modernism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, pp 64-65.

Modernism the relationship between artist and audience has “perished” he is presuming that the audience must in some way be placated; that shocking or overly-challenging the audience is not the function of art. Larkin is suggesting that the artist has a responsibility to the audience, one that precludes any attempt at “mystification”. The work of art must be at least comprehensible, and, presumably, pleasurable, at least to some of the audience. However, the artistic responsibility Larkin alludes to is only one version of the complex dynamic between the artist, the work of art and the audience.

Eliot’s own critical writing on poetry suggests an aesthetic approach which complicates any easy analysis of the relationship between poet and audience. He admits that poetry, in the modern age, must be “difficult”⁹, hence the need for formal experimentation which might frustrate the audience. However, he also expects the new forms of poetry to produce an emotional reaction in the audience, not directly, but in the reader’s recognition of an “objective correlative” which symbolises this emotion in an impersonal manner. This complexity is particularly evident in *TWL*, a poem which is, arguably, personal in its conception and yet which aims to be quite the opposite, to present myriad examples of poetic form and a babel of disparate voices which resolutely frustrate the reader’s attempt to identify any single, recognisable poet-author.

In this section of my study, I want to consider the aesthetic function of poetry as a means of illuminating the complexity of the relationship between Eliot the poet (and critic), the formal technique displayed in *TWL*, and the reader’s response to the poem. In particular, I want to examine the means by which the emotional content of Eliot’s poem is transferred to and experienced by the reader, through what Eliot calls the “objective correlative”, which implies that the poet’s personality must not be identifiable in the content of the poem. In order to contextualise aesthetic questions about poetry, I will employ a historical analysis of criticism as outlined by the American critic M. H. Abrams, who formulated a model by which to plot the significant shifts in aesthetic emphasis which underpin literary criticism since the time of Aristotle. By focusing on the salient features of Abrams’s taxonomy, I will attempt to illuminate some of the problems surrounding the production and reception of Modernist poetry in England leading up to the publication of *TWL*. The difficulty inherent in forming

⁹ In *The Metaphysical Poets*, published in 1921, a year before *TWL*, Eliot writes: “We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.” See KERMODE, Frank (Ed.). *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1975, p. 65.

any coherent critical response to Eliot's poem calls attention to its aesthetic complexity; readers of the poem are forced to examine the nature of the pleasure (or irritation) they experience during the reading process.

In the introductory chapter of his 1953 study *The Mirror and the Lamp: romantic theory and the critical tradition*, Abrams begins by classifying four essential elements of what he terms "the total situation of a work of art": (1) the work itself, (2) the artist, (3) the universe (or nature), and (4) the audience. (LODGE, 1977, p. 4) Abrams takes great pains to point out the looseness of his four terms of reference and offers numerous examples of the gradations which may be applied to them for a fuller interpretation of the model, especially in the case of the term "universe", which may stand for "particulars or types", "the beautiful or moral aspects of the world" or even "the artist's imaginative intuition", all of which stretch the term and the model. (LODGE, 1977, p. 4-5) Nevertheless, by means of these constituent parts and the dynamic interplay between them, Abrams attempts an overview of historical shifts in critical approaches to poetry, each of which demonstrates a revision of aesthetic concepts:

Although any reasonably adequate theory takes some account of all four elements, almost all theories...exhibit a discernible orientation to only one. That is, a critic tends to derive from one of these terms his principle categories for defining, classifying, and analysing a work of art, as well as the major criteria by which he judges its value. (LODGE, 1977, p. 4)

Abrams claims the trajectory of critical theory can be classified by recognising the hegemony of one of the four basic constituents or coordinates of his elected framework, an analysis which proves useful for understanding the relationship between Modernist poetry and the aesthetic response its formal experiments demanded. Abrams identifies the historical predominance of four critical theories or schools of thought, each one of which stresses a different aspect of the aesthetic model he proposes: Mimetic Theory ("universe"); Pragmatic Theory (audience); Expressive Theory (artist) and Objective Theory (work of art).

These formulations are useful for my examination of Modernist poetics, especially the relationship between the artist and the audience: in Eliot's version of the aesthetic, the poet's feelings are inscribed impersonally in the texture of the poem, to be recognised and felt by the reader by means of an abstract semantic or symbolic system. Not only is this theory ontologically dubious, it also presumes that the function of poetry is to communicate the mental and emotional processes of the poet, to *transfer* feelings linguistically. As we shall see, this is only one historically particular version of the aesthetic dimension of poetry, one classified by Abrams as "the expressive theory", which is inextricably linked to the early 19th

century Romantic Movement. Abrams summarises the fundamental principles of the expressive theory and its presumptions about the aesthetic function as follows: “A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings.” (LODGE, 1977, p. 17)

The centrality of the artist and the expression of feelings through art are recognisable as assumptions associated with Romantic poetry, a movement which clearly came late in the historical cycle of critical theories concerning literature. Arguably the first serious attempt to classify forms of poetry and their aesthetic function began with Aristotle. In the *Poetics*, the guiding principle of the forms of tragedy in classical Greece was “imitation”: the performance should evoke “pity and fear” from the audience by offering a plot which was a credible version of lived experience. “The plot is the source and (as it were) the soul of tragedy”, writes Aristotle. “Tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life...the events, i.e. the plot, are what tragedy is there for, and that is the most important thing of all. (HEATH, 1996, p. 11-12) For Abrams, Aristotle’s foregrounding of “imitation” in his classification of tragedy is fundamental in the formation of the “mimetic orientation”, what Abrams defines as “the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe”. (LODGE, 1977, p. 5) This highlights the prominence of “universe” as the most significant constituent of Abrams’s model in this classical phase of literary criticism. Although, for Aristotle, the reaction of the audience is all-important, the effect produced on the spectators is essentially one of recognition, rather than transformation: evocation of pity and fear does not necessitate any predictable change in the behaviour of the audience, especially in terms of moral instruction or guidance. Also, in mimesis, neither the poet himself nor his feelings play a crucial role in the aesthetic function of poetry. According to Abrams, Aristotle

does not assign a determinative function to the poet himself. The poet is the indispensable efficient cause, the agent who, by his skill, extracts the form from natural things and imposes it upon an unnatural medium; but his personal faculties, feelings or desires are not called on to explain the subject matter or form of a poem. (LODGE, 1977, p. 8)

The function of tragedy was to replicate a credible dramatic scenario through which the audience could experience the pleasure of pity and fear: the Greek theatre was an imitator of life-experiences without the pain associated with real tragedy. As Abrams explains, this model had considerable lasting power in the history of literary aesthetics: “‘Imitation’

continued to be a prominent item in the critical vocabulary for a long time after Aristotle – all the way through to the eighteenth century, in fact.” (LODGE, 1977, p. 8)

Nevertheless, before the 18th century, Sir Philip Sidney in his famous *Apology for Poetry*, written in the 1580s, was demonstrating a shift of emphasis from “universe” to “audience”, despite openly declaring his debt to Aristotle. Sidney writes, “Poesy therefore is an arte of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *Mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfetting, or figuring foorth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture: with this end, to teach and delight.” (LODGE, 1977, p. 11) The qualification at the close of the quotation is crucial here: poetry is not only designed to communicate pleasure to the reader, it also harbours a responsibility to “teach”. The function of poetry is to promote moral improvement, evidence of a shift towards what Abrams classifies as a “pragmatic” theory, which elevates the status of the audience in the aesthetic dynamic:

the needs of the audience become the fertile grounds for critical distinctions and standards. In order to ‘teach and delight’, poets imitate not ‘what is, hath been, or shall be’ but only ‘what may be, and should be’, so that the very objects of imitation become such as to guarantee the moral purpose.” (LODGE, 1977, p. 11)

Pragmatic theory, then, is characterised historically as the phase of criticism when art was expected to effect some recognisable change in the audience. When moral instruction becomes a chief priority of poetry, we have a situation when literature is judged on the extent to which the reader is improved by the act of reading; it is not enough to entertain without enlightenment. For Abrams, this demonstrates two things: firstly, that poetry becomes bound up with notions of rhetoric and its persuasive powers, and secondly, that the audience becomes the most significant element in the aesthetic dynamic.

Pragmatic criticism originated in the classical theory of rhetoric...an instrument for achieving persuasion in an audience...in order to persuade, the orator must conciliate, inform, and move the minds of his auditors. [] The pragmatic orientation, ordering the aim of the artist and the character of the work to the nature, the needs, and the springs of pleasure in the audience, characterised by far the greatest part of criticism from the time of Horace through the eighteenth century. (LODGE, 1977, p. 12-16)

According to Abrams, the longevity of what he calls the “pragmatic view” is witness to its historical and cultural force, an influence that he claims had hardly diminished in the Western world at the time of writing (1953). Nevertheless, the inevitable focus on the audience which characterises the pragmatic phase of criticism, with its emphasis on the improving power of art and literature, began to blur with the emergence of the Romantic Movement towards the end of the 18th century. W. H. Auden explains how what he calls the ‘Romantic Revival’ was determined by, and to some extent a reaction against, the forces of

the Industrial Revolution, certainly in England, where the ascendance of the mercantile, middle class had left artists without the wealthy patrons they had hitherto relied on. With the new stratification of industrial society, poets began to look inwardly, to examine their own feelings as a means of communicating with a new mass reading public within a mechanised society. Auden writes:

Isolated in an amorphous society with no real communal ties, bewildered by its complexity, horrified by its ugliness and power, and uncertain of an audience, they turned away from the life of their time to the contemplation of their own emotions and the creation of imaginary worlds...Instead of the poet regarding himself as an entertainer, he becomes the prophet, the “unacknowledged legislator of the world” (GUPTA & JOHNSON, 2005, p. 69)

This isolation had obvious repercussions for the poet’s choice of subject matter, though in broader terms it could be argued that the secular tendencies of the 18th century Enlightenment had already profoundly changed the conception of humanity, questioning the authority of God and putting man himself and his rational, reasoning powers at the centre of intellectual inquiry. Writing in 1931, the critic Edmund Wilson described Romanticism as “a reaction against the rationalism of the eighteenth century, and the physicists’ ‘mechanical’ view of the universe”, and argued that the movement constituted an assertion of “the rights of the individual against the claims of society as a whole”. (WHITWORTH, 2007, p. 65)

In terms of the historical development of aesthetic criteria in critical approaches to poetry, one of the salient features of this transformation was the ascendancy of the artist to the dominant focal position, displacing the “universe” in Aristotle’s mimesis, and the audience in Abrams’s pragmatic theory. The notion that the artist’s feelings and imaginative powers are crucial to the production and reception of a work of art are historically particular. That we read poetry expecting to have an emotional experience which is intimately related to a parallel emotional experience on the part of the poet is the product of a shift in aesthetic concepts derived, at least in part, from the Romantic Movement. A poem becomes a linguistic structure of feeling, as it were; the function of poetry is to encapsulate emotion in such a way that the reader will be able to sense those feelings and have a similar (or parallel) experience to the poet. Abrams cites Wordsworth’s Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800 as signalling a pivotal moment in the history of the aesthetic interpretation of poetry. In the Preface, Wordsworth characterised poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”, a vital expression of the creative imagination at work. In Wordsworth’s Romantic concept, says Abrams, “Poetry is the overflow, utterance, or projection of the thought and feelings of the

poet; or else...poetry is defined in terms of the imaginative process which modifies and synthesizes the images, thoughts and feelings of the poet.” (LODGE, 1977, p. 17)

We can see how, in Abrams’s historical overview of aesthetic questions relating to the critical judgement of poetry, there have been shifts of emphasis in the elements of the poetry dynamic. For Aristotle, the poetry of Greek tragedy was an “imitation” of the “universe” or the natural order of things; for Sir Philip Sidney, as for Samuel Johnson, it was not enough for poetry to delight the audience: it had to enlighten the reader by acting as a moral guide. According to Johnson, writing in 1768 about the plays of Shakespeare, “The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing.” (LODGE, 1977, p. 15) The supremacy of the artist himself, the potency of his feelings and power of his imagination, are essentially Romantic notions. There is, of course, an important sense in which all these approaches to literature have validity and it could be argued that the critical endeavour in contemporary culture inevitable contains traces of all the dominant aesthetic theories of the past. What Abrams’s historical vision allows us to see is the relative value of a variety of historical concepts of the poetic function. According to Abrams, there is always one particular concept of poetry that holds sway within any historical, cultural formation. It could be argued, then, that certainly in the early part of the 20th century, at a time when Modernism was emerging, the Romantic vision of poetry as a personal expression of the poet’s feelings was still dominating critical theory. The following quotation from Abrams concerning the hegemony of the Romantic creed serves as an illustration of an approach to poetry that sounds convincing even today, and one which we imagine the poet Philip Larkin would have appreciated:

The first test any poem must pass is no longer, ‘Is it true to nature?’ or ‘Is it appropriate to the requirements of either of the best judges or the generality of mankind?’ but a criterion looking in a different direction; namely, ‘Is it sincere? Is it genuine? Does it match the intention, the feeling, and the actual state of mind of the poet while composing?’ (LODGE, 1977, p. 18)

In a contemporary, postmodern context, such assertions may seem naïve: structuralism, amongst other post-war theories, attempted to demonstrate how assumptions about the author being a vital presence in works of literature were ideologically and ontologically suspect. However, as we will see later, if we mistrust the supposed emotional communication from poet to reader that Romantic poetry esteemed, the problem of identifying and defining alternative aesthetic effects that poetic language has on the reader becomes apparent. If, as readers, we do not “feel” a poem somewhere inside our emotional landscape, it is difficult to

imagine how that poem can maintain its attraction for us. This anomaly explains the negative reaction of many readers of Modernist poetry who, like Philip Larkin, interpret sophisticated technique and abstract images as obfuscation.

More modern critical approaches have taken a formalist view of poetry as a special case of language with its own grammar: the poem becomes a text which lends itself to formal analysis, the purpose of which is to classify linguistic techniques or idioms specific to poetry. In this way, it is the art object itself, or poem-as-text which becomes the main focus of critical analysis, what Abrams calls, in a fourth category, the “objective theory”. The significance of this development is that the three other constituent parts of Abrams’s model – artist, audience, universe – are conveniently held in parenthesis for the purposes of critical engagement:

the ‘objective orientation’...regards the work of art in isolation from all these external points of reference, analyses it as a self-sufficient entity constituted by its parts in their internal relations and sets out to judge it solely by criteria intrinsic to its own mode of being. (LODGE, 1977, p. 21)

This approach, associated with the American New Critics amongst other schools of thought, brings to mind some of Eliot’s assertions about poetry. John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks and others sought to analyse poetry as a discrete linguistic phenomenon; theirs was an exacting, formal approach which dispensed with notions of the poet’s original “intention” or the subjective effect the poem might have on the reader; the language of the poem constituted a self-referential system, the text a discrete aesthetic object that defied sociological analysis. The New Critics were undoubtedly influenced by Eliot’s critical writing and his system of classifying and evaluating poetry. In the 1928 Preface to his book of critical essays *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot wrote:

When we are considering poetry we must consider it primarily as poetry and not another thing...[it] is not the inculcation of morals or the direction of politics, and no more is it religion or an equivalent of religion, except by some monstrous abuse of words...a poem, in some sense, has its own life...(JULIUS, 1996, p. 207)

This appears to fit the criteria of the “objective theory” category proposed by Abrams, the poem being considered “in isolation” and devoid of any possible political significance. Eliot’s famous critical category, what he termed the “objective correlative” also appears to set a precedent for the New Critical approach to the analysis of poetry. However, Eliot’s “objective theory” did not preclude the sense of an emotional reaction experienced by the reader. What he suggested was that such a response could only be grasped if the reader had managed to *decode*, as it were, the *encoding* the poet had achieved in the poem. This brings us

to the issue which is central, I believe, in any examination of Eliot's poetry, and in particular *TWL*. How exactly are the poet's feelings encrypted into the poem? If *TWL* is a paradigm of what Eliot called the "impersonal" in poetry, how can its emotional content be recognised, if at all? If Eliot's poetry does indeed contain his own "feelings" in whatever shape or form he has decided to encode (or hide) them, how does that make the intention of his Modernist poetry radically different from the aims of Romantic poetry?

Abrams dedicates a large portion of his section on "expressive theory" to the English philosopher John Stuart Mill, in particular two essays Mill wrote on the subject of poetry in 1833, what we might call the twilight age of Romanticism. In keeping with the Romantic tradition, Mill describes poetry as the "expression or uttering forth of feeling" and argues that poetry must be true to "the human emotion". (LODGE, 1977, pp. 17-18) However, what makes Mill's approach to poetry particularly enlightening when compared with Eliot's, is the way Mill describes the means of transferring the emotional content of the poem. According to Mill, poetry "embodies itself in symbols, which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind", (LODGE, 1977, p. 19) an assertion that resonates strongly with Eliot's notion of the "objective correlative". To compound the similarity, in a review Mill wrote concerning Tennyson's early poems, Mill describes Tennyson's technique as "scene painting, in the highest sense of the term", and then qualifies the claim by describing Tennyson's poetic gift as

not the mere power of producing that rather vapid species of composition usually termed descriptive poetry...but the power of creating scenery, in keeping with some state of human feeling; so fitted to it as to be the embodied symbol of it, and to summon up the state of feeling itself, with a force not to be surpassed by anything but reality. (LODGE, 1977, p. 19)

For Mill, human "feelings" could become "embodied symbols" in poetic language, powerful enough to be "summoned up" by the reader and experienced with almost the same intensity as "reality". The poet's task was to use language symbolically, to juxtapose words and create images within a poetic framework somehow *inscribed* with "feeling itself". The personality of the poet was not central to the communicative, poetic act: it was the intensity of his feelings that mattered, and his ability to symbolically represent them. Compare Mill's conceptualising of the poetic act with Eliot's from 1919, almost a century later:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate

in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (KERMODE, 1975, p. 48)

Eliot doesn't seem to see any irony in admitting that poetry is an emotional experience; that the poet's feelings are what matters, and that his craft is to find the "objects" and "situations" that best symbolise those emotions in order that the reader can recognise them. And yet, also in 1919, Eliot was able describe poetry as "not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." (KERMODE, 1975, p. 43) Here, I think, lies one of the central paradoxes of Eliot's poetry: he insists on regarding the poet's "feelings" as central to the poetic act, hardly dissimilar from Romantic notions of poetry, and yet claims that the poet's "personality" must be always absent, undetectable in the poem. How, we might ask, can a poet register emotions in the language and imagery of a poem in a detached, impersonal fashion? Also, what are the aesthetic implications of a kind of poetry which communicates feelings symbolically and how are we to make sense of this exchange between poet and reader? Eliot later admitted, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* in 1933, that the poem exists in a kind of aesthetic limbo between the reader and the poet; he also suggests that the communicative function of a poem is only one aspect of its existence, as a poem is always an entity that defies reductive interpretative strategies.

If poetry is a form of 'communication', yet that which is to be communicated is the poem itself, and only incidentally the experience and the thought which have gone into it. The poem's existence is somewhere between the writer and the reader; it has a reality which is not simply the reality of what the writer is trying to 'express', or of his experience of writing it, or of the experience of the reader or of the writer as reader. (KERMODE, 1975, p. 80)

This is resonant of my argument in 1.3, where I suggest that *TWL* should not be mined for meaning or seen as a poetic statement about the post-war condition of culture, but appreciated for its musicality, technical mastery and diversity of tone. Nevertheless, the relationship between Eliot the poet and *TWL* remains complex and enigmatic, especially as his notion of "impersonality" does not sit well with other claims about the emotional content of poetry.

Eliot's ideas about the "poem itself" having its own "existence" might appear to be a way of abnegating responsibility; as if a poet's personality can never be truly identified within the formal structures or semantic codes of a poem. One of the most fascinating aspects of Eliot's poetry, however, is the *persona* of the poet himself: the voices we hear when reading *TWL*, for example, all seem to bear the Eliot hallmark; it seems the more Eliot attempts to "depersonalise" his poem, the more we recognise him. I have tried to encapsulate this paradox

in my title, *Hiding Behind Form*, suggesting that Eliot's highly sophisticated formal experimentation in *TWL*, together with the distancing effect of employing a babel of disparate voices, is an elaborate masquerade that is ultimately unsuccessful. Eliot apparently imagines that he has achieved the aim of the "impersonal" poet with his "objective correlative", and that his personality, to use James Joyce's phrase, has become "refined out of existence". Paradoxically, however, I would suggest that those readers of *TWL* who manage to connect most successfully with the "feelings" inscribed in its elaborate design are the ones who recognise T. S. Eliot behind the charade, or at least their imaginative reconstruction of Eliot the poet.

In his book *Discovering Modernism*, Louis Menand argues that Eliot was trying to write a poem that was "his own", and reminds us that "it was the common argument of *The Waste Land*'s early champions...that the poem was held together not by its meaning, or by its author's beliefs, or by metaphysics, but by the unity of a single, coherent authorial presence". (MENAND, 2007, p. 91) The fact that Eliot became an iconic figure in 20th century culture, a literary celebrity celebrated for his poetry, plays, scholarship and critical authority, makes it virtually impossible to read *TWL* without Eliot's iconographic *persona* seeping through. Although the voices we hear appear to fracture and dissipate any notion of a single "authorial presence", it is as if Eliot's ventriloquizing never completely disguises the jester behind the mask; Eliot may attempt to bury his own voice inside the characters which appear in *TWL*, but we always know it's him.

The author of the poem classes himself with the diseased characters of his own work – the clairvoyante with a cold, the woman whose nerves are bad, the king whose insanity may or may not be feigned. He cannot distinguish what he intends to reveal about himself from what he cannot help revealing: he would like to believe that his poem is expressive of some general reality, but he fears that it is only the symptom of a private disorder. (MENAND, 2007, p. 90)

There is nothing original about claiming that Eliot's critical assertions about poetry are not always in tune with his sensibility as a poet: the quest to formulate a poetic language which would "objectivise" personal feelings was defiantly challenging for any poet. In *The Fire Sermon*, for example, we find this:

"My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised a 'new start.'
I made no comment. What should I resent?"
"On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.

The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
 My people humble people who expect
 Nothing.” (NORTH, 2001, p. 15)

The first difficulty, if we subscribe to the “objective correlative”, is disassociating the “I” of the lyric narrator from Eliot himself, even though the “I” becomes confused with “He”, a possible distancing effect. Then we have the poignancy of rhyming “heart” with “new start”, with “He wept” in between, the cumulative effect suggesting a recovery from emotional suffering. There is also a mood of desperation in being able to “connect nothing with nothing”, an existential moment of hopelessness made stark by its contrast with “The broken fingernails of dirty hands”. Even in this short passage we recognise the enormity of trying to read *TWL* as an impersonal text. It also demonstrates, however, the compulsion we have as readers to focus on “the artist” and his powers of self-expression, a legacy, as we have seen, from Romantic notions of the aesthetic function of poetry, classified by Abrams as the “expressive theory”.

The paradox of Eliot’s critical assertions about objectivity in poetry and his own work which, for all its attempts at ventriloquizing, appears to reveal much about Eliot’s personal, emotional states, is picked up by the novelist and critic J. M. Coetzee. In his essay *What is a Classic?* (the title recalls Eliot’s own essay of that name) Coetzee writes: “For a poet who had such success, in his heyday, in importing the yardstick of impersonality into criticism, Eliot’s poetry is astonishingly personal, not to say autobiographical.” (COETZEE, 2001, p. 3) Coetzee suggests there is serious side to Eliot’s acts of parody and his claims about poets aspiring to the cultural role of a “music-hall comedian”: Eliot’s elaborate array of masks was nothing less than an attempt to reinvent himself. As an American in London, in awe of classical European culture stretching back to Dante and Virgil, Eliot’s New England insecurity manifested itself in the audacious way he carved his own name into the European literary tradition, both in his poetry and criticism. Coetzee describes Eliot’s efforts as

the essentially magical enterprise of a man trying to redefine the world around himself – America, Europe – rather than confronting the reality of his not-so-grand position as a man whose narrowly academic, Eurocentric education had prepared him for little else but life as a mandarin in one of the New England ivory towers. (COETZEE, 2001, p. 8-9)

Coetzee admits that this characterisation is “broadly unsympathetic”, and we might argue that Eliot’s talents as a poet, scholar and critic marked him out for much more than the life of a minor academic. However, Eliot’s ability to establish himself as a central figure in European culture not only redrew the map of poetry in the years following the Great War, it also allowed him to reconfigure categories of the aesthetic. According to Coetzee, Eliot’s

“astonishingly personal” poetry was based on his own emotional experiences as a sensitive aesthete, and his conception of the aesthetic function of poetry related to his own aesthetic experiences as a young scholar:

Eliot as a man and particularly as a young man was open to experience, both aesthetic and real life, to the point of being suggestible and even vulnerable. His poetry is in many ways a meditation on, and a struggling with, such experiences; in the process of making them into poetry, he makes himself over into a new person. The experiences are perhaps not of the order of religious experience, but they are of the same genre. (COETZEE, 2001, p. 8)

Virginia Woolf once described *TWL* as “Tom’s autobiography”¹⁰, suggesting that despite Eliot’s attempts to submerge himself in elaborate versification and parodic voices, it was still clear, at least to her, that the poet was baring his soul. Coetzee suggests that Eliot’s poetry functions as an attempt at reincarnation or reinvention, the various lyric voices which appear always leading back to the poet himself. What is striking about both these characterisations is that Eliot’s *feelings* are never an issue of contention: it appears to be acknowledged that the process of poetic communication implies the exchange of emotional experiences, harking back to the Romantic lyric.

This is surprising considering the formal complexity of Eliot’s poetry during the immediate post-war period, considered by many to be the epitome of High Modernism. If Eliot’s poetry was autobiographical, as Coetzee and Woolf claim, surely it would present far fewer problems of interpretation. Indeed, as I argue in 1.3, it is the enigmatic status of *TWL*, and the proliferation of discursive attempts to define it, which help to maintain the poem’s cultural centrality to this day. What is remarkable about *TWL*, as with other experiments with formal technique, is that the *impulse* to read the poem as an expression of the poet’s emotional state (and hence autobiographically revealing) is so strong that its inscrutable word-play and technical virtuosity are insufficient to dissuade such readings. Consider this passage from *A Game of Chess*, lines 97 – 105 of *TWL*:

Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
“Jug Jug” to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.

¹⁰ Woolf wrote in her diary in June 1922, four months before *TWL* was published: “Eliot dined last Sunday & read his poem...The Waste Land, it is called...Tom’s autobiography – a melancholy one.” See WOOLF, Virginia. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol 2*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980, p. 178

Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
 Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
 Spread out in fiery points
 Glowed into words, then would be savagely still. (NORTH, 2001, p. 8-9)

The extent to which this passage may be read as either expressive of the poet's feelings or autobiographical is tenuous to say the least. If Eliot's emotional life-experiences are indeed recognisable from these lines, it would be reasonable to assume that some form of poetic code or chart of symbols exists that we might employ to decipher the allusions and associations. Eliot's own *Notes to TWL* might be looked upon as such a guide, though the *Notes* turn out to be a topography of literary and scholarly references, rather than providing any insight into the thoughts and feelings of Eliot the poet. I will make the point several times in this study that meaning should not be the driving force in the appreciation of poetry; that content-heavy analyses of poetry tend to miss the music, the rhythms and sounds of poetry. What I am suggesting is that the language of poetry has an aesthetic quality which, in a sense, is *independent* of the thoughts and feelings of the poet; its resonances exist at a remove from the *intensions* of the poet, whether deliberate or implied. The aesthetic coordinates of such an approach detract from Abrams's "expressive theory" because it is not the feelings of the poet which are being communicated: in Modernist poetry in particular, the emotional "transfer" from poet to reader breaks down; the reader does not recognise or reproduce the emotions of the poet, but feels the evanescent suggestiveness of language.

For Eliot, however, complexity in poetry does not signal a move away from Romantic notions of an emotional communication between poet and reader, even accepting that this *transfer* takes place at the remove of what he calls the "objective correlative". In his essay *What is a Classic?*, written during the 1940s, Eliot warns that over-complicated poetry is at risk of dissociating itself from everyday speech:

[] complexity for its own sake is not a proper goal: its purpose must be, first, the precise expression of finer shades of feeling and thought; second, the introduction of greater refinement and variety of music. When the author appears, in his love of the elaborate structure, to have lost the ability to say anything simply; when his addiction to pattern becomes such that he says things elaborately which should properly be said simply, and thus limits the range of expression, the process of complexity ceases to be quite healthy, and the writer is losing touch with the spoken language. (KERMODE, 1975, p. 120)

We must presume from this that the section of *The Game of Chess* quoted above is an example of complexity used to express "finer shades of feeling". In terms of the aesthetic communication between poet and reader, however, such refined "feelings", though plausible, are virtually impossible to determine or define. There is certainly a "variety of music" in *TWL*'s rhythmical cadences and soundscapes, but it is arguably the music of Eliot's voice, his

different adopted tones which most enraptures us as readers. Indeed, I would argue that authorial presence in *TWL* is pressing to the point of being overwhelming. Eliot's parade of unreliable narrators and parodic voices may intensify the reader's confusion, but they ultimately fail to conceal his controlling spirit. Aesthetically speaking, *TWL* is fraught with anomalies: Eliot's experimental use of form as an "objective correlative" of his "feelings" complicates the reader's comprehension and leads to confusion; despite Eliot's ventriloquism, he is unable to disguise what we imagine as the "authentic voice" of the poet himself; the music of the poem – its sophisticated rhythms, metric patterns and soundscapes – are ignored by readers whose first instinct is to capture and paraphrase the poem's overall "message"; the complexity of *TWL*, its defiantly enigmatic passages and myriad voices do not deter us from reading the poem as autobiographical, as Coetzee suggests. Ultimately, it is Eliot's poetic ability as a master craftsman that most impresses us as readers and it is this which inevitably leads us to search for any traces we can identify of Eliot himself in the poem. Despite valid arguments for approaching *TWL* as a *text* shorn of any possible authorial intentions, for many critics the poem persists in symbolizing the thoughts and feelings of one man – Eliot the poet.

In certain ways, all of Abrams's aesthetic categories can be applied to Eliot's Modernist epic: *TWL* could be seen as *mimetic*, its chaotic disorder and competing voices symbolising the fractured consciousness and turmoil of modern life; the *pragmatic* approach could be employed to accentuate the spiritually enlightening qualities of the poem, the reading of which might help us to question modern values; the *expressive* theory could highlight the emotional suffering expressed by certain characters in the poem and contrast that with the jocularity of tone expressed by others, then relate these effects back to what we know of Eliot's personal experiences; or the poem could be examined by means of the *objective* theory, as a rich text in its own right, an aesthetic object which resonates with poetical effects and allusive imagery. Indeed, Abrams's categories allow us to appreciate the historical wealth and diversity of critical theories, all of which have potential for fruitful critical argument.

The particular difficulties that Modernist poetry presents to us as readers serve to highlight the complexity of applying aesthetic categories. The impulse we have, for example, to identify *feelings* which might allow us to experience a similar emotion, are frustrated by the lack of clarity. The apparent coldness of abstract forms forces us to examine notions of authorial identity and the relationship between reader and writer; it also throws up important issues about the aesthetic qualities of poetic language which is not immediately *mimetic*, but allusive or suggestive, language which might tap into our unconscious. Perhaps the most significant legacy of Modernist poetry is that it calls into question the very basis upon which

poetry provokes an aesthetic response; it forces us to reflect on our emotional reactions to poetry, and to ask ourselves how original and imaginative word-combinations, sounds, rhythms, allusions and imagery allow us to respond in unique ways as readers.

Abrams consistently refers to “aesthetic questions” in his essay, reminding us of the speculative nature of all attempts to understand the processes of art. Coetzee encapsulates the enigma of the aesthetic dimension in his essay *What is a Classic* when he reflects upon a moment in childhood which, he admits, changed his life. One Sunday afternoon, aged 15, the future novelist and critic was in the garden of his home in Cape Town when he heard music coming from the house next door. “As long as the music lasted”, he writes, “I was frozen, I dared not breathe. I was being spoken to by the music as music had never spoken to me before.” (COETZEE, 2001, p. 9) What the youthful Coetzee was listening to, though he didn’t know at the time, was a recording of Bach’s *Well Tempered Clavier*. Looking back, the novelist tries to understand the causes of his intense response to the music. In the essay, Coetzee has been examining Eliot’s identification with high European culture and wonders if, like Eliot, he too instinctively identified a cultural escape route to Europe. Coetzee wonders if, in his case, the music of Bach somehow symbolises a flight from the confines of South Africa.

[] is there some non-vacuous sense in which I can say that the spirit of Bach was speaking to me across the ages, across the seas, putting before me certain ideals; or was what was really going on at that moment that I was symbolically electing high European culture, and command of the codes of that culture, as a route that would take me out of my class position in white South African society...? (COETZEE, 2001, p. 10)

What is at stake, for Coetzee, is the *purity* of his response to Bach, what he classifies later in the paragraph as “a disinterested and in a sense impersonal aesthetic experience”. (COETZEE, 2001, p. 11) Of course, Coetzee can never be sure; neither can he be sure that such a thing as a “disinterested” and “impersonal aesthetic experience” is possible. Coetzee is asking questions because, like Eliot before him, when it comes to categories of the aesthetic, there are no satisfactory answers.

Listening to music may appear to be the *purest* aesthetic experience we can have, free of language and its associations, liberated from what Foucault has called “the malevolence of the sign”.¹¹ Nevertheless, defining that experience in aesthetic terms is as complex as

¹¹ Foucault writes in his essay *Nietzsche, Marx, Freud* in 1964: “from the nineteenth century on, beginning with Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, it seems to me that the sign is going to become malevolent. I mean that there is in the sign an ambiguous quality and a slight suspicion of ill will and ‘malice’.” The essay was published in *Nietzsche, Cahiers du Royaumont*. Paris: Les Editions du Minuit, 1964, pp. 183-92.

explaining our reaction to poetry, and in particular Modernist poetry, when our comprehension is suspended by problematical language that refuses to *signify* anything immediately. Arguably, the fascination of Modernist poetry (rather like that of the French Symbolist poets which Eliot admired) lies in its dislocation of the *signifier* from the *signified*, its exposition of language as aesthetic *in itself*, cut loose from the referent. This does not imply a cold, detached response from the reader: language always resonates with associations and allusions which inevitably touch emotional nerves. Indeed, Eliot's notion of the "objective correlative", his belief that "feelings" can somehow be inscribed within technically sophisticated poetic language must be considered a possibility. I would argue, however, that it is equally important to approach *TWL* and other difficult Modernist poetry, first and foremost *as music*, breaking with the Romantic impulse to locate and respond to the poet's emotions in any direct way. Eliot may indeed be "hiding behind form", as my title suggests, but if we listen to the musicality of that form – the rhythms, the soundscapes, the vacillating tones – we may hear his voice more clearly.

1.2 The Aesthetic of the Image: Ezra Pound and the emergence of Modernist poetry in England

Pound's "image" – a way of seeing as much as a new thing seen – is an honorific figure of perceptual concreteness in opposition to the method of "abstraction"; a figure for a truthful discourse in opposition to "rhetoric"; a figure of intellectual as opposed to sentimental control; of aesthetic necessity and social relevance as opposed to aesthetic "ornament" and social uselessness. Frank Lentricchia (LENTRICCHIA, 1994, p. 194)

The influence of Ezra Pound on the emergence and development of Modernist poetry in England before and after World War One is both immeasurable and indisputable. According to poet and critic Ian Hamilton, an authority on 20th century verse, "Everyone who thinks at all about modern poetry sooner or later has to take a view of Ezra Pound." (HAMILTON, 2003, p. 55) Indeed, it might be argued that without Pound, Modernist poetry would not have emerged at all; or if it had emerged, its profile, substance and literary fortunes would all have been radically different. It was Pound's ambition to forge and proclaim a new aesthetic for poetry, to revitalize poetic form, to crystallize poetic language and foreground the images that spring from such language: the site of this revolution was London from 1908 to 1920, "crucial years in the inauguration of so-called 'modernism', an inauguration masterminded by Pound. It was Pound who invented Imagism and who promoted the early works of T. S. Eliot and campaigned against the censors on behalf of Joyce." (HAMILTON, 2003, p. 55) The reason Hamilton suggests readers must take a "view" of Pound is based on his damaged reputation in later years, a consequence of the poet's anti-Semitism and open support for Fascism during World War Two. However, for the purposes of this study, I want to concentrate on Pound's early reputation as the learned poetic visionary who ushered in a new era for modern poetry.

Perhaps the defining moment which kick-started Modernism in English poetry was October 1912, when Pound, who was about to submit for publication a poem written by his childhood sweetheart Hilda Doolittle, wrote underneath the poem "*H. D. Imagiste*" and posted it off. As a consequence, "Imagism" became the epithet used to define a new movement in poetry, one spearheaded by Pound but which employed H. D.'s poetry as a talismanic vehicle. Imagism was an attempt to declutter poetry of unnecessary verbal baggage, to treat subjects or objects "directly", to produce images powerful enough to stand on their own, independently of fixed metrical patterns. Pound's vision was pioneering, but like Eliot, he was keenly aware of historical influences, in particular that of the French Symbolist poets, such as Mallarmé and

Verlaine, to whom Imagism is indebted. Although the late 19th century movement in France known as Symbolism is, like most movements, disparate and difficult to categorise, there are certain aspects which resonate with the work of Pound and Eliot. Arguably the central development is the loosening of the *referent*, the conviction that the words of poetry can symbolise beyond themselves, as it were, reaching deeper meanings or significances not immediately apparent to the reader. According to Kenner,

all over Europe, by the late 19th century, poets had decided that effects were intrinsic to poetry, and were aiming at them by deliberate process. Effects...‘too subtle for the intellect’...whole poems...held together, as effects are, by the extra semantic affinities of their words...an existence purely linguistic, determined by the molecular bonds of half-understood words. (KENNER, 1991, p. 130)

This model of poetry and its “half-understood words” is, of course, highly significant in the development of Modernism, the opponents of which often complain that such verbal experiments do not make sense; that much Modernist poetry remains defiantly enigmatic and oblique. What unsympathetic readers fail to appreciate, however, is that the unique juxtaposition of words and images in certain Symbolist and Modernist poetry creates new *spaces* for meaning to occur, what Kenner calls “extra semantic affinities”, meanings not tied to the individual words or sequence of words when read literally. Pound was fully aware of the advances that the Symbolists had made; it allowed him to contemplate a poetry that could signify *nonliterally*; a poetry that would resonate beyond its constituent parts and that did not require readers to somehow fill in the gaps. “[T]he Symbolist revolution...allowed Pound to know that there would still be poetry for the reader who could not fill the ellipses back in, who literally, therefore, did not know what many words meant. (KENNER, 1991, p. 133)

Kenner explains how French Symbolist poetry registered a shift of emphasis from logical and predictable meanings based on the capacity of words to have agreed and verifiable referents, to words as aesthetic objects *in themselves*, words which “assert themselves as *words*, and make a numinous claim on our attention, from which visual, tactile and mythic associations radiate. Words set free in new structures, that was the Symbolist formula.” (KENNER, 1991, p. 187) This revolution in poetic *signification* depended upon the willingness on the part of the reader to suspend the process of transforming words into predetermined images in the imagination and allow the “numinous” language of the poem to become the aesthetic object itself, rather like the colours of an abstract painting hold our attention: words not as *signifying, referring* agents, but as “symbols” plump with suggestiveness and “mythic associations”.

One can see why the word “symbol”, once journalists had discovered it, seemed so welcome: it gave an air of system to the otherwise baffling fact that poems were producing things that had not preceded them, that were not part of the pre-existing array called “the subject of the poem”, the array of things one supposes the poem to be “about”, as a statement about a horse is “about” some horse whom we understand to have stood or walked or grazed before the statement was thought of. (KENNER, 1991, p. 189)

In literary representation, therefore, the idea that conscious thoughts, ideas or images could be accurately communicated through the medium of language had begun to break down in late 19th century France; Symbolist poetry was an attempt to break with literary tradition, to suggest a new aesthetic dimension for poetry. In a sense, the purveyors of literature in England lagged behind their French counterparts, writing under the influence of Victorian realism in prose fiction and traditional forms of poetry deployed by Tennyson and Browning, amongst others. To define themselves against this Victorian staleness and sterility, English poets and critics of the early 20th century looked towards Europe for inspiration and direction. In 1931, the American critic Edmund Wilson published a wide-ranging survey of Symbolism covering, amongst others, Rimbaud, Valéry, Proust, Yeats, Eliot and Joyce. In his book, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930*, Wilson neatly encapsulates the new thinking which generated Symbolist poetry and which later had a defining influence on Pound’s Imagism movement and on Eliot’s poetry:

Every feeling or sensation we have, every moment of consciousness, is different from any other; and it is, in consequence, impossible to render our sensations as we actually experience them through the conventional and universal language of ordinary literature...it is the poet’s task to find, to invent, the special language which alone be capable of expression his personality and feelings. Such a language must make use of symbols: what is so special, so fleeting and so vague cannot be conveyed by direct statement or description, but only by a succession of words, or images, which will serve to suggest it to the reader. (DANSON BROWN & GUPTA, 2005, p. 247)

Symbolism served to remind us that “the universal language of ordinary literature” and its claims to be a reliable representation of lived experiences is always problematic. It is not that Symbolist poetry functioned as a more accurate representation, but that it chose to *go elsewhere*, in a sense, to create meaning spontaneously and unpredictably through symbols, “numinous language” and oblique images. Wilson alludes to the crucial notion of *suggestion*, an admission, almost, of language’s essential flaw: its inability to communicate exactly, directly or accurately, reminding us of Eliot’s proclamation, in *Prufrock*, that “It is impossible to say just what I mean!” (ELIOT, 1967, p. 15)

One of Pound’s early collaborators who also exerted his influence over the development of Imagism was T. E. Hulme, who, as a student in Brussels in the early years of the 20th century, came under the spell of his philosophy tutors Henri Bergson and Jules de

Gaultier, and the critic Rémy de Gourmont. (SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 654) Back in London in 1908, Hulme started a poetry discussion group, The Poets' Club; the following year he began another group, this time attended by Pound in April 1909, and it was during these sessions that he began to stress the importance of the *image* in poetry. Taking up the story, and quoting from a letter by founder member, F. S. Flint, Peter Jones writes "their talk was of the state of contemporary poetry and how it might be replaced 'by *vers libre*, by the Japanese tanka and haikai'" (JONES, 2001, p. 15) As a classical literature scholar, Pound had a growing interest in Chinese and Japanese forms of poetry. The "haikai", or haiku, was of particular interest to the proto-Imagists and their poetry group because of its brevity and its presentation of one single or two juxtaposed images. Flint claims in his letter that "Hulme was the ringleader. He insisted too on absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage... There was also a lot of talk and practice among us... of what we call the Image. We were very much influenced by Modern French Symbolist poetry." (JONES, 2001, p. 15-16) According to Schmidt, Hulme deliberately pared down and concentrated his language, attempting a kind of poetry that was "hard, definite, resistant like stone". Pound and Hulme were determined to drain poetry of excess baggage, to strip it bare, to distil language into a kind of crystallized image. Poetry was not logical, but metaphorical, suggesting associations through the juxtaposition of apparently disparate images.

Hulme posits discontinuity between various realms of thought, the possibility of creating new kinds of connection, new forms. In this context 'image' means that things not normally associated can be brought together into significant relationships; that relationships independent of normal ideas of continuity and logic can be resonant. (SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 655)

Hulme was the antithesis of a prolific poet, his legacy being only a tiny collection of short poems, most of them composed and published by 1912, five years before he was killed in action in the Great War. Here is *Autumn*, published in 1909:

A touch of cold in the Autumn night –
 I walked abroad,
 And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
 Like a red-faced farmer.
 I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
 And round about were the wistful stars
 With white faces like town children. (SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 658)

Here two disparate images are fused together in the space of a few lines: employing anthropomorphic metaphors, the moon becomes a "red-faced farmer" and the stars have "white faces like town children". Hulme makes possible metaphorical associations that are

original and striking, yet clearly defy logic. There is little movement in the poem, the speaker who “walked abroad” being arrested by the power of the images, which are static. The formal framework is free: every line is of different length and the poem does not suggest a rhythmic pattern. This unevenness makes the poem hesitant and halting: by breaking the flow, Hulme forces the reader to consider the metaphors as stark, crystallized images.

In late 1908, before he had met Pound, Hulme delivered *A Lecture on Modern Poetry* to the *Poet's Club* in London, outlining what he believed to be the way forward for poetry in the new century.

The lecture was a call for a new and liberated form of poetry, based on trenchant observation but at the same time reflective of the radical diffidence he sees as characteristic of the modern spirit. He argues, in a markedly aggressive tone, for a “tentative and half-shy poetry”. (McGUINNESS, 2003, p. xii)

Like Pound, Hulme was beginning to reject the rhetorical bombast of the 19th century, arguing for a “radical diffidence”, a “tentative and half-shy poetry”, reminding us already, perhaps, of the “diffident” personas which would appear later in Eliot’s *Prufrock* and parts of *TWL*. There is a sense in which both Pound and Hulme wanted to erase the poetry of the recent past and “tentatively” begin again; to initiate a kind of poetic *renaissance* that would involve both a reevaluation of poetic form stretching back to Classical Greece, and a “half-shy” attempt to speak with a new lyric voice. One of Hulme’s poems published in *The Book of the Poets’ Club* in 1909 was *Conversion*:

Lighthearted I walked into the valley wood
 In the time of hyacinths,
 Till beauty like a scented cloth
 Cast over, stifled me. I was bound
 Motionless and faint of breath
 By loveliness that is her own eunuch.
 Now pass I to the final river
 Ignominiously, in a sack, without sound,
 As any peeping Turk to the Bosphorus. (McGUINNESS, 2003, p. 3)

The poem begins (almost) as a conventional lyric, partly because of Hulme’s “I” narrator, which appears in the first line, and also because of the pastoral setting. As the poem progresses, however, the strangeness of the imagery deliberately clouds the sense and, as readers, we find ourselves caught up in the language, unable to make easy connections. If we read the poem as three sentences, three stages in the short narrative, we get a sense of how the juxtaposed images gain their potency. In the first image, the I-narrator is “stifled” by “beauty”, a figure with clear Romantic resonance that perhaps would not look out of place in

Keats. What breaks the spell is the use of the prosaic word “cloth”, associated with dirt (a cloth dipped in chloroform is often used to “stifle” kidnap victims into unconsciousness). The next image, crucially, heightens the intensity of the poem to a region of aesthetic complexity: “I was bound / Motionless and faint of breath / By loveliness that is her own eunuch.” Knowing Hulme spent several years studying in France, I would suggest there is more than a hint of French Symbolism about these lines. The use of the word “motionless” helps to stop us in our tracks here, as we try to contemplate the sense. To be “bound” by loveliness is a strange image, suggesting force, with possible erotic overtones which are reinforced by “faint of breath” and the sudden starkness of the word “eunuch”. The sentence is powerfully epigrammatic: to paraphrase, we might say that true “loveliness” is too pure to be considered in the same breath as erotic desire. However, the complexity of the image prevents easy interpretation and remains unresolved: it does, however offer an insight into the aesthetic innovations of Imagist experimentation, highlighting the aesthetic qualities of poetic language *as language*, and seductively strange images as deliberately static and oblique.

The final image in the poem is both stark and bewildering: “Now pass I to the final river / Ignominiously, in a sack, without sound, / As any peeping Turk to the Bosphorus.” The lines provoke obvious questions: what is the “final river”?; why “ignominiously”?; why “in a sack”?; why the sudden appearance of a “peeping Turk”? There is also a more fundamental question to pose here: are we, as readers, expected to “understand” these lines or merely *register* them in our imagination as an irresolvable image? Taken as a whole, the poem’s structure allows us to read it as a series of nine unique but oddly connected images, one per line. This effect is achieved in two ways: firstly, the replacement of the iamb by the anapaest at the start of each line (stress on the first syllable), which both compromises the speaking voice associated with the iambic form and helps to cement each line as a separate and static image; secondly, by the lack of urgency in the enjambment between the lines, which allows us to savour each line without being ushered into the next. If we were determined to paraphrase the poem, we might interpret the whole as follows: the “I” narrator, on being overcome by the visual splendour of nature, which may or may not have sexual overtones, enters into a state of delirium that “blinds” and ultimately kills him. The *Conversion* of the title is the full realisation of “beauty”, which is overwhelming. The poverty of this interpretation lies in its reduction. Imagism was a movement which deliberately denied traditional interpretive strategies: each poetic “image” should survive in its starkness, unresolved, challenging the reader, carving out aesthetic pathways that crystallize “beauty” as irreducible.

Oblique language and the juxtaposition of disparate images are also a feature of the poetry of Hilda Doolittle (H. D.), Pound's protégé who inspired him to proclaim her as the first official *Imagiste* in 1912, the same year Hulme's poem *Autumn* was published. Describing H. D.'s verses, which borrowed heavily from her studies of Greek mythology, Pound wrote: "It is the laconic speech of the Imagistes...Objective – no slither – direct – no excess of adjectives, etc. No metaphors that won't permit examination. – It's straight talk – straight as the Greek!" (KENNER, 1991, p. 174) The transformation from Hilda Doolittle, the Astronomy professor's daughter from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to 'H. D. Imagiste' was very much the work of the ambitious Pound and his imaginative, literary and promotional skills. Nevertheless, it was H. D.'s poems that ignited the Imagism spark and, along with Hulme's meagre output, carried the torch for early Modernism in England. One of H. D.'s first efforts, *Hermes of the Ways*, which evidently provoked Pound to utilise his editor's pencil (a habit he would later employ to great effect when revising *The Waste Land*), was one of three poems published in Chicago in 1913 in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine. Here are the opening and closing stanzas of the poem, which stretches to 54 lines:

The hard sand breaks,
And the grains of it
Are clear as wine.

Far off over the leagues of it,
The wind,
Playing on the wide shore,
Piles little ridges,
And the great waves
Break over it

[...]

Hermes, Hermes,
The great sea foamed,
Gnashed its teeth about me;
But you have waited,
Where sea-grass tangles with
Shore-grass. (JONES, 2001, pp. 64-65)

Here again we find the stuttering rhythm which doesn't flow but edges forward, almost like the waves themselves as they slowly gather before assaulting the shore. The halting flow, aided by the use of commas, breaks the rhythm in order to concentrate and highlight the images themselves. The first image, grains of sand "clear as wine" is a typical Imagist abstraction, forcing us to imagine the sand crystals somehow held up to the light individually. Sand doesn't "break", neither does the "clearness" of wine seem to reflect anything about sand as we might find it on a beach; we need to stretch the imagination to make the

connection, and it is this originality of image, this *meaning-making* that characterises Imagism as both related to Symbolism and essentially Modern. In the second stanza the wind becomes an active agent, “playing” on the shore and “piling” ridges. This adds an element of mystique to the poem, giving the wind a ghostly presence; the ridges are piled by the wind only for the “great waves” to break over them; elements of the natural world are given life anthropomorphically. This effect is intensified in the last stanza as the “great sea” is depicted as “gnashing” its teeth, a disturbing image which requires a leap of imagination to visualize. The final juxtaposition of “sea-grass” with “shore-grass” provokes a number of associations. The “tangling” of the two is another effect which requires imaginative effort; it also has romantic resonances, a sentimental merging of the two elements. However, it is the sonorous qualities of these last two lines which formalises a kind of Symbolist detachment from reality: the sibilant repetition of the “s”, “z” and “sh” sounds in “sea-grass tangles with / Shore-grass” mimics a kind of whispering sound, suggesting the sound of the wind or a kind of shimmering silence characterised by the lonely sea shore. When the onomatopoeic qualities of the language are foregrounded, as here, we are able to focus on the language *as language*, as *effect*, and not as a referring, transparent agent.

Perhaps the most salient feature of the three stanzas cited from *Hermes of the Ways* is the mood which they suggest, a mood which emerges from the starkness of imagery, the absence of lush adjectives and economy of sentiment. “Hard sand” and “great waves” which “break”; sea which “foams” and “gnashes its teeth”; and the “tangle” of “sea-grass” with “shore-grass” amounts to a stylised vision of the seashore bereft of any obvious human *feeling*; the imagery is not intimate and connecting, but distant and barren; soulless, we might say. These elements can be seen as a deliberate Modernist reaction against the excess of sentiment associated with the Romantic Movement, and with the traditional forms and sententiousness which characterised much Victorian poetry. Schmidt reminds us that Pound and his protégé were also reacting against the recent emergence of Georgian poetry in England, which was dismissed as pastoral and derivative. For Schmidt, H. D. was

the Imagist touchstone, an example of how poetry could be reclaimed from the excesses of the Georgians, where language generally seemed (to Pound) to exceed its occasion, and where the occasions themselves were merely conventional. In H. D. Pound found a concentration, an absence of sentiment, and accuracy of rhythm. (SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 695)

As the “Imagist touchstone”, HD exhibited qualities in her poetry that could be measured against a set of guidelines which Pound had drawn up in the spring of 1912, rules that amounted to a manifesto for the new poetry. The three main principles, which later appeared

in *A Retrospect*, a collection of Pound's essays on poetry published in 1918, are the following: "1. Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective. 2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation. 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome." (SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 686-687) According to these diktats, what the poet leaves *out* of the poem is at least as important as what he or she puts in. Pound's instinct was as an editor, pruning all purple passages, superfluous language and cliché: what was left would be bone-dry, stark and crystallized.

The most anthologised poem of H. D.'s Imagism period is the very short *Oread*, the Greek title signifying a nymph who lived in mountainous areas:

Whirl up, sea—
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir. (SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 695)

Here the starkness is achieved partly by the imperative verbs which begin every line but one, the plea to the sea to "whirl", "splash", "hurl" and "cover" almost becoming an aggressive demand. The deliberately unorthodox rhythm (only the second line scans in any traditional sense) greatly enhances the effect of those imperatives: metrical pattern is sacrificed to allow the poem to function as a set of forceful incantations. The only two adjectives, "pointed" and "great" are deliberately plain and descriptive, rather than allusive. It is the arresting development of the image, however, which gives the poem its lasting power: the sea is implored to transform itself into "great pines" in order to "splash" and "hurl" its "pools of fir" over the narrator and her fellow-nymphs (we presume). This is a clear example of what I call *meaning-making*, of creating an image that is unique, unexpected and, for that reason, disturbing. It is the opposite of employing language as a *transparent* medium through which to communicate ideas: the language itself becomes the aesthetic object of contemplation; the "pointed pines" of the sea and its "pools of fir" crystalize as *images* in our imagination. "Her verse never speaks except obliquely," says Kenner, "addressing not persons but things, things of unstable menace, playing the safe game of attributing to them volition." (KENNER, 1991, p. 176) When Kenner describes H. D. as "playing the safe game" he is alluding to her complicated emotional relationships, from which her poetry can be seen as a kind of therapeutic outlet, a form of "oblique" self-expression which tries to purge itself of personal identity or human feelings. However, this *purging* was at the heart of the Imagist experiment:

Pound's ambition was to "banish everything but abstracted feeling from the lyric mode" (LENTRICCHIA, 1994, p. 190), to carve out a new form which was essentially *visual*. Readers of the new poetry were being asked to suspend the impulse to interpret emotionally, to consider an aesthetic response derived from a new imaginative *space*: "The reception of the new lyric of the image would release the reader from the constraints of circumstance, so that he [sic] could feel transported." (LENTRICCHIA, 1994, p. 190)

This notion of "abstracted feeling" is crucial in understanding Pound's most famous contribution to Imagism in verse form: his three-line poem *In a Station of the Metro*. Kenner offers biographical evidence which uncovers the poem's long gestation period. During a visit to Paris in 1911, Pound got out of the Metro train at *La Concorde*, and, in his own words,

saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what they had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion. (KENNER, 1991, p. 184)

According to Kenner, Pound wrote a poem of 30 lines following the experience, but destroyed it. Months later the poet made a second attempt to encapsulate his Metro vision, but was similarly dismayed with the results. The problem for Pound was not only to find the exact words that would recreate the vision, but also to distil the image down to its barest form, stripped of adjectives and shorn of any excess. "Satisfaction lay not in preserving the vision, but in devising with mental effort an abstract equivalent for it, reduced, intensified." (KENNER, 1991, p. 184) After another year had passed, Pound, influenced by the Japanese haiku, finally produced a poem of only 20 words, including the title.

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough. (KENNER, 1991, p. 184)

If there is beauty in the poem, it is not the beauty of the faces which Pound recognised in the Paris Metro: the beauty is in the aesthetic *transformation* of faces into petals, the image of flower petals radiating from their "wet, black bough"; the beauty is achieved in the imaginative response to the poem, in the *process* of reading. That the poem took more than a year to formulate is a testament to its creative power. Three images yoked together in three lines.

Although Pound appears to have deliberately abandoned any set metrical pattern here, I would argue that the ghost of the "metronome" haunts these three lines and adds to the effect. The rhythm is most evident in the first line, "The apparition of these faces in the

crowd” where an iambic pattern can be detected beneath the stresses. Metrically, the line can be scanned as an iambic hexameter, also known as the alexandrine, a forerunner of the iambic pentameter which features in French poetry in the work of Racine, Corneille and later Baudelaire. Pound’s ideas about free verse at the time of his Imagist experiment did not preclude the use of the iambic form, only that poets should not be slavish to traditional rhythmical frameworks. In his essay *A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste*, Pound wrote: “I think one should write vers libre only when one ‘must,’ that is to say, only when the ‘thing’ builds up a rhythm more beautiful than that of set metres...a rhythm which discontents one with set iambic or set anapaestic.” (POUND, 1968, p. 12) The reasons why Pound may have slipped into an iambic rhythm in the *Metro* poem are not clear. However, Aristotle’s observation in the *Poetics* that the iambic pattern was the poetic form that most resembled human speech is relevant here. Although the title is merely descriptive, the first line carries the conviction of the poet communicating his profound vision personally, telling his story of “these faces”; faces only he saw, the cadences of his voice recognisable in the iambic rhythm. The last line “Petals on a wet, black bough” is the poem’s most striking image because it demands of the reader an imaginative leap, to visualize “faces in the crowd” as resembling “petals” of indiscriminate colour on the dark branch of a tree. The image is arresting because petals are blank shapes which depend upon colour and texture for their appeal; faces, in stark contrast, have individual physiognomies. The comparison, therefore, presents the “faces” of the *Metro* as fleeting impressions stripped of their identity, static, “faceless” shapes of colour. The poem’s potency also resides in the economy of language, the distillation, the crystallization, the rejection of anything extraneous. According to Pound himself, the poem symbolized “the precise moment when a thing outward and objective transforms itself into a thing inward and subjective.” (SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 687) To turn the tables, we might say that it is precisely the “subjective” effect on the reader of what Hamilton calls the “uncluttered, static, and hard-edged” verse forms of Imagism that represents a new aesthetic dimension for English poetry before the war. (HAMILTON, 2003, p. 63)

One of the central texts of Imagism is the anthology *Des Imagistes*, edited by Pound and published in London by *The Poetry Bookshop* in 1914. Pound includes an epigram at the beginning of the collection, one which alludes to his and H. D.’s fixation with ancient Greece: “And she also was of Sikilia and was gay in / the valleys of Ætna, and knew the Doric / singing.” The relationship between Imagism and Greek mythology and poetry is complex. H. D. was a classical scholar and Pound, as a translator and linguist, admired and championed classical literature (as did Eliot). However, exactly how the imagery and references from

Greek poetry affected the substance and presentation of Imagism is difficult to disentangle. Vincent Sherry suggests Pound may have adopted Greek verse forms for inclusion in the Imagist project as a means of returning to the *origins* of poetry, to the Hellenic song and the spoken lyric, bypassing the excesses of the Romantics and Victorians. “A myth of origins, of a song performed in the morning of the world, locates the revolutionary (going in a circle) impulse in Imagism, which is seeking the immediacy and directness of first words for its poetics of direct sensual experience.” (SHERRY, 2015, p. 162) One of the poems Pound included in *Des Imagistes* is a work of his own with the title *Δ'ΩΡΙΑ*, which can be translated from the Greek as *Doria*.

Be in me as the eternal moods
of the bleak wind, and not
As transient things are —
gaiety of flowers.
Have me in the strong loneliness
of sunless cliffs
And of grey waters.
Let the gods speak softly of us
In days hereafter,
The shadowy flowers of Orcus
Remember Thee. (JONES, 2001, p. 93)

This ethereal poem reminds us of Kenner’s definition of Symbolism as “words set free in new structures”, words which “assert themselves as *words*, and make a numinous claim on our attention, from which visual, tactile and mythic associations radiate. (KENNER, 1991, p. 187) The unexpected associations provoked by word pairs such as “eternal moods”, “strong loneliness”, “sunless cliffs” and “shadowy flowers” are evocative of nothing and nowhere that we can recognise immediately: the *process* of reading the poem and of allowing such associations to crystallize in the imagination is its own justification, part of what Sherry calls a “poetics of direct sensual experience”. The arrangement of the lines into short, juxtaposed phrases is part of the aesthetic effect, breaking the rhythm into moments of hesitation, suggesting the “diffident” voice, what Hulme called a “tentative and half-shy poetry”.

Similar to Hulme’s poem *Conversion*, we have in *Doria* three sentences which represent three basic constituent images, though each statement has within it sub-images which add to the complexity. The lyric voice appears to be addressing the “*Doria*” of the title, imploring her to act by the imperative forms “Be in me” and “Have me”. The strangeness of these commands is most apparent in the second entreaty: “Have me in the / strong loneliness / of sunless cliffs / And of grey waters.” Although the images of “grey waters”, “sunless cliffs” and “strong loneliness” build upon each other to heighten the mood of melancholia, the sense

of the statement is seriously flawed by the initial “Have me in the...” which defies any kind of logic. Referring to what Pound once called “delightful psychic experience” in his 1910 book of essays *The Spirit of Romance*, Lentricchia defines such moments of bewilderment as “an experience akin to what is recorded in ancient myth: the feeling of walking ‘sheer into nonsense’”. (LENTRICCHIA, 1994, p. 191) Reading *Doria* is like listening to several voices tentatively singing different songs, the lyrics of which we only half-understand, though we are nevertheless lulled by its captivating melody. What we remember are the potent images: “the eternal moods of the bleak wind”, “the strong loneliness of sunless cliffs”, “the shadowy flowers of Orcus”. The aesthetic experience is unique, as all aesthetic experiences should be: we are transported to original *spaces* by the skill of Pound’s technique, by tentative suggestion, by “half-understood words”, by the half-sense of oblique metaphors.

Another poet who was intimately involved in the gestation of Imagism was the young Englishman Richard Aldington, a member of Pound’s inner circle along with H. D. and T. E. Hulme. Aldington married H. D. in 1913 and, as a commissioned officer, was wounded in 1917 on the Western Front. His poems feature strongly in the early collections of Imagist poetry published during the first years of the war. The following poem, *Round-Pond*, was published in *Some Imagist Poets* in 1915.

Water ruffled and speckled by galloping wind
Which puffs and spurts it into tiny pashing breaks
Dashed with lemon-yellow afternoon sunlight.
The shining of the sun upon the water
Is like a scattering of gold crocus-petals
In a long wavering irregular flight.

The water is cold to the eye
As the wind to the cheek.

In the budding chestnuts
Whose sticky buds glimmer and are half-burst open
The starlings make their clitter-clatter;
And the blackbirds in the grass
Are getting as fat as the pigeons.

Too-hoo, this is brave;
Even the cold wind is seeking a new mistress. (LAWRENCE, 2010, pp. 14-15)

The first stanza bears the hallmark of other Imagist poetry: a juxtaposition of images without an identifiable poet-narrator; the anthropomorphism of the wind into an acting agent; the strangeness of the language and the suggested similes and associations. In the first three lines there is a richness of unexpected verb forms which draw attention to themselves: “ruffled”, “speckled”, “galloping”, “puffs”, “spurts” and “dashed”, which function both as forms of poetic language with aesthetic qualities in themselves, *as language*, but also as indicators of

imaginative disruptions of the norm. The verb forms are loud and assertive to mimic the aggressiveness of the wind; their denotative meanings have been hijacked, however, to make new connections, new associations. The turbulence of these opening lines is reinforced by suddenness: the poem starts *in medias res*, leaving the reader with no introductory context; the images of nature, made strange by the noisy, onomatopoeic verbs, appear as a list, one on top of the other, crystallizing before us as we read down the lines. The fourth line, “The shining of the sun upon the water”, is almost a perfect iambic pentameter, and, with its more conventional sense, breaks the spell of the first three lines. However, the image which follows is far from conventional. By likening the sunlight on the water to “a scattering of gold crocus-petals / In a long wavering irregular flight” Aldington pays a debt to Symbolism by inventing an image that defies logic but can be understood as the linguistic equivalent of an Impressionist painting: it is in lines like these that we begin to understand the Imagist ambition to stretch the reader and, in so doing, invoke the possibility of a new aesthetic appreciation of poetry.

After the first stanza, the poem loses its force, compromised by more conventional images, such as “the blackbirds in the grass / Are getting as fat as the pigeons” which introduces an element of bathos. This anti-climax is consolidated by the closing lines, “Too-hoo, this is brave; / Even the cold wind is seeking a new mistress”, which begins as a kind of naïve exclamation and leads to a prosaic image that doesn’t convince. The starkness and energy of the opening stanza confirms, in a sense, Pound’s inclination in the *Metro* poem to trim his lines incessantly until the required image is crystallized; anything which may distract from that image is discarded. In the lines which follow the opening stanza, “The water is cold to the eye / As the wind to the cheek”, Aldington introduces an agent in the poem, a *persona* who communicates the coldness of the wind as it touches the cheek. By giving the poem, however subtly, a recognisable human context, the spell of the *Imagiste* is broken.

The English critic William Empson, according to Schmidt, drafted his own definition of Pound’s Modernist experiment:

Imagist poetry is poetry that has lost the use of its legs – it does not move (in any sense), it does not evoke time sequence, existing only in space. This is one way in which it resists the tyranny of continuity, of cause and effect. Committed to the image, it disregards the context of the image. It has no conscience beyond artistic perfection. (SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 658)

The problem of criticising Aldington’s poem for breaking the ground rules of Imagism is that, in a general sense, poetry cannot be written using a set of guidelines issued as a manifesto: individual poets will inevitably write in a particular style that develops, as it were, organically

with each new poem. Empson claims that the aim of the Imagists was to achieve “artistic perfection”, a phrase which takes us back to the Aesthetic Movement of the late 19th century, to Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater and the notion of “art for art’s sake”.¹² Undoubtedly, Pound’s Imagism was an attempt to create a new form of poetry which needed no moral or social justification; poetry was indeed an art form that should be judged using purely technical and aesthetic criteria. At this stage, I think it is worth offering an outline of exactly what Pound did say about poetry and about his Modernist experiment, according to two important essays that were written and published at the time Imagism was emerging: *A Few Don’ts*, which was originally published in *Poetry* in 1913 as *A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste*, and *Prolegomena*, which first appeared in the *Poetry Review* in 1912.

There is a sense in which the plastic arts, such as sculpture and painting, are accepted on their own terms: they are not judged in terms of any statement they may make about the broader social context in which they appear. In contrast, because poetry uses language – the common parlance of everyday communication – it is expected to *say* something *beyond* itself; to guide or provoke its readers in a moral or spiritual sense. However, as we have seen in the overview of aesthetic approaches, this concept of poetry as an art form obliged to justify itself is a relative concept, one which is historically particular and by no means definitive. At the time of Imagism, Pound was convinced by poetry’s status as a “pure” art form, and used the term openly; looking back on the Victorian era, he appraises the achievements of the 1890s so-called *Decadent Movement*, associated with Swinburne and Oscar Wilde and much influenced by Walter Pater’s essays on aesthetics.

As for there being a “movement” or my being of it, the conception of poetry as a “pure art” in the sense in which I use the term, revived with Swinburne...and assuredly the “nineties” continued the development of the art, confining their improvements, however, chiefly to sound and to refinements of manner. (POUND, 1968, p. 11)

Pound’s association with the Aesthetic Movement and the so-called Decadent poets of the 1890s, who were themselves influenced by the French Symbolists, begins to establish a trajectory, a vision of poetry as an art form of value *in itself*, to be judged by technical achievement and aesthetic criteria alone. This also gives us an insight into the principles

¹² The New World Encyclopaedia describes “Art for Art’s Sake” as follows: “The concept that art needs no justification, that it need serve no purpose, and that the beauty of the fine arts is reason enough for pursuing them was adopted by many leading French authors and in England by Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Arthur Symons.” See: http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Art_for_art's_sake, accessed on 29/04/16.

which guided Pound when he masterminded the substantial editing of Eliot's *The Waste Land* a decade later. Pound was convinced some of the radical revisions he was establishing with Imagism would take hold in the 20th century and replace the wooliness of ornate, pastoral or didactic poetry which dominated the Victorian age.

As to Twentieth century poetry...It will be as much like granite as it can be, its force will lie in its truth, its interpretative power...it will not try to seem forcible by rhetorical din, and luxurious riot. We will have fewer painted adjectives impeding the shock and stroke of it. At least for myself, I want it so, austere, direct, free from emotional slither. (POUND, 1968, p. 12)

There is a sharp contrast here between old verse forms full of “rhetorical din”, “luxurious riot” and “painted adjectives” and the new “granite” poetry which is “austere, direct” and “free from emotional slither”. The former is an overwrought, flowery poetry with a tendency to bombast, a poetry which aims to convince by its rhetorical force. The latter is a Spartan, crystallized poetry, emptied of embellishment and aiming at aesthetic communication through concrete imagery.

For Pound, poetry was a profession which demanded application and discrimination; its proponents should have a grasp of the historical development of technique and poetic form in order to master its complexities. “Don’t imagine that the art of poetry is any simpler than the art of music, or that you can please the expert before you have spent at least as much effort on the art of verse as an average piano teacher spends on the art of music.” (POUND, 1968, p. 5) This challenges the idea that poetry is a pursuit that anyone can practise; it also lays a burden of responsibility at the feet of both the literary critic and the teacher of poetry. Pound’s comparison of music and poetry is illuminating because it shifts the emphasis from the pursuit of *meaning* in poetry to the centrality of technique. When we listen to music we are not expected to understand the difference between diatonic or chromatic scales, or even the basic rules of harmony, pitch and melody, though knowledge of these things might deepen our appreciation. Similarly, most readers of poetry are unaware of the complexity of poetic form: the purpose of reading poetry is in the expectation of an emotional connection that issues *through* the language. One of the lasting achievements of Pound’s Modernist experiment has been to fix the focus of poetic appreciation very firmly on technique and on the centrality of form as a *carrier* of meaning. “Let the neophyte know assonance and alliteration, rhyme immediate and delayed, simple and polyphonic, as a musician would expect to know harmony and counterpoint and all the minutiae of his craft.” (POUND, 1968, p. 6) The consequence of Pound’s assertions is that teachers of poetry need to be as technically adept and assured as teachers of music: it is not the denotation of words which

matters, but their sonic and rhythmic qualities, symbolic associations, and, most importantly, their juxtaposition within a particular formal, metrical *framework*.

The problem with labelling the ideas and poetry of Pound, T. E. Hulme, H. D. and Richard Aldington as “Imagism” is the problem of all “isms”: they are treated as fads which fade as quickly as they emerge. However, as Pound’s *Metro* poem demonstrates, the crystallization of images and their juxtaposition points the way to new aesthetic possibilities for poetry which transcend the inevitable demise of the Imagist movement. The particular “image” which Pound conceived in his pre-war experiments was “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.” (POUND, 1968, p. 4) The “emotional” capability of the image is viewed as only one aspect of its composition; the other complementary element is its “intellectual” capacity. The intellectual demands of writing and reading poetry may be integral to its status as an art form, but I think Pound is suggesting that only by engaging and challenging the intellect can poetry make an aesthetic *space* for itself that is distinctive from prose writing and from other art forms. The development of Imagism and Pound’s continuing innovations in the establishment of Modernism in poetry are inextricable linked to this aesthetic dimension, a simultaneous contemplation of both emotional and intellectual beauty. “It is the presentation of such a “complex” instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.” (POUND, 1968, p. 4)

Pound urges anyone serious about poetry to “Go in fear of abstractions”. (POUND, 1968, p. 5) American critic Frank Lentricchia attempts to interpret the sense of “abstraction” as Pound uses the term in an essay Lentricchia wrote about the aesthetic consequences of Pound’s contribution to Modernist poetry. Not only does Pound warn against moving from the particular to the general: from the distilled language and concrete particulars of the poetic image to a wider context and more general considerations. He was also adamant that no singular element of the Imagist poem could be “abstracted” without dissolving what Lentricchia calls “the aesthetic monad”.

The image, like the “luminous detail” Pound had theorized before it, and like the ideogram and vortex that came after, was the exemplary figure of concentration and totality, the essential texture of a new poetry that would necessarily appear difficult in the context of the diluted practice where “abstraction” reigned. (LENTRICCHIA, 1994, p. 193)

The concrete images of the new poetry symbolised a “totality”; each poem must be embraced on its own terms or the aesthetic *space* Pound envisaged would be compromised. The reader’s

response to Imagist poetry depended upon a willing *submission* to its concrete particulars, a process which would automatically block the generalities of interpretative discourse. This blocking of “abstractions” was facilitated by the intellectual complexity of the new poetry, by what Lentricchia calls “a moment of liberation from common sense”. (LENTRICCHIA, 1994, p. 191) Reading through and quoting from Pound’s critical directives, Lentricchia writes:

The “image” is lyric, it tells no story. Its existence lies wholly in an eternal present (the “instant”), with no past or future encumbrances attached...[The Imagist poem represents] “a visual concrete language” that prevents the reader from “gliding through” to “an abstract process”, a language of images which “are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language.” (LENTRICCHIA, 1994, p. 191)

The experience of reading an Imagist poem, therefore, is a moment of intuitive aesthetic recognition, a *suspension* from both “common sense” and abstract thought; the “visual concrete language” of the poem has aesthetic qualities in itself, it does not need to be paraphrased or explained. Although Pound views the aesthetic “totality” of the Imagist poem as its own justification, we might understandably ask how enjoying a moment of “suspension” can be justified as a cultural act within the modern societies we live in. In other words, what are the political consequences of Pound’s aesthetic of the “eternal present”?

Lentricchia argues that Pound’s “image” is “a figure of intellectual as opposed to sentimental control; of aesthetic necessity and social relevance as opposed to aesthetic ‘ornament’ and social uselessness.” (LENTRICCHIA, 1994, p. 194) Instead of relegating poetry to the status of cultural “ornament” designed to stimulate the “sentimental” impulse, the new “concrete image” revitalises the form and re-establishes the centrality of poetry as an art form with revolutionary and redemptive qualities. “Pound’s attacks on the aesthetic of the ornament were not made on behalf of an isolated aesthetic autonomy but on behalf of the necessity of the aesthetic within the human economy.” (LENTRICCHIA, 1994, p. 198) In a sense, what Lentricchia calls the “necessity of the aesthetic within the human economy” is exemplified by music, which in the 21st century has enormous cultural status and is seen as the cultural form which most easily lends itself to the notion of a “pure” aesthetic experience. Pound’s Modernist experiment was an attempt to present poetry as the equal of music in technical and aesthetic complexity, to argue the case that poetry should be assigned, at the very least, the same cultural status as music. The problem with Pound’s vision, however, was the intellectual rigour of the new poetry and, particularly as Modernism reached its climax in Eliot’s *TWL*, the intellectual investment necessary on the reader’s part. Pound’s *Cantos*, the long series of poems composed throughout his life, contain many of the elements which characterise *TWL*: intellectual complexity; technical sophistication; literary references;

foreign language quotations, and myriad cultural associations. For Schmidt, the *Cantos* represent “the quintessence of Imagist practice, a tissue of juxtapositions of historical fact, poetry, politics, vocal registers, music, satire.” (SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 693)

Eliot’s *TWL* can also be seen as a “tissue of juxtapositions”, a compendium of “poetry, vocal registers, music, satire”, a work heavy with quotation and allusion, but most significantly a poem which bears the indelible imprint of Pound’s unforgiving editorship, a poem forged in the “image” of Imagism. Though the Modernist upheaval masterminded by Pound and Eliot radically transformed poetic practice in the 20th century, the reverberations of Imagism and Eliot’s long poem have been anything but benevolent: poets and critics are still deeply divided over the merits of Modernism, and both the *Cantos* and *TWL* have become texts reserved for academic study only. If the most common reaction of the reading public to Pound and Eliot’s Modernist texts is bafflement, is it not reasonable to assume that, ultimately, the experiment failed? Schmidt begs to differ: “It is with Eliot and Pound that our poetic and critical language, our sensibility, are thoroughly shaken out. If the dust has settled again, if the challenge of Modernism has not been accepted in the longer term, it is our loss.” (SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 686) The challenge of Modernism may not have been *accepted*, as Schmidt remarks, but the advances in poetics made by Pound’s Imagism and Eliot’s Modernism remain formidable a century later, a testament to their revolutionary force, and to the originality of their aesthetic innovations.

1.3 Fusing the Voices: the appropriation and distillation of *The Waste Land*

I think that a poet may gain much from the study of music...I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly, are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure...I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression as words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image. T. S. Eliot (KERMODE, 1975, pp. 113-114)

Although the publication of T.S. Eliot's long poem, *The Waste Land*, in 1922 represents one of the defining moments of High Modernism, the text remains defiantly complex and remote. Students' feelings of inadequacy on first reading the poem reflect a critical climate which esteems content analysis over an appreciation of form, musicality and the performative qualities of poetry. That Eliot's poem is essentially enigmatic, deliberately constructed from fragments, and reads like a confusing babel of disparate voices does not deter the critical impulse to uncover an underlying meaning, to *fuse* the voices together in an act of reduction: Eliot and Pound's *montage* is always the victim of paraphrasing. This quest to capture the *truth* residing somewhere in *The Waste Land* (henceforth referred to as *TWL*) has guaranteed the canonical status of the poem, which depends upon a mass of critical discourse reproducing itself and paradoxically justifying the text's cultural centrality. All attempts to locate a contemporary "message" in Eliot's poem, however, lead to the same impasse: an entanglement with significance that misses the music, when you see only the house and not the bricks that made it. This obsession with discovering new meanings in the poem, what we might call the academic processing of *TWL*, represents a proliferation of attempts to explain something resolutely (and deliberately) inexplicable. For Maud Ellmann, "The Waste Land is a sphinx without a secret...and to force it to confession may also be a way of killing it." (NORTH, 2001, p. 258)

In this Chapter, I intend to contextualise *TWL* by considering a number of paradoxes which seem to me relevant to an understanding of the poem's reputation as a pioneering and highly-influential literary text. These paradoxes can be seen as a set of oppositional terms, with each term displaying a degree of mutual exclusivity. I will consider *TWL* in order to ascertain whether it is historically particular, or a text that frees itself from historical particulars by expressing "timeless" values; to what extent the poem is a personal expression of Eliot's thoughts and feelings, or expresses something objective and impersonal; whether *TWL* is a clear example of Modernism or if its uniqueness escapes categorisation; whether

Eliot's poem is comprehensible or, as the critic Cyril Connolly says, "unintelligible". (CONNOLLY, 1975, p. 207) By contextualising *TWL* in this way, I hope to show how an essentially enigmatic poem has become the focal point for endless interpretative strategies and critical debates which proliferate in circumspection, interpretations forever flawed in their attempt to explain the inexplicable rather than illuminating the poem's sophisticated poetics. In a sense, this *overdetermination* of critical explanation on the outside, parallels the inner paradoxes generated by the poem itself: "Because the poem can only abject writing with more writing," according to Ellmann, "it catches the infection that it tries to purge, and implodes like an obsessive ceremonial under the pressure of its own contradictions." (NORTH, 2001, p. 273)

TWL is a poem of more than four hundred lines divided into five parts. Eliot's original title for the poem was "He Do the Police in Different Voices" (a reference to a character in Charles Dickens's novel *Our Mutual Friend*) as a number of noticeably different voices appear to narrate the verse. The original manuscript was more than twice the length of the published poem and Eliot even considered publishing the parts as separate poems. Pound, Eliot's American compatriot, edited the manuscript, cutting out long sections as he went along. *TWL* is constructed as a kind of montage and includes quotations in several languages. Eliot freely borrows from Shakespeare and other Elizabethans, Greek and Roman poetry, Dante, Baudelaire and other French symbolist poets, eastern religion, paganism, the music-hall and other sources. It is widely accepted that one of the underlying themes of *TWL* is the Arthurian legend of the Fisher King, the wounded king who is charged with keeping the Holy Grail. According to Eliot himself, the principal character in the poem is Tiresias, a blind and clairvoyant prophet from Greek mythology. *TWL* is unusual in that Eliot supplies a complete set of "Notes" at the end of the poem intended to "explain" some of the references, although the poet later claimed the notes were somewhat disingenuous and admitted to sending readers "on a wild goose chase".¹ The notes begin with a reference to two books Eliot claimed were highly influential in the composition of *TWL*: Jessie L. Weston's book on the grail legend, *From Ritual to Romance*, and George James Fraser's study in comparative religion *The Golden Bough*. Many of the first readers of *TWL* presumed that a close study of these two

¹ Quoted in Frank Kermode's introduction to the Penguin edition of *T.S. Eliot: The Waste Land and Other Poems*, London, 2003, p. 108. Eliot had written in *The Frontiers of Criticism*, 1956, "My notes stimulated the wrong kind of interest among the seekers of sources. It was just, no doubt, that I should pay my tribute to the work of Miss Jessie Weston; but I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail."

books was necessary for a clearer understanding of the poem. Understandably, this crowd of ghostly voices and scholarly references has confounded interpretations of the poem since its first publication. In fact, the poem is infamous for its complexity and for the controversy surrounding the various readings and misreadings it has produced. David Ayers encapsulates the historical reception of the poem thus:

The general cultural claims about ‘The Waste Land’ in its first decades were replaced by a process of scholarly interpretation, which was then followed by a deconstructive phase in which it was possible to argue that the poem really could not be interpreted and in effect meant practically nothing at all: it was a text without an author, the sight of readerly speculative play but not of any complex, hidden or buried meaning. (AYERS, 2004, p. 27)

This would suggest that, following the “scholarly interpretation” performed by the so-called New Critics, we are now at the “deconstructive phase”, a kind of postmodern *free for all* of “speculative play” when all interpretations are valid as *TWL* means “practically nothing”. However, this is misleading: meaning is inscribed in language, not something we can place in parenthesis for the duration of reading a poem. Although I intend to expose the futility of *the will to paraphrase* Eliot’s poem, I am not suggesting *TWL* is “meaningless”. Rather that, as an aesthetic artefact first and foremost, we should listen to the voices and the music of the poetry they perform: only by experiencing and *feeling* the *TWL* in this way, can the significance of Eliot’s text *as poetry* percolate through.

I want to begin my attempt to contextualise the poem by considering the complex relationship between literature and history. Terry Eagleton makes an interesting observation on this theme in his essay *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. There is a sense in which we value literature by the accuracy of its portrayal of history: the greatest literature is that which captures the moment most convincingly and inspires our historical imagination. In contrast, however, literature is also valuable, or so we are led to believe, because of its ability to capture “timeless truths”; we might still read Shakespeare plays today, for example, because of what they reveal to us about an essential and unchanging “human nature”. Eagleton addresses this paradox when he writes that the aim of Marxist criticism is to grasp the forms, styles and meanings of literary works “as the products of a particular history”. He then goes on to say:

The painter Henri Matisse once remarked that all art bears the imprint of its historical epoch, but that great art is that in which this imprint is most deeply marked. Most students of literature are taught otherwise: the greatest art is that which timelessly transcends its historical conditions. (EAGLETON, 1976, p. 3)

Clearly, there is an impasse here: either great literature is recognisable as a product of its time, or it is that which transcends time. This paradox is particularly relevant to *TWL* as the poem is often cited as a critique of the decay of civilization in the aftermath of WWI. Peter Childs writes:

Eliot's poem is representative of much modernist art produced during and after the First World War to the extent that it records an emotional aspect of a Western Crisis, characterised by despair, hopelessness, paralysis, angst and a sense of meaninglessness shown on a spiritual, cultural and personal level. (CHILDS, 2008, p. 184).

This comment is typical of many interpretations of the poem's historical vision, and yet it does not chime so accurately with what Eliot himself said about the poem in 1931: "when I wrote a poem called *The Waste Land* some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the 'disillusionment of a generation,' which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention." (KERMODE, 2003, p. xix) This anomaly is interesting on a number of levels. Firstly, it might preclude a certain historical reading of the *TWL* based on evidence of the author's "intention". However, this assumes that what the author is recorded as saying about *his* text limits the possible interpretations of that text; it produces what Roland Barthes refers to as a "closure" of the text. It also assumes that we can take Eliot at his word, when in fact the poet was known for his evasion and irony. Perhaps more significantly, this statement by Eliot could be seen as a particular *political* reading of *TWL*. By denying the poem reflects the post-war *zeitgeist*, Eliot is making the case for an "ahistorical" or purely "literary" reading of the poem, one which recognises the cultural significance of the classical references and of Eliot's mastery of form and gift for parody, but which avoids an analysis of the poem's historical significance.

This is not to suggest that Eliot ignores history, but that he has a particular conception of history and its relationship to literature. Although Eliot denies that his poem expresses or encapsulates the mood of a disaffected generation in the aftermath of a global crisis, he does not rule out the possibility of literary works making statements or judgements, however oblique, about historical movements. In an essay he wrote about Joyce's novel *Ulysses* in 1923, a year after both *TWL* and *Ulysses* were published, he commends Joyce's use of Greek mythology as a means of connecting the present with the classical world of antiquity. Referring to Joyce's "parallel use of the Odyssey", Eliot writes:

[i]n using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him...It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense

panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. (quoted in KERMODE, 2003, p. xxii)

The two key words here, I would suggest, are “manipulating” and “controlling”. Eliot appears to be claiming that, by preserving a form of classical mythology, Joyce can somehow atone for the “sins” of the post-war present; by structuring his novel as a “parallel” version of an ancient mythical journey, Joyce is able to contrast the “futility” of the present with the model of classical literature. This “manipulation” or reformulation of the ancient past into the present is, of course, precisely what Eliot attempts in *TWL*, with its proliferation of classical references and mythological figures. This deliberate preservation of classical mythology can be seen as an archly conservative reading of history.

The paradox here is that Eliot on the one hand denies *TWL* is a historical poem, one that reflects the political and cultural apocalypse caused by WWI, and yet he wants to preserve certain “historical” cultural references. By holding up classical literature as a model of excellence, an approach which “others must pursue”, Eliot acknowledges the significance of literature in history, but avoids confronting the powerful historical forces present in 1922 which predetermined his own poetic vision. Eagleton encapsulates Eliot’s poetic approach at the historical moment which produced *TWL*:

The crisis of European society – global war, severe class-conflict, failing capitalist economies – might be resolved by turning one’s back on history altogether and putting mythology in its place. Deep below finance capitalism lay the Fisher King, potent images of birth, death and resurrection in which human beings might discover a common identity. (EAGLETON, 2008, pp. 35-36)²

When reality is a post-war moral chaos bereft of spiritual values, the poet can always fall back on the deep structures of classical mythology, Eastern religion, Dante and Grail legends. Admittedly, it is not necessarily the responsibility of poets to be politically engaged: poets are not obliged to write poetry as a means of representing the socio-political and historical moment they find themselves in. Poetry is also a very personal mode of self-expression, one which attempts to communicate feelings and represent emotions. This poses of the question of the extent to which *TWL* is more of a personal statement.

At times Eliot appeared to be surprised by the critical attention given to *TWL* and was quick to deny that he was attempting, in the poem, to make a statement about the “decline of the West” or the parlous state of modern society.

² Eagleton’s book, *How to Read a Poem*, is, I believe, deliberately mistitled. Purportedly written for students, Eagleton warns those “less experienced” to begin at Chapter 4. The first four chapters amount to a study of poetry better encapsulated by the title, “Marxism and Form in English Poetry”.

Various critics have done me the honour to interpret the poem in terms of criticism of the contemporary world, have considered it, indeed, an important piece of social criticism. To me it was only the relief of a wholly insignificant grouse against life: it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling. (KERMODE, 2003, p. xix)

Eliot's characterization of his own poem as a form of personal "grumbling" might induce his readers to see the text as one of psychological significance, as if the anxiety of the "protagonist" (Tiresias, or Eliot himself) was emblematic of certain eternal truths about human existence. Yet this humanistic reading of the poem can also be seen as an obfuscation of history, an interpretation which *politicises* the poem in the very act of trying to deny its ideological significance. As Child explains,

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot deals predominantly with a destroyed post-war Europe but the references to war are oblique, and social change only takes place within a mythological framework. The poem represses history and politics, which is itself a significant historical effect inasmuch as it exposes a contemporary disillusionment with the possibilities for collective action and social change. (CHILDS, 2008, p. 184)

By claiming the critics had misinterpreted his "intention", Eliot conveniently removes himself from the scene of any possible debate about the relationship between literature, politics and social change. Despite Eliot's evasion, the treadmill of interpretative strategies continues unabated: *TWL* must be *politicised* in some way in order to justify its inclusion on literary courses. Eliot's conservatism, his "repression" of history and politics in *TWL*, does not devalue the poem, of course, as no artist can claim political immunity. What Adorno calls the "truth content" of a work of art, needs to be recognised, irrespective of political bias: "we are concerned not with the poet as a private person, not with his psychology or his so-called social perspective, but with the poem as a philosophical sundial telling the time of history." (ADORNO, Th. W., in RICE & WAUGH, 2001, p. 116) For Adorno, works of Modernism such as *TWL* are indeed historically significant, though that significance will come to light as part of the critical act: it neither needs to be inscribed in the text nor explicitly declared by the author.

There is a sense, however, in which the personal and the historical co-exist in *TWL* at the level of "authorial intention". Childs sees Eliot's poem as an example of the literary establishment's attempt to reassert its "elitism" in the wake of WWI and the beginning of mass culture. "What is revealed is a desire to break away from the idea that the artist writes about something for somebody in a literal or descriptive way. Instead, Eliot evinces a valorisation of erudition, mythology, symbol and elite culture." (CHILDS, 2008, p. 105) It is as if Eliot constructs a poetic "wall of defence" by piling together great literary quotations and allusions; classical references to set against the onslaught of a mass, low-brow literary culture.

Writing in 1932, F. R. Leavis certainly recognised a parallel between Eliot's poem and a decline in cultural values:

What is the significance of the modern Waste Land? The answer may be read in what appears as the rich disorganization of the poem. The seeming disjointedness is intimately related to the erudition that has annoyed so many readers and to the wealth of literary borrowings and allusions. These characteristics represent the present state of civilization. The traditions and cultures have mingled, and the historical imagination makes the past contemporary; no one tradition can digest so great a variety of materials, and the result is a break-down of forms and the irrevocable loss of that sense of absoluteness which seems necessary to a robust culture. (LEAVIS, 1972, p. 71)

The “break down of forms” and the “loss of absoluteness” that Leavis laments, sounds eerily like a definition of post-modernism: the techniques of *pastiche* within a melting pot of cultural relativity and indeterminate value. We can now see how Modernism was the beginning of a seismic shift in perception and representation that we are still feeling today. To try and resist this splintering of culture, as Leavis hoped to do in his conservative critical approach, was not necessarily Eliot's intention, however.

If there is a statement lurking somewhere in *TWL*, it might be that only by preserving the past can we move forward culturally, an argument Eliot strenuously put forward about poetry in his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. Although Eliot claims *TWL* is a personal poem, the foundation stones of the complex structure are impersonal, the voices are those of others. History is placed in parenthesis while historical literature is dusted off and selected examples are held up as a shining ornaments of great value. If *TWL* is an example of the “Modern”, we might argue, then the modern resides in the pre-modern, and the artist's role is to reshape the icons of the past, to valorise the classics, to re-voice the echoes of antiquity. However, it is precisely by means of this *re-voicing* that Eliot manages to “speak” to us in *TWL*: the museum pieces need a poetic voice of equal stature to introduce them and weave them together. What makes *TWL* fascinating is the shadow-play that Eliot performs within this “museum” of antiquity, and the reader's urge to locate the poet's identity amongst the array of disparate voices, the yearning to find *authenticity*. Frank Kermode sees a parallel between *TWL* and other emerging art forms in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The Waste Land had something in common with Cubism, which had revolutionised painting a few years earlier, and with the twelve-tone music invented by Arnold Schoenberg in place of the traditional scales; it permitted a view of history as without perspective, and a mode of composition that did not forget the past but perceived its methods as effects of mere custom rather than law, which the artist must now, as it were, get behind. (KERMODE, 2003, p. xxi)

To conclude that Eliot was consciously and deliberately fashioning a new style, albeit one crafted from the remains of earlier relics, may be misleading. What we can deduce about *TWL*, however, is that the intention was personal, but the perception was impersonal. Eliot may have been getting some personal grievances off his chest, but *TWL* was widely interpreted as a dispassionate reading of a historical moment.

Part of the appeal of *TWL* is undoubtedly its alluring perplexity, its teasing enigmas, its babel of competing voices. It is as if the poem functions at a deeper, sub-textual level, a lower stratum of signification where Eliot managed to lay the allegorical and mythological allusions woven into the fabric of the text. For Eagleton, Eliot “was more of a primitivist than a sophisticate. He was interested in what a poem did, not what it said – in the resonance of the signifier, the lures of its music, the hauntings of its grains and textures, the subterranean workings of what one can only call the poem’s unconscious.” (EAGLETON, 2007, p. 92) This suggests another paradox: although the search for signification in *TWL* may be fundamentally thwarted by its deep, enigmatic structure, students of literature are encouraged to perform a close reading of the text in an attempt to grasp some intrinsic, holistic meaning. Here is a section from *The Fire Sermon* (lines 187 – 206):

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
 Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
 While I was fishing in the dull canal
 On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
 Musing upon the king my brother’s wreck
 And on the king my father’s death before him.
 White bodies naked on the low damp ground
 And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
 Rattled by the rat’s foot only, year to year.
 But at my back from time to time I hear
 The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
 Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
 O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
 And on her daughter
 They wash their feet in soda water
 Et O ces voix d’enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

Twit twit twit
 Jug jug jug jug jug jug
 So rudely forc’d.
 Tereu (NORTH, 2001, pp. 11-12)

There is an almost music-hall, comic vitality about these lines which radically confounds the disturbing image of “White bodies naked on the low damp ground / And bones cast in a little low dry garret” contained within. The *spirit* of Eliot here is profoundly ironical, singing to himself and enjoying the inventiveness of his word play, despite the smell of death in the air.

The form Eliot chooses to employ here, the ubiquitous iambic pentameter of English poetry, with its “ghostly” authority as the speaking voice we hear in Shakespeare, adds to the irony. Of the first thirteen lines quoted here, only three of them break the iambic pentameter mould, thus drawing attention to themselves. The lines are: “On a winter evening round behind the gashouse”, which infuses an element of comedy; “Rattled by the rat’s foot only, year to year” which revels in assonance and alliteration despite the ominous enigma of the sense; and “O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter” which introduces a comic singing voice and indicates a shift of mood, complemented by the banality of “soda water” and “Twit twit twit”. Readers encouraged to search for profundity may be inclined to read these lines in a serious cast of mind, resisting the urge to smile in wonder at Eliot’s act of parody (it would be difficult to imagine F. R. Leavis having anything other than a very straight face while reading *TWL*). Not all of the poem is light-hearted by any means, but taken as a whole, as the poem certainly is, the overall effect of *TWL* is hardly depressing. It was Eliot himself who said, with, I believe, only a trace of irony: “Every poet would like to think that he had some direct social utility...All the better, then, if he could have at least the satisfaction of having a part to play in society as worthy as that of the music-hall comedian.” (KERMODE, 1975, p. 95)

Students of literature are routinely asked to pay close attention to the text, to study poems carefully and diligently. In the case of *TWL* however, if close reading does not produce a definable sense of the poem, but leaves the reader baffled and frustrated, we could even begin to question the efficacy of close reading as a viable approach. Rainey reminds us that the editors of *Dial* magazine, who eventually published *TWL*, didn’t feel it necessary to read Eliot’s text at the time, and this highlights the historical particularity of the practice of close reading.

The best reading of a work may, on some occasions, be one that does not read it at all. Such an extreme formulation would doubtless be misleading. Yet it might remind us that close reading is itself a historical form of activity that appears at a precise moment in the development of professional literary studies and that other kinds of reading are and have been practised – not least among them the not-reading that was practised by the editors of the *Dial*, itself a trenchant reading of *The Waste Land*’s place in the structural logic and development of literary modernism. (RAINEY, 2007, p. 267)

What is undeniable about *TWL* is that it is safely established in the literary canon and, as such, must be given due attention. One of the problems of interpretation concerns the reader’s expectations: although the poem is long and divided into discrete sections, there is a natural tendency on the reader’s part to imbue the poem with an overall “message”, a single

voice, a meaning – however reductive – that can be taken away and repeated. This is despite the fact, as I have mentioned, that Eliot considered publishing the sections as separate poems.¹³ “No doubt it is conceivable,” according to Kermode, “that we have been induced by a sort of benign propaganda to see the poem as a single whole; but even if that is so, we have now agreed to see it thus, and we do see it thus.” (KERMODE, 2003, p. xxi) Weighed down by the critical discourse already expended on it, *TWL* has been transposed into four hundred lines of continuous text that must be swallowed whole for its significance to be fully grasped. This holistic interpretation is encouraged by the ghostly “presence” of a principal speaker and onlooker in the form of Tiresias, who, “although a mere spectator and not indeed a ‘character’”, as Eliot tells us in the notes, “is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest.” (ELIOT, 1967, p. 70) Here we have the voice of the most reliable authority, the poet himself, asserting that readers should focus on the blind prophet of Greek mythology, as this voice or “personage” is the one “uniting all the rest”. With the presence of this “protagonist”, Eliot is directing the reader to see *TWL* as a unified whole. And yet, according to Vincent Sherry, it was Ezra Pound who first realised the importance of Tiresias and elevated his significance in the process of editing the original manuscript. In reducing the manuscript by hundreds of lines, Pound manages to exhort a “unifying” voice which can give the disparate sections a holistic vitality. “With the entrance of Tiresias”, writes Sherry, “the vocal medley evident in the earlier sections begins to achieve the focal intensity and definition of a single speaking character.” (SHERRY, 2003, p. 217) Eliot’s original conception, *He Do the Police in Different Voices*, has become, with the help of Pound, something akin to “The Vision and Prophecy of Tiresias”, as “Tiresias is established as the dominant consciousness of the poem” (SHERRY, 2003, p. 218)

Pound’s influence on *TWL* is, of course, well known – Eliot dedicates the poem to his editor, calling him “il miglior fabbro” (the better craftsman), a reference drawn from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Sherry, however, suggests the extent to which Pound not only gave shape and a unifying voice to the poem, but also affected the subsequent interpretations of the poem is not widely understood. Eliot’s deference to Pound allowed the “better craftsman” to change the *form* of the poem, to alter the tone, to bring order and consistency to what was previously a “babel” of incongruent voices.

¹³ In his section *Synoptic Bibliographical Descriptions*, Lawrence Rainey produces a chronological listing of Eliot’s letters and prose which reveals that certain parts of *TWL*’s manuscripts were written as early as 1913 when Eliot was at Harvard. These findings highlight the arbitrariness of holistic readings of the poem as a unified entity. See RAINEY, 2005, p. 13

Pound's editing [...] breaks up the multifarious command of Eliot's quatrain form, replaces its changing cadences and motley vocabulary with a much more consistent rhythm and diction, rinsing away the note of suburban bitchiness and lifting the vocal character into a single idiom of calmly solemn, ritual dignity. (SHERRY, 2003, p. 220)

And it is precisely this “consistency” which encourages holistic interpretations. The dominant critical approach to *TWL* has been to yoke the five sections together into an integrated semantic whole and draw parallels with the apparent “decay of Western civilization” and similar portentous judgements about the poem's significance. “The fiction of consistence that Pound managed to inscribe in the sequence, however, proved to be the main point of hermeneutic appeal in the literary criticism of the next fifty or so years.” (SHERRY, 2003, p. 224) The “deeper” structures of significance we have seen – the grail legend, the Fisher King, the anthropology of *The Golden Bough* – also contribute towards the possibility of reader “consumption”, of making sense of the poem, offering thematic consistency. Sherry argues that many readers of *TWL* use the grail quest narrative as a foothold,

just to organize their experience of an insistently bewildering poem, just to go on reading. A significance of loosely strung, provisional logical quality serves to appease the needs one's conditioned sensibility brings to literature, but it has little relation in the end to what the poem is 'about'. (SHERRY, 2003, p. 224)

The paradox of an “insistently bewildering” poem, a text that is “unintelligible” and yet one that invites endless interpretation is at the core of *TWL*. The poem is a site where all discourses which attempt to reproduce the text clash together in a void. The discursive practice of interpretation based on close reading is not deterred by enigma or incoherence: the search for meaning continues regardless. This moral quest for significance represents a kind of deafness: instead of listening to Eliot's rhythms, cadences and subtle shifts of register (which bring comedy to the performance), readers knit their brows in the hope of deeper enlightenment. Consider the rich variety of five short extracts from *The Burial of the Dead* (lines 17 – 63):

In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.
(...)
What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish?
(...)
“You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
“They called me the hyacinth girl.”
(...)
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
One must be so careful these days.
(...)
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many. (NORTH, 2001, pp. 5-7)

In attempting to identify a semantic thread linking these phrases, one misses the irony implicit in Eliot's switching of tone, his gift for ventriloquizing and mastery of the idiomatic phrase ("One must be so careful these days."). The "I" who reads, the "I" who brings the telescope, the "I" who watches the crowd and "me the hyacinth girl" are personas, none of which are clearly identifiable as the poet himself. Distilling *truth* from an array of disparate voices, some comic, others prophetic, some singing, others chatting in pubs, might be considered incongruous, tantamount to allotting a single opinion to a group of people. Eliot may have had an overall *design* for *TWL*, a dominant and passionately-held idea to communicate to his readers, but there is scant evidence for such a theory. When Eliot says, in the Notes which accompany *TWL*, "What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem", we might ask ourselves, as Ellmann does, what does Tiresias see, exactly? "Blind as he is, the prophet has a single walk-on part, when he spies on the typist and her lover indulging in carbuncular caresses." (NORTH, 2001, p. 264)

Hugh Kenner calls *TWL* "a parody of a modern poem". This begins to make sense if we consider the ventriloquism, the evasiveness and ironic distancing of Eliot himself, the pub scene, the music hall references, the clash of registers: taken together, these elements do not auger well for a poem widely considered to be a statement of serious intent.

The Waste Land presupposes that there is something called Poetry, which has come to us from many lands and periods, and consorts with certain elevations of style, and no longer has much meaning. It is packaged like the official Poetry of a time when poetry is dead, complete with numbered lines and footnotes. (KENNER, 1991, p. 439)

Kenner appears to presuppose that Eliot and Pound's production was in some way irresponsible, or deliberately facetious. However, I would argue that *TWL* was never intended to be "understood"; it is a poetic performance, layers of half-meanings and overheard conversations all signifying something but not leading to any grand narrative or reducible meaning. The purpose of the poem, if there is one, is to provoke readers into asking questions,

questions we are sure to address to the poem itself – what on earth does it mean? – though the force of such a question ought to strike back to the hallowed materials themselves: what can that song from *The Tempest* mean? [...] What did Ophelia mean when she bade the ladies goodnight? The poem is a grotesquerie, often nearly a parody; Eliot even told Arnold Bennett that yes, the notes were a skit, but no more so than some of the poem itself. (KENNER, 1991, p. 443)

Words like "skit" and "parody" point towards something that is tongue-in-cheek, something not meant to be taken too seriously. However, if *TWL* is a "parody of a modern poem" and yet it is firmly positioned at the pinnacle of High Modernism, then we have a conundrum. Either Modernism itself is essentially parodic in style, or *TWL* is the caricature of a poetic style we

should be able to identify as Modern. Perhaps more importantly, if we agree to view *TWL* as a form of poetic burlesque, this compromises the widely held interpretation of the poem as emblematic of a spiritual crisis which followed WWI. Adorno's description of a poem as "a philosophical sundial telling the time of history" is useful here: Eliot may not have intended to write an allegory of post-war spiritual decay, but *TWL* remains, nevertheless, a valuable cultural document that offers insights into what Eagleton calls the "ideologico-aesthetic" moment of its first publication. This is not to suggest *TWL* carries a profound, underlying *message*, but that its complexity, its array of poetic styles, its shifting idioms and competing voices all work together to illuminate the state of poetry in England in 1922.

Although Eliot, as we have seen, could be dismissive about ideological parallels or historical interpretations of *TWL*, this does not mean the construction of the poem was somehow a haphazard affair. In fact, Eliot was impatient with critics who concerned themselves with the possible meaning or significance of the poem, prioritising content over form. As Eagleton reminds us, "It was form – the material stuff of language itself, its archaic resonances and tentacular roots – which mattered most to him." (EAGLETON, 2007, p. 92) Eliot believed poetic language carried with it a deeper, more "primitive" resonance that affected the reader at a deeper level, a place beyond logical "meaning" and explanation. This explains the concentration of myth and symbolism in *TWL*, but it also suggests the poem should not be plundered for "meaning" at the level of logical consciousness. "Poetry was not to engage the reader's mind: it did not really matter what a poem actually *meant*, [...] Meaning was no more than a sop thrown to the reader to keep him distracted, while the poem went to work on him in more physical and unconscious ways." (EAGLETON, 2008, p. 35) As Eliot is firmly established as a central figure in the emergence of Modernism, we can extrapolate from this that one of the principle facets of the new movement in poetry was "opacity"; the reader is not intended to make much sense of a Modern poem. "This kind of writing is surely *meant* to baffle us. [...] The esoteric diction and arcane allusions deliberately prevent us from reading for 'content'." (EAGLETON, 2007, p. 91) At this point, we reach another possible paradox: either *TWL* is clearly classifiable as an example of Modernism – something "baffling", formally dense, littered with allusion – or it is a unique text which defies categorisation. If we opt for the former, and suggest that *TWL* is an essentially Modern text, then we must be able to define "Modernist poetry". Yet, as we have seen, the whole ethos of Modernism is to be "difficult", "opaque" and "baffling". If Modernist poetry is essentially enigmatic, then it surely defies the categories that try to contain it. For Eagleton,

what Eliot's poetry "says", among other things, is "This is modernism". It proclaims itself as a type of literature which is impossible to consume." (EAGLETON, 2007, p. 91) If the sheer inscrutability of *TWL* is its main feature, then the problem arises of how best to define Modernism. In fact, it could be argued that no two definitions of Modernism are the same, or, as Perry Anderson has said, "what is concealed beneath the label is a wide variety of very diverse – indeed incompatible – aesthetic practices: symbolism, constructivism, expressionism, surrealism". (ANDERSON, 1984, p. 112) It appears we do not have a reliable category – Modernism – by which *TWL* can be defined.

For Lawrence Rainey, Modernism in literature announced itself as a high-cultural movement, complete with with arcane texts, which unwittingly alienated the ordinary reading public. The critical establishment was similarly intimidated by the erudite complexity of *TWL* and of Eliot's formidable reputation as an intellectual poet. Few had the courage to admit they did not understand the poem. According to Rainey, "*The Waste Land* was represented as the verse equivalent of Ulysses, a work that epitomized not just the experiences of an individual...but the modernist claim to a hegemonic position in the institution of 'literature'". (RAINEY, 2007, p. 252) Rainey is particularly critical of the American New Critics who helped to elevate *TWL* to iconic status by performing a series of clinical and detailed readings of the poem, embracing its complexity and attempting to elaborate its deeper significance by careful examination of Eliot's notes. The New Critical approaches were aiming to extrapolate *meaning* from the *TWL*, establishing what we might call contemporary thematic relevance. Rainey is impatient with this hallowed reverence for *TWL* and appeals to readers to be *open* to the poem as a lyric performance: By doing so,

we can remain open to the pleasure of amazement and the sense of wonder that a reading of *The Waste Land* inevitably brings, attentive to the poem's vertiginous twists and turns of language, responsive to its richly varied ironic and climactic moments, receptive to its lacerating wildness and stubborn refusal to accommodate expectations." (RAINEY, 2005, p. 128)

Rainey, however, may have more sympathy than he realises for this openness. Cleanth Brooks, one of the leading lights of New Criticism, admits that the daunting scholarship necessary to perform a thorough examination of *TWL* can obscure more immediate pathways of access to the poem:

I prefer not to raise...here the question of how important it is for the reader to have an explicit intellectual account of the various symbols and a logical account of their relationships. It may well be that such rationalization is no more than a scaffolding to be got out of the way before we contemplate the poem itself as a poem. (BROOKS, 1939, p. 136)

Brooks, however, like many critics, is reluctant to let go of the idea of a *unity* of meaning in *TWL*, despite evidence of the fractured nature of the poem's construction and of Pound's wholesale editing of the manuscripts and subjective selection of parts for inclusion. As Frank Kermode says, quoted above, we are left with no alternative but to consume *TWL* whole because that is what the critical establishment has resolved to do as the arbiters of culture. Brooks even admits the apparent randomness of images and voices in *TWL*, but believes that doesn't detract from grasping the poem as a unified whole:

With the characters as with the other symbols, the surface relationships may be accidental and apparently trivial and they may be made either ironically or through random association or in hallucination, but in the total context of the poem the deeper relationships are revealed. The effect is a sense of the oneness of experience, and of the unity of all periods, and with this, a sense that the general theme of the poem is true. But the theme has not been imposed—it has been revealed. (BROOKS, 1939, p. 169)

It is undeniable that *TWL* had a profound effect on the reception of poetry in England at the time of its publication. Cyril Connolly remembered how he and his colleagues at Oxford in the 1920s were so overwhelmed by *TWL* and Eliot's exalted image that they immediately dispensed with other contemporary poets. "We were like new-born goslings forever imprinted with the image of an alien and indifferent foster-parent, infatuated with his erudition, his sophistication, yet sapped and ruined by the contagion of his despair. Housman, Flecker and the Georgians all melted away overnight." (CONNOLLY, 1975, p. 207) Connolly, who later became a renowned literary critic in England and champion of Modernism, characterises the image of Eliot and his poem here with the words "erudition", "sophistication" and "despair". *TWL* was a testament to literary scholarship, to the mastery of poetic form displayed with the confidence of the urbane intellectual, one who could afford to be ironical. The "despair" was in the tone, the "rhythmical grumbling" Eliot admitted. Consider these famous lines from *The Fire Sermon* (lines 300 – 306):

"On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing."

la la (NORTH, 2001, p. 15)

We are surely shooting in the dark here, only able to guess at the possible significance residing somewhere in this juxtaposition of sounds and images. There is clearly pathos in "I can connect / Nothing with nothing", but it is sandwiched between "Margate Sands" (a seaside resort for working class Londoners) and "The broken fingernails of dirty hands"; and though "My people humble people who expect / Nothing" sounds prophetic (especially if we

knew who “my people” might be) the line is compromised in its seriousness by that final “la la”. The “despair” Connolly identifies may indeed be apparent, but it doesn’t reveal itself by careful examination of the words and their context. For Maud Ellmann, *TWL* “lures the reader into hermeneutics...but there is no secret under its hugger-muggery”. Yes, the poem speaks to us, but not if we struggle with definitions, for “it is in the silences *between* the words that meaning flickers, local, evanescent – in the very ‘wastes’ that stretch across the page.” (NORTH, 2001, p. 259)

In June 1922, a few months before *TWL* was published, Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary:

Eliot dined last Sunday & read his poem. He sang it and chanted it, rhythmized it. It has great beauty and force of phrase: symmetry; & tensivity. What connects it together, I’m not so sure...One was left, however, with some strong emotion. *The Waste Land*, it is called...Tom’s autobiography – a melancholy one. (WOOLF, 1980, p. 178)

Eliot’s reading of the poem was, of course, a *performance*. In giving several voices to the poem, in chanting it, *TWL* became less of a text and more of a dramatic eulogy. It was the performance of a personal lament; a long, melancholy song. The editor of the poem, Ezra Pound, was absent, though his role in the production cannot be over-estimated. Together Eliot and Pound produced a kind of modern “mantra”: a magical poem full of symbolism that should be read aloud, preferably “in different voices”. These formal qualities – sound, rhythm, rhyme, register – give poetry its particular strength. They are physical, visceral qualities, which *humanise* the poem in an anthropological sense. The desire to interpret the poem as a single entity may be natural, but it forces content-heavy interpretations that overlook the musicality of *TWL*. Much like Virginia Woolf, Eliot was not a writer with a politically engaged social vision; he was not attempting to represent a post-war mood of despondency and cultural decay. He was more of an aesthete, a poet who wanted to mount an exhibition of literary ornaments, and then play the part of the curator who writes the catalogue for the show, singing it aloud for the gallery audience. What connects the five parts together, as Woolf suggests, is not something we can determine with any certainty. However, Woolf’s view of the poem as having “beauty and force” is something I, and many others, would agree with, though as we have seen, such terms are difficult to define. *TWL* undoubtedly rewards repeated readings, though not to tease out more “meaning”, but to enjoy its musical, allusive, hypnotic power.

In the winter of 1923, Cyril Connolly, then an undergraduate at Oxford, described *TWL* in a letter to a friend at Cambridge as a very “Alexandrian” poem.

Whatever happens read 'The Waste Land' by T. S. Eliot – only read it twice. It is quite short and has the most marvellous things in it – though the 'message' is almost unintelligible and it is a very Alexandrian poem – sterility disguised by superb use of quotation and obscure symbolism – thoroughly decadent. It will ruin your style...(CONNOLLY, 1975, p. 207)

This is an enlightening observation about Eliot's poem; one corroborated by the following definition offered by a Greek classicist and I believe worth quoting at length:

The Alexandrian poets are all in some way or other, directly or indirectly, *hampered and fettered by the weight of classical Greek poetry*. They looked at the Greek poetic tradition with awe mingled with despair; they were spellbound by the rich and beautiful language, the perfection of form and the grandeur of the classical creative imagination from Homer to Menander, but the more they studied those works the more deeply were they convinced of the utter impossibility of creating anything of equal originality; they realized that they were incapable of freeing themselves completely from the classical tradition or of breaking it and creating new types of great poetry, as the Ionians had created the epic, or the Athenians drama. The furthest they dared venture was to *mix and to mingle* the old pure and clearly defined types of poetry. The result, neither the same nor completely new, flattered their vanity by persuading them that they were creating, without breaking way from the spell of tradition. (TRYPANIS, 1947, pp. 1-7)

It seems to me that this is an almost uncanny description of Eliot's view of poetry and of his approach to the writing of *TWL*. "Immature poets imitate," writes Eliot, "mature poets steal: bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different."³ Eliot looked at the tradition "with awe" and felt "hampered" by its weight: the best he could hope for was to "mix and mingle" some of the old "pure" poetry with something new. The result, *TWL*, is a fascinating document, not only as a homage to classical, romantic and symbolist poetry, however, but as a unique *performance* only made possible by the ghostly voices that emerge and vanish. Indeed, Eliot's original title *He Do The Police in Different Voices*, is fruitful to bear in mind when reading the poem, with all the irony of the original quotation. The phrase, from Dickens' novel *Our Mutual Friend*, appears when the widow Betty Higden says (ungrammatically) of her young adopted son Sloppy, "You mightn't think it, but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices." The comedy of this exchange is an indication of the spirit of *TWL*.

³ The famous quotation of Eliot's comes from his essay on Philip Massinger in *The Sacred Wood*, 1932. Eliot writes: "One of the surest tests [of the superiority or inferiority of a poet] is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different than that from which it is torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion." Of course, the composition of *The Waste Land*, could be seen (holistically) as one in which, as Eliot says "the good poet welds his theft into *a whole of feeling which is unique*, utterly different than that from which it is torn". (my italics)

In a complimentary letter to Cleanth Brooks after reading the critic's essay on *TWL*, Eliot made an illuminating comment:

["Critique of the Myth"] seems to me on the whole excellent. I think that this kind of analysis is perfectly justified so long as it does not profess to be a reconstruction of the author's method of writing. Reading your essay made me feel, for instance, that I had been much more ingenious than I had been aware of, because the conscious problems with which one is concerned in the actual writing are more those of a quasi-musical nature, the arrangement of metric and pattern, than of a conscious exposition of ideas. (BROOKS, 1995, pp. 99 – 100)

Whatever we, as students and critics of literature, have decided to *read into* Eliot's poem highlights the complexity of modern, critical theory and the academic *processing* of literature, more than it exposes the hidden depths of *TWL*. As a poet, Eliot was mostly concerned with technique, with rhythm, rhyme and the wit of his word-play; the credibility of his social commentary or of his exposition of cultural decay, if they existed, were secondary to him at best. Perhaps the most fruitful reading of *TWL* would not be a reading at all; it would be the opportunity to listen to the poem performed by a company of actors in a variety of registers and accents. Only after this entertaining initiation should the poem be tackled on the page, notes and all, to marvel at Pound and Eliot's inventiveness.

PART TWO

The Shadow of War: Eliot's English contemporaries

'The early work of Brooke, Owen, Sassoon, Rosenberg and others shows their familiarity with Decadent poets such as Swinburne and Wilde, who had portrayed the artist as alienated from a doomed society and exclusively concerned with the refinement of his own feelings, including pain, in the fatal pursuit of beauty. The supreme sensation would be at the moment when death and beauty met in exquisite agony. Thus, even the realities of trench warfare were material for art when they came.'

Dominic Hibberd (HIBBERD, 1986, p. 13)

2.1 More than ‘rainbows, cuckoos, daffodils and timid hares’: a reassessment of The Georgians

Poetry must grow out of the realities of the human condition. Plain, direct language must be used and all inversions and archaisms must be avoided like the plague. Only everyday speech was fit for the bare truthfulness and sincerity of poetry. We must write with our ‘eye on the object’ and eschew literary themes. Vivian de Sola Pinto¹⁴
(HIBBERD & ONIONS, 1986, p. 28)

When a number of poets find themselves identified under the umbrella of a new “movement” there is always a risk that, with the passing of time, the movement will fall out of fashion and the poets connected with it will be discredited by association. This is precisely what happened with the Georgians, a group of poets writing in England in the second decade of the 20th century, years that included the Great War. The epithet *Georgian* stemmed from the fact that George V had ascended the throne in 1910, after the brief reign of Edward VII, whose name had been similarly used to distinguish the Edwardian era. The man behind the idea to anthologise some of the poets he admired and to signal the emergence of a new aesthetic approach to poetry was Edward Marsh, a civil servant and patron of the arts who was Winston Churchill’s private secretary until 1915. Altogether, five anthologies of Georgian poetry were sponsored and edited by Marsh between 1911 and 1922, published by Harold Monro at the Poetry Bookshop in London. In the Preface to the first volume (1912), which included work by Rupert Brooke, Wilfrid Gibson and Harold Monro, Marsh looks forward excitedly to the dawning of a new age for poetry in England.

This volume is issued in the belief that English poetry is now once again putting on a new strength and beauty. This collection...may if it is fortunate help the lovers of poetry to realize that we are at the beginning of another "Georgian period" which may take rank in due time with the several great poetic ages of the past. (MARSH, 1912, p. vii)

Although all attempts to define the characteristics of a disparate group of poets are inadequate, the so-called Georgians are often classed as representative of a particular kind of attitude and a distinctive use of language. In a sense, the Georgians were not concerned with righting the wrongs of the Edwardian era, the seven-year period that immediately preceded them. The Georgian poets were self-consciously reacting against what they viewed as the

¹⁴ Hibberd and Onions recount how Vivian de Sola Pinto, a British poet, became friends with Siegfried Sassoon, who was both a Georgian and a war poet, during the war. The quotation is a summary of the advice Sassoon gave to de Sola Pinto to improve his poetry. The original quotation is to be found in *The City that Shone*, by Vivian de Sola Pinto, 1969, pp. 221-222.

sterility and irrelevance of Victorian poetry at the beginning of a new century characterised by rapid technological advancement. The Edwardians had made advances, but the period had been too brief and the influence of the Victorians too strong for any real progress in the arts. What the Georgians offered was a new poetics stripped of grandiose themes, ornate language and traditional metrical patterns; a poetry of the here and now, of everyday reality.

After the doldrums of Edwardian verse, the publication of the first volume of *Georgian Poetry* in 1912 had aroused lively interest. In place of the grand, vague diction of the late Victorians, the new poetry offered plain language, simplicity, sharpness of detail, and a commitment to realism that did not duck the unpleasant. (HIBBERD & ONIONS, 1986, p. 9)

Despite the positive nature of Hibberd's retrospective comments and the optimism of Marsh, the Georgians are much more maligned than praised, in many critics' eyes forever associated with a naïve and parochial Englishness that was unwilling to engage with modern ideas about art hailing from France, or the political struggles which were threatening to engulf the European continent.

The general perception of the Georgians is that they were too insular for a rapidly expanding literary landscape; too focused on the English countryside and the English sensibility; too concerned with depicting the bohemian version of polite English society which most of them occupied. Georgian verse is particularly associated with a purblind, pre-war mentality, a wistful rendition of English life before the war as a timeless world of country walks, afternoon tea and timid, breathless love.

That the Georgians recognised the changing nature of civilisation cannot be denied. Instead, however, of so adapting their poetry as to make it a fit medium for the expression of the changed circumstances they continued to play with subjects having a preconceived and rather facile emotional appeal. It was purely a poetry of escape, concerned with the romance of far-off lands, the sea, and of a sentimentalised English countryside, fixed firmly at three o'clock on a sunny afternoon before the first world war. (MAXWELL, 2016, p. 2)

Maxwell's judgement here, though prescriptive, is typical: it appears there are fit and unfit subjects for poetry, and that the Georgians were unable to recognise their own irrelevance. If the world was changing dramatically, then poetry should reflect the *zeitgeist*, should represent the new social reality. The English countryside was no longer the reality for an industrialised, mass society more used to pounding the streets of the city and being confronted by oily canals and factory smoke. "From 1900 until the first world war, poetry in England wandered for the most part along the country paths opened up for the most part by the nineteenth-century romantics, unaware that the paths had become ruts, and that a more suitable track was now the pavement." (MAXWELL, 2016, p. 1) Maxwell's view forms part of his explanation for the

revulsion felt towards the Georgians by the subject of his book, T. S. Eliot. The key word here is “pavement” which acts, symbolically, as representative of Eliot’s oeuvre from *Prufrock* in 1917 to *TWL* in 1922, poetry suffused with images of urban decay: “The conscience of a blackened street” (*Preludes IV*), “one-night cheap hotels” (*Prufrock*), “broken blinds and chimney pots” (*Prufrock*), “The river sweats oil and tar” (*TWL III*), and the “dull canal...behind the gashouse” (*TWL III*) to name only a few. Eliot’s antipathy towards the Georgians, according to Maxwell, bordered on the pathological and was to have a long-term effect on his critical views about poetry. In 1917 he described the limited range of the Georgian’s subject matter as “rainbows, cuckoos, daffodils and timid hares” and complained that such poets had failed to engage with the diverse currents of European and other cultures. “The serious writer of verse must be prepared to cross himself with the best verse of other languages, and the best prose of all languages. In Georgian poetry there is no such crossing visible; it is inbred.” (MAXWELL, 2016, p. 4) What we begin to see here is not only Eliot’s prescriptive view of the true nature of poetry, but also the formative ideas that would affirm the relevance of his own cosmopolitan and metropolitan style of poetry writing.

Maxwell admits Eliot was an early imitator of the Georgian style, but defends this as a flirtation only to be expected of the young Harvard man. That Eliot’s fervent reaction against the Georgians became the basis of his subsequent critical stance is more difficult to understand. “Eliot’s earliest undergraduate poetry has a Georgian tinge, but the *mésalliance* was brief, and it was his later reaction to their work that led to his formulating the literary theories from which all his poetry has since derived.” (MAXWELL, 2016, p. 1) Perhaps there was something about the very Englishness of the Georgians that, as an American, Eliot found distasteful. There was also the common identification of the Georgians as a kind of neo-romantic movement that irritated Eliot the critic, who had little time for some of English Literature’s Romantic luminaries. Writing just after the war, in 1919, he bluntly dismisses the Georgians as an unpleasant reminder of three of his literary *bêtes noires*: “Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth punish us from their graves with the annual scourge of the Georgian anthology.” (MAXWELL, 2016, p. 4) Despite Eliot’s harshness, he was not alone in such strident opinions: most critical evaluations of the Georgians are similarly dismissive, though, in retrospect, it could be argued that as one of the foremost critics of his day, Eliot had a hand in the formation of a critical landscape within which the Georgians had no place. In a recent survey of critical opinions, we get a flavour of the accepted viewpoint to which most readers have become familiar.

The subject matter of many Georgian poets during World War One appeared to be divorced from the cataclysmic upheavals that were taking place on the continent. The movement has often been judged to be the last flicker of the Romantic movement, and many modern critics have dealt harshly with the poetry produced under the aegis of Marsh. (HAWKINS-DADY, 1996, p. 322)

In his reassessment of the Georgian poetic, Myron Simon suggests that the movement's attitude towards Victorian poetry amounted to more than a rejection of ornate language, traditional forms and grandiose themes: it was also a disavowal of the Christian morality which pervaded 19th century verse.

The Georgians...questioned the honesty...of the relationship between the poet, his subject matter and his audience. [They] were avowedly and comprehensively anti-Victorian...They were wary of simplistically grandiose metaphysical and ethical assumptions. A virtually uniform agnosticism contributed heavily to their disaffection from the doctrinaire quality of much Victorian religious verse. (SIMON, 1978, p. 33)

The picture Simon paints here is of a kind of ethical and spiritual revolution, a revaluation of the morality of the church which had dominated English culture during the Victorian era. The idea that poetry, or art in general, has an obligation to *instruct* its audience is, as we have seen, only one conception of its aesthetic function. Simon is convinced that the Georgians, taken as a group of poets with a similar conviction to rid poetry of grandiose themes and excessively ornate language, share many characteristics in common with their Imagist contemporaries. Both movements, Simon argues, had similar aesthetic aims: to strip poetry of excess and, through a careful and self-conscious selection of language, allow the reader to experience a more direct relationship with the language and the image.

In their common desire to recall poetry to the genuine truths of human experience, both the early Georgians and the early Imagists were quite willing to restrict radically the subject matter of poetry to what could be known by the poet directly and stated accurately. Both groups were, moreover, opposed to the use of poetry for doctrinizing, for conveying moral or political messages. Consequently, the disposition of Marsh's Georgians to reduce the scope of poetry by severely pruning poetic diction and banishing doctrinal content was virtually identical with that of the Imagists who were guided by the poetics of T. E. Hulme. (SIMON, 1978, p. 41)

The principal victim of this *purging* was "doctrinal content"; the use of poetry for moral guidance and instruction, rather than viewing the poem as an aesthetic object the contemplation of which could be an end in itself. The importance of this distinction cannot be overstated: questions about the *function* of poetry and its value as an object of study centre around this dichotomy. Although it is tempting to argue that poetry should be read and contemplated for its innate *beauty*, the critical practices which *define* poetry in the academic environment inevitably make value judgements based on the interpretation of content, rather than the appreciation of formal technique. This explains the insistence, for example, on

rooting out the “message” in *TWL*, what I have termed “the will to paraphrase” Eliot’s poem. It seems that if *TWL* cannot be shown to have moral or political significance when placed within a particular historical context, then its academic study is difficult to justify. Evidently, we cannot read *TWL* for *pure pleasure* even today, without reflecting upon the ethical consequences of experiencing such a discrete aesthetic encounter with the text.

For Simon, another important aspect of the aesthetic dimension in poetry which he identifies as linking the Georgians and the Imagists is the status of the poet. The poem is not a vehicle through which the poet’s *personality* or his *feelings* can be identified: the stripping of excess which pares down the poetic language also includes a withdrawal of the identity of the poet. The language of the poem must stand on its own as a verbal image or encapsulated idea; the poem is not a medium through which we reach the poet. By removing the authorial voice, the poetry was also deprived of its *authority* as a rhetorical statement with moral implications.

[S]ome of the proposals and practices of the Imagist circle appeared thoroughly consistent with those of the Georgians. Pound’s notion at this time that the achievement of truth and beauty in poetry necessitated the poet’s withdrawal from public posturing, that is, the subordination or extinction of his personality in the interest of an absolute dedication to his craft, and his consequent abandonment of the rhetorical formulas that ensured popular approval, seemed entirely compatible with the orientation of the Marsh group. (SIMON, 1978, p. 38)

Simon associates the “subordination or extinction” of the poet’s “personality” with Pound’s approach to poetry during the Imagist period, though we are also reminded here of Eliot’s famous category of the “objective correlative”, the idea that the poet is a *depersonalised* figure who *encodes* his feelings in the text for the reader to decode. Arguably, where Pound and Eliot diverge is on the important issue of the poet’s emotions: when Simon says that Pound was attempting to achieve “truth and beauty” in poetry, we presume that these aesthetic aims do not imply the recognition of the poet’s “feelings” in the poem, whether encoded or not. The crystallized images and oblique language of Pound’s Imagism amount to a *negation* of personality when compared with Eliot’s Modernist style which, even on the evidence of *TWL* alone, resonates with Eliot’s personality. Although Eliot was insistent that his poetry was *impersonal* and his deployment of myriad *personas* in *TWL* appears to support this assertion, Eliot’s lyric voice, as I have said before, is so powerful it can be heard beneath the masquerade. For this reason, it is extremely difficult to dissociate the “voice” of Eliot we hear when reading his poetry with the emotional timbre of the language. In this sense, certain sections of *TWL* appear to be both personal and “emotional” utterances that distinguish them from Pound’s Imagist experiments. Pound’s aim, as we have seen, was to fuse an “intellectual

and an emotional complex”, thereby denying the ascendancy of the emotional thrust of Romantic verse. Pound’s image was more of an intellectual concept, one which fixed itself in opposition to sentimental abstractions.¹⁵ Simon is prepared to make bold assertions about the similarity between Imagism and the Georgians, but his ideas go against the grain of the vast majority of critical evaluations of the two schools, which elevate the status of Pound’s experiments and denigrate the poets listed in Marsh’s five anthologies. In order to offer a flavour of Georgian poetics, I have chosen to examine a number of poems which represent the movement in a variety of ways.

Rupert Brooke was one of the leading lights in the Georgian group, a personal friend of Marsh together with whom he conceived of the idea of launching a new movement in poetry in around 1910. Following Brooke’s death in 1915, Marsh took on the role of both executor of the poet’s estate and his biographer. Although Brooke’s name became synonymous with his iconic war sonnet *The Soldier*¹⁶, which is often looked upon as a symbol of selfless English patriotism, he was also figured prominently in the early Georgian Poetry anthologies. One of Brooke’s contributions to Marsh’s first anthology, *Georgian Poetry 1911-1912*, was a poem with the unpromising title *Dining Room Tea*.

Dining Room Tea

When you were there, and you, and you,
 Happiness crowned the night; I too,
 Laughing and looking, one of all,
 I watched the quivering lamplight fall
 On plate and flowers and pouring tea
 And cup and cloth; and they and we
 Flung all the dancing moments by
 With jest and glitter. Lip and eye
 Flashed on the glory, shone and cried,
 Improvident, unmemoried;
 And fitfully and like a flame
 The light of laughter went and came.
 Proud in their careless transience moved
 The changing faces that I loved.

Till suddenly, and otherwhence,
 I looked upon your innocence.
 For lifted clear and still and strange
 From the dark woven flow of change
 Under a vast and starless sky
 I saw the immortal moment lie.
 One Instant I, an instant, knew

¹⁵ The complexity of this area of aesthetic speculation, the role of the emotions, the transfer of “feelings”, is both daunting and, ultimately speculative. The question, for example, of how emotion is communicated symbolically through language is particularly resistant to adequate explanation.

¹⁶ See my detailed discussion of Brooke’s *The Soldier* and its significance in the context of English WWI poetry in the following chapter.

As God knows all. And it and you
I, above Time, oh, blind! could see
In witless immortality.

I saw the marble cup; the tea,
Hung on the air, an amber stream;
I saw the fire's unglittering gleam,
The painted flame, the frozen smoke.
No more the flooding lamplight broke
On flying eyes and lips and hair;
But lay, but slept unbroken there,
On stiller flesh, and body breathless,
And lips and laughter stayed and deathless,
And words on which no silence grew.
Light was more alive than you.

For suddenly, and otherwhence,
I looked on your magnificence.
I saw the stillness and the light,
And you, august, immortal, white,
Holy and strange; and every glint
Posture and jest and thought and tint
Freed from the mask of transiency,
Triumphant in eternity,
Immote, immortal.

Dazed at length
Human eyes grew, mortal strength
Wearied; and Time began to creep.
Change closed about me like a sleep.
Light glinted on the eyes I loved.
The cup was filled. The bodies moved.
The drifting petal came to ground.
The laughter chimed its perfect round.
The broken syllable was ended.
And I, so certain and so friended,
How could I cloud, or how distress,
The heaven of your unconsciousness?
Or shake at Time's sufficient spell,
Stammering of lights unutterable?
The eternal holiness of you,
The timeless end, you never knew,
The peace that lay, the light that shone.
You never knew that I had gone
A million miles away, and stayed
A million years. The laughter played
Unbroken round me; and the jest
Flashed on. And we that knew the best
Down wonderful hours grew happier yet.
I sang at heart, and talked, and eat,
And lived from laugh to laugh, I too,
When you were there, and you, and you. (MARSH, 1912, pp. 45-47)

There appears to be very little here resembling either Pound's oblique, impersonal images or the shifting tones and registers of Eliot's montage in *TWL*. Brooke's tone is consistently light-hearted, the effect reinforced by the regular rhythm and rhyme patterns. The iambic tetrameter used throughout the poem adds a sense of intimacy, the "speaking" iambic form, identified

first by Aristotle, making the lyric voice gentle, immediate and convincing. Much of the subject matter resonates with cosiness and sentimentality, depicting polite society and the love of friends. The stereotype of Georgian poetry as derivatively Romantic, safe and, as Eliot says, “inbred” appears to be validated. However, underneath the levity of tone and sentimental musing, Brooke pitches an arresting, transcendental image, an uncanny moment of perception the starkness of which is heightened by its ironic contrast with the songlike form.

Time stands still in the middle of the poem and the transience of all things is suddenly apparent. In stanza two we find “Under a vast and starless sky / I saw the immortal moment lie. / One Instant I, an instant, knew / As God knows all”, where the punctuation in the third line (after “One instant,”) mimics the halting, arresting moment of perception. The representation of a timeless moment continues in stanza four when the tea is “Hung on the air”, the smoke is “frozen”, the “body breathless”, and “lips and laughter stayed and deathless”. Although thematically Brooke’s poem has Romantic resonance, the starkness of this metaphysical imagery is atypical. The pivotal stanza in the poem is the next:

For suddenly, and otherwhence,
I looked on your magnificence.
I saw the stillness and the light,
And you, august, immortal, white,
Holy and strange; and every glint
Posture and jest and thought and tint
Freed from the mask of transiency,
Triumphant in eternity,
Immote, immortal. (MARSH, 1912, pp. 45-47)

The iambic rhythm is fractured here to emphasise the strangeness of the imagery. After line four, “And you, august, immortal, white,” the iambic line gives way to three trochaic lines, with the stresses on the first syllable of the words: “Holy”, “Posture” and “Freed”. The effect is one of intensification, presenting a stuttering and dizzying array of adjectives, then nouns, to describe the oddness of the scene: “august, immortal, white, / Holy and strange...glint / Posture and jest and thought and tint”. What we are looking at exactly is unclear, as it is difficult to visualise “jests” and “thoughts” and “tints” “freed from transiency”; it is also unclear whether “you” is one individual or a figurative device; this strangeness begins to stray into Pound territory, the enigmatic imagery hanging in the air, like the “amber stream” of tea in stanza three. The juxtaposition of the Latin word *Immote* (motionless) with “immortal” in the last line does not resolve the stanza but adds to the enigma.

In the long, final stanza the narrator wakes from his transcendental reverie as the characters in the scene jerk back to life, described as a moment when “The broken syllable

was ended". This image is fascinating ontologically, suggesting that language itself has been suspended for the duration of the reverie, a moment when the presumption of rhetoric was silenced. The I-narrator decides against divulging his revelatory experience, as he presumes that by "Stammering of lights unutterable", he will only manage to "distress, / The heaven of your unconsciousness." Linking, metaphorically, "heaven" with "unconsciousness", sounds distinctly like a Romantic conceit, though the tone of the poem allows for such flippancy – more sentimental than Romantic. The naivety reaches its peak with the childishness of the lines "You never knew that I had gone / A million miles away, and stayed / A million years." This levity prevents any attempt to interpret the poem as a serious, metaphysical observation, reinforcing instead its essentially comic tone. The poem ends with the rhythmically perfect iambic tetrameter of "When you were there, and you, and you", a repetition of the first line which invites the reader to begin again, the timelessness of the theme presented as a conceptual circularity. Clearly the poem has its own distinctive flavour, partly naïve and comic, partly sentimental, but with moments of imaginative potency and stark images which remain unresolved. The gentle, intimate tone is perhaps its most Georgian characteristic, and there is little in the poem to suggest that Brooke paid heed to Pound's experiments with form. Nevertheless, the overall effect of Brooke's poem depends on the regular iambic rhythm which produces the gentle, assuring lyric voice, only to shatter the illusion by freezing time and introducing a powerful transcendental image: this is an example of form working *against the grain* of content in order to present the images ironically and defeat the reader's expectations.

Walter de la Mare was in many ways a quintessential Georgian poet of the accepted stereotype: his work appeared in all five of Marsh's anthologies; his poetry appears to be rooted in an Edenic, pastoral version of the past; he works within the parameters of traditional forms; we rarely feel challenged when reading his work; he is patronised by literary critics. In Michael Schmidt's towering biographical survey of English poetry¹⁷, which runs to more than a thousand pages, de la Mare is only mentioned in passing, mostly as a derivative practitioner, though one who was very generous in helping fellow-poets. He was already 37 years old when the first volume of Georgian Poetry was published in 1912 (Brooke was 25), and in this sense he represents an older generation of poets and poetic sensibilities. In his anthology of English poetry from 1880 to 1920, John Munro sums up de la Mare's style of poetry thus:

¹⁷ Michael Schmidt's *Lives of the Poets* was first published in 1998 and covers the work of more than 250 poets writing in English, from the pre-Chaucerian to the contemporary. See biographical entry.

De la Mare may best be described as a late survival of the Romantic Movement, most of his poetry evoking a fairy world far removed from civilization, or investigating the mystery at the heart of experience. Sometimes he gives us merely self-indulgent dreams, but at their best his poems have an intensity that saves them from mawkishness. (MUNRO, 1968, p. 111)

One of de la Mare's poems, *The Listeners*, published in *Georgian Poetry 1911-1912*, has the ironic distinction of being both a Georgian poem and one of the most popular and famous poems in England, a poem that features in most anthologies of popular poetry, especially those aimed at children. The irony is that although the poem is learnt by heart by most schoolchildren even today, very few people, if any, would recognise *The Listeners* as a particularly *Georgian* poem.

The Listeners

'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,
 Knocking on the moonlit door;
 And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
 Of the forest's ferny floor:
 And a bird flew up out of the turret,
 Above the Traveller's head:
 And he smote upon the door again a second time;
 'Is there anybody there?' he said.
 But no one descended to the Traveller;
 No head from the leaf-fringed sill
 Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
 Where he stood perplexed and still.
 But only a host of phantom listeners
 That dwelt in the lone house then
 Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
 To that voice from the world of men:
 Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
 That goes down to the empty hall,
 Harkening in an air stirred and shaken
 By the lonely Traveller's call.
 And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
 Their stillness answering his cry,
 While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
 'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
 For he suddenly smote on the door, even
 Louder, and lifted his head:—
 'Tell them I came, and no one answered,
 That I kept my word,' he said.
 Never the least stir made the listeners,
 Though every word he spake
 Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
 From the one man left awake:
 Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
 And the sound of iron on stone,
 And how the silence surged softly backward,
 When the plunging hoofs were gone. (MARSH, 1912, pp. 71-72)

What we notice immediately is the regularity of the rhythm and the rhyme, which is clearly suggestive of a poem that would appeal to younger readers. We might also remark on the pastoral, archaic imagery of a moonlit forest and a horse which, in its detachment from modern-day reality, is based on imaginative fantasy. There appears to be little here that might distinguish the poem from the kind of verse we imagine would be found on the shelves of a child's bedroom in the Victorian era. There is nothing here that hints of a Modernist outlook and everything to suggest that the Georgian stereotype of a derivative, pastoral, escapist poetry is exemplified. We cannot imagine that Eliot or Pound would find anything here of interest; on the contrary, it appears that it is precisely poetry like this that fuelled their reaction. However, as the poem has become a central text in English popular culture, I think it is worth examining in more detail.

The rhythmic pattern established by the poem is crucial in producing the effect de la Mare aims to achieve. The poem is popular with children because they can follow the regular beats of the line and chant in unison in the classroom. What is not immediately apparent, however, is how de la Mare has arranged the metre so that the majority of the lines have three beats (knock, knock, knock) which mimics the traveller's banging on the door, a perfect example of how form produces effects in subtle yet significant ways. That regular three-beat pattern is the *essence* of the poem, not the imagery or even the language: children can chant along without understanding some of the words, demonstrating how poetry manages to operate at deeper levels. What is even more telling about the rhythm is that the first of the three beats does not start on the first word, despite the fact that de la Mare has used the trochee form, where the stress comes on the first syllable, rather than the second syllable of the "speaking" iam. What this means is that the rhythm works in two distinct ways: each line begins with a stressed syllable and is then underpinned by a three-beat pattern. This transforms the lyric voice into one which is loud and urgent, shattering the stillness of the "silent" imagery. What de la Mare then does is to break the rhythmic pattern with longer lines which draw attention to themselves. Here are some examples: 'Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes'; 'Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair'; 'Harkening in an air stirred and shaken'; 'Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house'; 'And how the silence surged softly backward'. What we notice immediately is how these longer lines are suggestive of a deeper significance to the apparently simple narrative. The sophistication of these metaphorical images becomes apparent, it seems, only when we detach them for closer analysis. The contrast between the shorter, three-beat lines and the longer line is encapsulated by the last two lines: 'And how the silence surged softly backward, / When the plunging

hoofs were gone.’ In the first of these two lines, the pattern forces us to scan the line more slowly, following five stressed vowels; the sibilance adds to the effect, drawing attention to the metaphorical language and emphasizing the oblique image of silence “surging” backwards. The last line then urges us back to the “knock-knock-knock”, three-beat rhythm, the sound of the horse’s hoofs shattering the silence.

The poem clearly appeals on other levels than the rhythmical. Thematically, we have a very short ghost story: a dark, moonlit silence shattered by knocking and shouting; “a host of phantom listeners” who stand “thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair”. The narrator allows us to see inside the darkness of the house where the traveller cannot see, and in this sense we identify with the cowering “phantoms” more than the loud and forceful traveller. As in a nightmare, it is as if we are also hiding from the traveller, who is threatening to invade our silence, our safety; in this sense, the poem excites our childish fears of being attacked, achieving a cathartic effect. There is also a moment, however, when the traveller feels the presence of the ghosts: “And he felt in his heart their strangeness, / Their stillness answering his cry”. This is an important Romantic image, an emotional link between the traveller and the “phantom listeners” which, on the one hand, takes the edge off the starkness of the poem’s imagery, but also suggests a possible link between the “living soul” of the traveller and the “dead souls” inside. What I am trying to demonstrate is that even with an apparently simplistic poem like *The Traveller*, a favourite with children and with adults who do not normally read poetry, we have to be careful with critical judgements that do not take account of the manner in which poetry operates at deeper, unconscious levels, appealing, in this case, to a primitive urge for rhythm, and a childish desire to experience fear.

There is a sense, however, in which critical discrimination is inevitable: we are constantly judging whether a work of literature or a particular poet is worth studying in any depth. Clearly, what has happened to poets like Walter de la Mare and many of the other Georgians is that their work has been judged to be fundamentally lacking. Popular poems like *The Listeners* are common, we might argue, and do not justify a reassessment of de la Mare’s work. The critic Michael Schmidt and many others have obviously reached this opinion. What *The Listeners* does do, however, is to highlight the gulf between poetry which appeals to the many and poetry which is deemed to be worthy of study. It is emblematic of a comment made by Hibberd and Onions regarding the changing status of the poet following the emergence of Modernism, which I have cited in the following chapter. Referring to the role poets played in the pre-war, Edwardian and Georgian eras, they write: “In an age before Modernism had set the poet apart from the public, writers were still close to their readership and were expected to

write straightforwardly about matters of current importance; poetry often appeared in newspapers as well as in a great variety of periodicals, and it was widely read.” (HIBBERD & ONIONS, p. 8) The fate of Walter de la Mare and other Georgians who are deemed to be irrelevant today can be seen, therefore, not necessarily as a critical judgment on their “intrinsic value”, whatever that might be, but on more fundamental shifts in cultural values; from a pre-war era when poets wrote for a popular audience to a post-war age when poetry, according to Eliot, had to be “difficult” in order to reflect the turbulence of modern life. This historical shift in the cultural status of poetry is prescriptive nevertheless, suggesting that poetry must engage with the modern world to be relevant, an argument that highlights the fate of the Georgians, but one that also presumes to limit the function of the artist.

Isaac Rosenberg is another poet who, like Brooke, is considered principally as a war poet, as his work appears mainly in war anthologies and one of his poems, *Break of Day in the Trenches*, has become highly regarded. Rosenberg hailed from a poor Jewish family in the East End of London and studied art at the prestigious Slade School, where he was thought of as a painter with potential. He was also, however, a uniquely gifted poet until he was killed on the Western Front in April 1918. In Marsh’s *Georgian Poets* collection from 1916-1917, the editor included a poem by Rosenberg, his only appearance in the Georgian series of anthologies. The poem, known as *Ah Koelue!*, is actually a speech from *Moses*, a verse play Rosenberg wrote and printed privately in 1916. In the extract, Moses, an Egyptian prince, is addressing Koelue, the daughter of Abinoah, another character in the play.

Ah, Koelue!

Had you embalmed your beauty, so
 It could not backward go,
 Or change in any way,
 What were the use, if on my eyes
 The embalming spices were not laid
 To keep us fixed,
 Two amorous sculptures passioned endlessly?
 What were the use, if my sight grew,
 And its far branches were cloud-hung,
 You small at the roots, like grass,
 While the new lips my spirit would kiss
 Were not red lips of flesh,
 But the huge kiss of power?
 Where yesterday soft hair through my fingers fell,
 A shaggy mane would entwine,
 And no slim form work fire to my thighs,
 But human Life’s inarticulate mass
 Throb the pulse of a thing
 Whose mountain flanks awry
 Beg my mastery -- mine!
 Ah! I will ride the dizzy beast of the world

My road -- my way! (MARSH, 1917, p. 53)

The poem's beginning reveals the influence of Romantic verse, though the lyrical voice could also be mistaken for a Shakespearean character delivering a soliloquy; these two impressions are encapsulated in the iambic pentameter line, "Two amorous sculptures passioned endlessly". However, as the poem progresses, the imagery becomes oblique and the voice takes on a more modern feel, especially in phrases such as "the huge kiss of power", "human Life's inarticulate mass", and "ride the dizzy beast of the world". The poem has an enigmatic complexity which challenges the reader to grasp the sense. The underlying idea appears to be that, although Moses finds Koelue entrancingly beautiful, ultimately he finds the trappings of power more alluring, preferring the "kiss of power" and mastering "the dizzy beast of the world". The metaphorical progression in the second half of the poem – from "soft hair" to "shaggy main"; from "slim form" to "inarticulate mass"; from "mountain flanks" to "dizzy beast" – is powerful in its strangeness, and certainly not what we might have expected from a Georgian poem. There appears to be little of what Maxwell calls the "facile emotional appeal" of a "sentimentalised English countryside, fixed firmly at three o'clock". (MAXWELL, 2016, p. 2)

The form of the poem takes shape organically, rather than fitting into a pre-set metrical framework. However, the rhythm is not haphazard but follows a basic pattern of three or four beats to the line, the regularity supporting the rhetorical force of Moses's speech. There is also a profusion of end rhymes, both full and half-rhymes, which are surprising for a poem as unorthodox as this: "so" with "go"; "way" with "laid"; "grass" with "kiss" and "mass"; "entwine" with "mine"; and "thighs" with "awry". The rhymes not only serve to unify the sense of the poem, they also add a musicality to it, and hence an extra aesthetic dimension. There is also a proliferation of sibilant sounds in the poem, with the "s" or "z" sound appearing no less than 36 times, most notably in the iambic pentameter "Two amorous sculptures passioned endlessly", and also in the couplet "You small at the roots, like grass, / While the new lips my spirit would kiss". These patterns of rhythm and sound suggest that Rosenberg conceived of the poem as essentially songlike: the effect of this is to *detach* the poem from its sense and to present it, Symbolist-style, as a soundscape of words and images valuable *in themselves* as worthy of aesthetic contemplation.

Two images of mixed metaphors stand out in particular as difficult to resolve. The first is "What were the use, if my sight grew, / And its far branches were cloud-hung, / You small at the roots, like grass". With the "growth" of Moses's "sight", his stature also appears to grow commensurately, reducing Koelue to the size of a blade of grass; the "far branches"

of sight becoming “cloud hung” suggests that his vision somehow becomes part of the natural world. The second image, even more oblique, appears near the end of the poem: “human Life's inarticulate mass / Throb the pulse of a thing / Whose mountain flanks awry / Beg my mastery.” Again we appear to have a metaphorical transformation from human form to nature, though the sense of “thing” and of “mountain flanks” is difficult to define. Clearly, Rosenberg is allowing free reign to both his imagination and his poetics, choosing words and images that appear to him *laterally*, rather than logically, and juxtaposing them together. This is very much an approach we associate with Pound’s Imagism, when the words support the image and not the sense; when the reader has to enter a unique aesthetic space to experience the effect of the poem. According to Schmidt, Rosenberg has “more affinity with the Imagists and Modernists, than with liberal writers. For him poetry is not instrumental: it is a language of exploration and record, not a suasive tool.” (SCHMIDT, 1999, p. 611) Ultimately, the cross-fertilisation between movements in poetry or literary *genres* – in this case, between Imagism and the Georgians – is inevitable as the categories themselves are never mutually exclusive. There is also the element of *semblance* which affects the retrospective critical approach, when similarities between different poets and different movements, whether real or imagined, are recognisable from a future historical vantage point.

The last Georgian poem I want to examine is by John Drinkwater, who was a regular contributor to the five volumes published by Marsh between 1911 and 1922. Drinkwater was also a playwright and worked as a theatre director throughout the war; before the war he met regularly with other aspiring poets, including Edward Thomas, Rupert Brooke and Wilfrid Gibson. The poem I have chosen is from *Georgian Poets 1918-1919*.

Moonlit Apples

At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows,
And the skylight lets the moonlight in, and those
Apples are deep-sea apples of green. There goes
A cloud on the moon in the autumn night.

A mouse in the wainscot scratches, and scratches, and then
There is no sound at the top of the house of men
Or mice; and the cloud is blown, and the moon again
Dapples the apples with deep-sea light.

They are lying in rows there, under the gloomy beams;
On the sagging floor; they gather the silver streams
Out of the moon, those moonlit apples of dreams,
And quiet is the steep stair under.

In the corridors under there is nothing but sleep.
And stiller than ever on orchard boughs they keep
Tryst with the moon, and deep is the silence, deep

On moon-washed apples of wonder. (LARKIN, 2002, p. 159)

Here we get a sense of what a stereotypical Georgian poem might be like: cosy, unchallenging images from nature wrapped up in an easily-digestible form; a poem designed to give simple pleasure; a poem about moonlight and apples. From the evidence of this poem, it is not difficult to comprehend Eliot's perception of the Georgians as a naïve group of poets who were happy to depict "rainbows, cuckoos, daffodils and timid hares". (MAXWELL, 2016, p. 4) And yet, *Moonlit Apples* is a little more than this. As a meditation on light and colour the poem is not challenging to read, though its simplicity should not devalue its aesthetic qualities. The poem's regularity of rhythm and exacting rhyme scheme is deliberate: the effect Drinkwater achieves is similar to that of a lullaby, a still and quiet poem which contains painterly images. No character appears, nothing moves but the clouds, and the only sound is that a scratching mouse that suddenly stops to allow the stillness to return. Drinkwater also uses *enjambment* to add to the effect: many of the long lines, which follow a pattern of five beats, suddenly end, the resolution of the sense coming on the next line. This halting of the rhythm breaks up the sense to add an element of mystique to the overall effect, to the "wonder" of the "moon-washed apples".

Arguably, there is a sense that, at its heart, *Moonlit Apples* is an Imagist poem, or a poem which depends upon its central images. As no human life is evident, what we remember from the experience of reading the poem are the images of light and colour, reinforced by the stillness and silence. As an experiment, I will present a pared down version of the poem as it might have been conceived of as an Imagist poem. This will allow me to comment on how the non-imagistic parts of the poem function; in other words, why Drinkwater has chosen to situate those images within a regular poetic framework.

Moonlit Apples

Deep-sea apples of green
 the moon
 dapples the apples with deep-sea light
 they gather the silver streams
 out of the moon
 those moonlit apples of dreams
 and deep is the silence
 deep

I have selected images in the order they appear in the poem, removed surrounding words and the punctuation. I believe this transformation would not have been possible with either the Rosenberg or the Brooke poem, or many other so-called Georgian poems. However, if, as

readers, we prefer this version, then we must ask ourselves how the aesthetic effect of reading the Imagist version compares favourably with that of the original. Perhaps the rhythmic and rhyming regularity of the original, what we might call its nursery-rhyme feel, lessens the impact of the central images. We might imagine that, for Pound or Eliot, Drinkwater's adherence to traditional poetical patterns and styles makes the poem clichéd, predictable and, ultimately derivative, unwilling to break new ground. We have to remember the poem was published in 1920, two years after a seismic catastrophe had engulfed the European continent. Yet, as I have already pointed out, we must be wary of embracing Eliot's dictum that poetry must be "difficult" in the post-war era if it is to be of any lasting value: that evaluation is prescriptive and exclusive. Drinkwater's choice to *encase* his images in a traditional form is integral to the poem's overall aesthetic effect. What we hear in the long lines which hover at the end, in the rhyme scheme which allows the lines of each stanza to chime together, in the musicality of the rhythm, is a very particular lyric *tone*. The tone Drinkwater achieves is not the same gentle, intimate tone we hear in the Brooke poem: instead, it *dissolves* itself in the music of the poem; it is the rhythms and rhymes which carry the poem along. This exemplifies Simon's view of the Georgian lyric as an attempt to achieve "the subordination or extinction of [the poet's] personality in the interest of an absolute dedication to his craft". (SIMON, 1978, p. 38) By being caught up in the music, Drinkwater's tone is deliberately devoid of rhetorical import: the lyric voice acts only as an otherworldly *observer* of the scene, painting a still-life picture without rhetorical flourish. Where the tone of Rosenberg's *Moses* is assertive and compelling, Drinkwater's is quietly anonymous.

The summoning of both Pound and Eliot into a discussion of Georgian poetry is deliberate and relevant: the emergence of both Imagism and Modernism were in a very significant way a reaction against what both believed to be the poverty of English verse before the war. Neil Powell, in his brief assessment of the Georgians, draws attention to the fact that the last volume of Georgian poetry was published in 1922, shortly before Eliot published *TWL*. Powell describes this historical coincidence as a "chronological misfortune which partly explains the common perception of 'Georgian Poetry' as a species of lightweight, sentimental lyricism catapulted into deserved oblivion by modernism". (HAMILTON, 1996, p. 183) Note the significance of the word "deserved" here, suggesting that the Georgians deserve to be forgotten. As I hope to have shown, however, there is always a need to keep 'Georgian Poetry', as Powell does, in inverted commas. Although common features of many of the poets who appeared in Marsh's five anthologies can be identified, there is an equally important sense in which their distinctiveness seriously questions the idea of a unified 'movement' in

poetry which lasted for the duration of the second decade of the 20th century. When writing critically from a retrospective vantage point, almost a century after the emergence of Modernism, there is also the danger of failing to recognise the radical impact the Georgians had, and the controversy they caused, before the war; a historical moment when, as Powell reminds us, “the Georgians were considered daring and indeed revolutionary in the literary context of their time”. (HAMILTON, 1996, p. 184) The other equally important consideration to be made is that the Georgians were not writing in the shadow of the war, which arrived only two years after the first of Marsh’s anthologies were published: they became very much part of that war and their influence pervaded the poetry produced during the conflict. As Tim Kendall, the editor of several recent anthologies of WWI poetry, points out “This was, in literary terms, a Georgian war” and, furthermore, “Georgianism became the touchstone for poetic quality”. (KENDALL, 2013, pp. xvi)

The paradox in this story is that WWI poetry has become immensely popular in England and is widely taught in secondary schools, while Georgian poetry is looked upon with scorn, or simply ignored. It is as if there is no connection between the two. As I will explain in the next chapter of this study, the two most famous and well-known WWI poems in England are by poets who were proud to be associated with the Georgians: Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen. Ultimately, the Georgians were the victims of literary fashion, which may be an arbiter of public taste, though it is rarely a reliable arbiter of poetic quality. “Post-war changes in taste led to a persistent critical habit of undervaluing the Georgians or forgetting who they were, so that one of the neglected aspects of First World War poetry is that much of the best of it was either Georgian or Georgian influenced.” (HIBBERD & ONIONS, 1986, p. 10) If the Georgians were guilty of escapism or naïve in their post-Romantic pastoralism; if their celebration of the English countryside and the heartiness of friendship amounted to burying their heads in the sand while the threat of war loomed in Europe, then we must accept that this is how they chose to express themselves at the time. What it doesn’t mean, however, is that none of the poets associated with the Georgian movement are worth serious re-evaluation. Modernism certainly did capture the limelight after the war, but Eliot’s great poem was composed in a literary climate thronging with Georgian poetry and it is naïve to think *TWL* was composed without a trace of the influence of Eliot’s English contemporaries.

2.2 Changing perceptions of the Great War: patriotism, propaganda and protest in English poetry, 1914-1918

Not since the Siege of Troy has a conflict been so closely defined by the poetry it inspired.
Tim Kendall (KENDALL, 2013, p. xxvii)

That some poets are accepted as “witnesses” while hundreds more are no longer read is a result of a long selection process in which anthologies have played some part. Ever since 1914, anthologists have influenced, and been influenced by, contemporary attitudes to war. Their choice of material has often not been made solely on the grounds of excellence or imaginative power, as is evident from...the way in which some modern collections have arranged poems in sequences which imply comments on history and politics.

Hibberd & Onions (HIBBERD & ONIONS, 1986, p. 2)

It is understandable that the European crisis of 1914 – often referred to as “the war to end all wars” – remains to this day a powerful stimulant to the historical imagination. The Great War was the first conflict to involve millions of volunteers and conscripts from more than a hundred countries throughout the world, a mass war whose armies employed new machines designed for killing and deadly chemical weapons. As more than sixteen million soldiers and civilians died before the Armistice was signed in 1918, it was a conflict that affected everyone. As George Walter puts it, “The First World War was, in a very real sense, the first total war: total in that no-one who lived through it could remain untouched by it.” (WALTER, 2006, p. xi) However, this “total war” is unique in another, very important sense: it is through literature that English people make sense of what happened one hundred years ago. The images we hold and emotions we experience come from the thousands of poems written in response to the conflict, a body of work that the former English Poet Laureate, Sir Andrew Motion, has called “a sacred national text”. (MOTION, 2004, p. xi)

The war provoked an unprecedented outpouring of verse; during the four years of battle, hundreds of thousands of poems were written and published in England – collected in newspapers, magazines and hastily-produced anthologies. Clearly, this unique literary phenomenon must be considered in terms of its historical context: in the first decade of the twentieth century, poetry was not a rarefied form, but an integral part of the expanding education system in Edwardian and Georgian England. The spreading of literacy down through the English class system was generated by the promotion in schools of “literature with a capital ‘L’”, which meant “the nation’s treasury of patriotic and heroic poems.” (MARSLAND, 1991, p. 44) As the writing and reading of poetry was still very much part of

the English cultural landscape, many of the first poems of the war were written by established poets – Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling among others – who were expected to make emotional sense of the storm about to sweep across Europe. “In an age before Modernism had set the poet apart from the public, writers were still close to their readership and were expected to write straightforwardly about matters of current importance; poetry often appeared in newspapers as well as in a great variety of periodicals, and it was widely read.” (HIBBERD & ONIONS, p. 8) However, the war also inspired many of the less experienced to try their hand at poetry. Indeed, at a time of political, cultural and emotional crises, poetry seemed the natural medium to express personal reactions to the momentous events unfolding.

The English poetry of World War One (WWI) that I want to examine here shows few, if any, of the inflections of Modernism that we have seen in the Imagist experiments produced in the years leading up to the war. The preconception that Modernism was put on hold for the duration of the war is not entirely untrue: Pound’s groundwork establishing a new aesthetic approach for poetry was seriously blighted by the conflict. Understandably, the battlefields were hardly conducive to conducting avant-garde experiments in poetry when one’s very existence was hanging on a thread. There is one very important exception to this assessment, however, and that is the work of Herbert Read which I will consider in the next chapter. Another factor to consider is that the two most influential poets of the war were both associated with the Georgians: Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen. Although the Georgians, as we have seen, can hardly be regarded as having Modernist tendencies in the sense of a Pound or an Eliot, neither can they be dismissed as merely derivative or conventional. As we shall see, each of the poems I examine has its own idiosyncrasies and, although most fall into the category of either “patriotism” or “protest”, this does not necessarily limit their scope or aesthetic complexity. Ultimately, this overview of WWI poetry is intended to highlight the contrast between the efforts of the soldier-poets, the Imagist experiments which preceded them and Eliot’s post-war Modernism exemplified by *TWL*.

One of the most salient factors about WWI poetry is how its critical fortunes have oscillated in the century since the conflict. An analysis of the changing popularity of many of the poets associated with the war exposes a complex relationship between national identity, political and cultural ideologies, and critical values, all of which are dependent on the vicissitudes of history, and the way history is reconstituted. It is worth considering why, one hundred years after the conflict, at a time when the cultural significance of poetry is lamentably low, anthologies of WWI poetry are still published. This is even more significant

when we grasp that many of the most anthologised and critically acclaimed poets of the war years were virtually unknown at the time of the conflict. This leads us not only to consider the importance of publishing in the production of cultural values, but also to take a further step back and ponder those values which underpin the choices of literary material – in this case poetry – to be published. Anthologists and publishers not only *reflect* public taste at any particular historical moment, they also *produce* that taste to a certain degree. In the case of WWI, the choice of poetry deemed fit to publish at the start of the war had an impact on the work produced afterwards, most clearly in the case of those less-experienced writers who aimed to emulate what they had read in newspapers and periodicals. In the century that has passed since the conflict, the shifting and complex relationship between politics and culture has affected the cultural value and reception of WWI poetry at any given time. Hence, when we use critical labels such as “patriotism” and “realism” today, it is clear that the significance of such concepts has changed, as their interpretation is always relative to, and dependent upon, the historical moment in which they are used.

The fluctuation in the cultural value of WWI poetry over the last one hundred years reveals how it has been a victim of critical tendencies, literary “taste” and public opinion, factors which are themselves always dependent on deeper value systems. Any reader assessing the changing fashion for WWI poetry over the century would be forgiven for concluding that literary value is never something given, a quality clearly identifiable in a text, but is always something produced at any one time. (EAGLETON, 2008, p. 14) As Walter points out, one of the key moments in the growth of interest in the war poets stems from the period between 1964 and 1968 when Britain witnessed four years of fiftieth anniversaries, on the strength of which a number of books, plays, feature films and TV programmes were produced. This wave of commemorative events and publications not only produced an audience for cultural material connected with the war, it also elevated the cultural *value* of such material, stimulating teachers in the 1960s, for example, to focus on WWI poets in the classroom. (WALTER, 2006, p. xxviii) As I write, in 2015, there has been a similar glut of publications and programmes about the war and the poetry it produced, centenary anniversaries that are set to continue until 2018. I consider this rise and fall in the fortunes of WWI poetry not as an indication that its literary merit is always in doubt, though obviously critical opinion changes and critics always need to defend their choices. Rather, that literary criticism, by its choice of material and approach, is always partly responsible for producing and reproducing certain values, even when the critic does not openly declare those values.

With this in mind, I hope to show here how certain poems, particularly ones popular at the time of the conflict, or that have since become so, allow us to make judgements about how critical opinion is formed and how our perceptions of the war have been influenced by the literature left behind.

During the first two years of the war, we begin to recognise a division in the poetry produced in response to the conflict: on the one hand, established poets from the older generation writing verse from the safety of their homes, and on the other soldiers on active service scribbling poems in their notebooks. In fact, there is a further division: some of these “soldier-poets” were literary men before the war, writers from the upper-middle classes who became commissioned officers and produced poetry as a matter of course; others were conscripts with little writing experience who experimented with poetry as the most convenient form of self-expression. Despite these differences, many of the poets who began to write once war had been officially declared showed similarities in their approach: England’s history, culture, national identity and natural beauty were under threat and must be celebrated and defended. There was, therefore, at least during the first few months of the war, a rallying together of the English people in a spirit of pride, resilience and determination – a mood often described as *patriotic*. Like most labels, this term hardly captures the diversity of feeling in England at the time, though it serves a purpose as a critical concept with which to evaluate some of the poetry produced in 1914 and 1915.

The poet most often associated with this patriotic spirit at the start of the war is Rupert Brooke, whose poem *The Soldier* – one of a set of five sonnets published in February 1915 – profoundly affected the production and reception of poetry throughout war. The poem was also to have a lasting influence on the conception of war, particularly at home in England, where it was widely admired and read aloud in public. Brooke had a privileged upbringing, attending the famous Rugby School, where his father was Headmaster, and Kings College, Cambridge, where he read Classics. Brooke’s first volume of poetry was published in 1911 and he was well connected in the literary sense, being a founder-member of the Georgians and counting Virginia Woolf and Edward Marsh – Winston Churchill’s private secretary – among his friends. When war was declared he appeared enthusiastic, and after being commissioned into the navy, infamously wrote to a friend: “Come and die. It’ll be great fun.” (HAMILTON, 2003, p. 82) However, the sentiment in *The Soldier*, his famous sonnet, is much less facetious:

The Soldier

If I should die, think only this of me:
 That there's some corner of a foreign field
 That is for ever England. There shall be
 In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
 A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
 Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
 A body of England's, breathing English air,
 Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
 A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
 Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
 Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
 And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
 In hearts at peace, under an English heaven. (KENDALL, 2013, p. 106)

This is clearly the work of a seasoned poet, at least in terms of its formal qualities. It is a Petrarchan sonnet written in iambic pentameter and the rhythm is regular and controlled. Indeed, until we reach the essential word “England” in line three, the iambic stresses are a model of poetic composition. The word “England” actually breaks the metrical rhythm, because the second stress of the *iam* falls of the first stress of the word, allowing “England” to stand on its own, with the full stop coming immediately after to complete the emphasis. The poem is, of course, a paean to England, so the appearance of the word in line three functions as a kind of subtitle. The significance of the sonnet form and its constituent iambic pentameter is worth considering in more detail. As a well-established poetic form with a long history, pre-dating Shakespeare, the Petrarchan sonnet carries with it, I would suggest, a kind of *authority*, and when it is skilfully handled, as in this case, the form makes a kind of didactic imprint of signification. Put simply, the frame of the poem, as a respected form, accentuates the content and gives it authority. For Peter Barry, “the formal and metrical intricacies of the sonnet and the iambic pentameter are a counterpart of social stability, decorum and order.” (BARRY, p. 168) That “stability” and that “order” carry the *message* of the poem just as much as the surface “meaning”. Form, as we have seen, is not an adjunct to meaning, but *generates* meaning. As Eagleton reminds us, “form is *constitutive* of content and not just a reflection of it. Tone, rhythm, rhyme, syntax, assonance, grammar, punctuation and so on are actually generators of meaning, not just containers of it. To modify any of them is to modify meaning itself.” (EAGLETON, 2007, p. 67)

The tone of the poem is also significant in producing certain effects. Firstly, there is an absence of plosives (‘t’ ‘k’ ‘p’) or harsh sounds in the choice of words. This has the subtle effect of making the narrating voice quietly convincing, as if we are listening in on a young man’s hushed thoughts. If we look more closely at the last three lines we find several sibilant

sounds close together: “sights”, “sounds”, “friends”, “gentleness”, “hearts” and “peace”. These soft sounds give the lines a lulling, captivating timbre that consolidates the sense of “gentleness” implied by the narrator. Secondly, if we examine the punctuation, we see that many of the lines are foreshortened by commas or semi-colons. This has a halting, almost see-saw effect, as if the narrator is improvising a list of England’s qualities – this, then this, then this, then this. This listing effect, most noticeable in lines 5 – 9 and 12 – 14, helps to strengthen the sense; an example of form producing and consolidating the “message” implied by the narrator. Within this listing, the regular iambic stresses create their own kind of rocking, hypnotic rhythm (*di da, di da, di da*) which adds to the effect. The iambic pattern also adds to the gentle tone: by leaving the stress to the second syllable, the reader is carried more gently into each new line. Overall, Brooke manages to sustain a gentle and convincing tone that greatly enhances the meaning, or “message” of the poem.

After the initial “England”, the same word, and its counterpart “English” appear seven times in the space of fourteen lines. Clearly, this is the starting point for a reading of the poem as an example of patriotism. Brooke is suggesting that “heaven” is somehow situated above England, so we could interpret “English air”, “rivers”, “suns”, “sights and sounds” and so on, as “richer” than the normal “dust” contained in that “foreign field”. The effect, however, is more delicate, as this possible superiority is presented to us in a very subtle way. The key word here is “gentleness”, a quality often associated with the English and one that it might seem churlish to challenge. Although the word “gentleness” appears in the penultimate line, the rest of the poem, in a sense, is leading towards this concept as the crowning glory of the poem. Once we accept this “gentleness” as a given, it is easy to ingest the other implications of the content: that the “suns” in England have the power of “blessing” its inhabitants, that English “days” and “dreams” are “happy”, and English “hearts” are “peaceful”. This last inference is highly significant in a poem written about war, suggesting that the English are a peace-loving nation, an idea that is hardly borne out by historical evidence.

To paraphrase the “message” of the poem, we could see it in this way: The I-narrator tells us that if he is killed in the war, “England” will not be extinguished, but will live on as “a richer dust” buried in the earth. This dust is both symbolic and metaphorical: it is the remnants of a dead English man and embodies the admirable qualities of England and Englishness, including the love of flowers, the “happy days”, and the “gentleness” already discussed. The poem, however, reaches to further heights at the commencement of the second octave in line nine, where we find: “And think, this heart, all evil shed away, / A pulse in the eternal mind, no less”. Here we find a metaphysical conceit as the narrator-poet imagines that

his heart is “purified” of evil and stays “pulsing” “eternally” in the collective human consciousness. This powerful image adds thematic force and resonance to the idea of an elevated English sensibility, one that is somehow “richer” than the “foreign” equivalent. It is as if only a gentle English heart could be sanctified in this way. Needless to say, this sentimental homage to England, published only five months into the conflict, served as a powerful incentive for new recruits in England and as an inspiration for aspiring poets. The fact that Brooke died in April 1915, only two months after the poem’s publication, merely added to this mythologizing of English values at a time of national introspection. “Rupert Brooke was to become the type of the young poet sacrificed heroically to war and his death had profound consequences for the national mood, letting the sluices discharge more patriotic verse, and becoming a symbol of heroic endeavour when, before the Battle of the Somme, the War was still susceptible to that kind of exalted presentation.” (MURRAY, 2010, p. 46)

Three days after Brooke’s death, the significance of his upper-middle class background and literary connections came into play. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty at the time, who knew Brooke through his secretary Edward Marsh, wrote an obituary in *The Times* newspaper. Churchill, an admirer of Brooke’s poetry, said:

During the last few months of his life, months of preparation in gallant comradeship and open air, the poet-soldier told with all the simple force of genius the sorrow of youth about to die, and the sure triumphant consolations of a sincere and valiant spirit. He expected to die; he was willing to die for the dear England whose beauty and majesty he knew; and he advanced towards the brink in perfect serenity, with absolute conviction of the rightness of his country’s cause, and a heart devoid of hate for his fellow-men. (MURRAY, 2010, p. 64)

Here we can see how the *cult* of Rupert Brooke and the inextricable links between his name and the concept of patriotism were first established. Clearly, Churchill invents Rupert Brooke for the English reading public. Brooke is a poetic “genius” with a “sincere and valiant spirit” who was prepared to die in “perfect serenity” and with a “heart devoid of hate”; not only that, but Brooke had the “absolute conviction of the rightness” of England’s participation in the war. Churchill’s successful attempt to make a martyr of Brooke boldly reveals its political overtones, functioning as a rallying cry to the youth of “dear England” to take up arms selflessly against the foreign foes. It also reveals how literature can be appropriated for political purposes. Brooke’s thoughts and sentiments expressed in *The Soldier* do not consist of a verifiable meaning that we can extract. The interpretation of the poem depends on a number of important considerations including historical context, aesthetic approach, emotional engagement, and so on. As the naval chief, Churchill identified in Brooke’s sonnets a powerful *message* that could function as a form of aesthetic propaganda. This allowed him

to praise the beauty of the poetry and the gallantry of the poet himself, while at the same time commandeering the “message” of the poems for his own political purposes.

Churchill was far from the only admirer of Brooke’s poetry. Six weeks earlier, following the publication of the five *War Sonnets*, which included *The Soldier*, the poet Walter de la Mare wrote a review in the *Times Literary Supplement* extolling the virtues of the younger man’s verses:

It is impossible to shred up this beauty for the purposes of criticism. These sonnets are personal...and yet the very blood and youth of England seem to find expression in them. They speak not for one heart only, but for all to whom her call has come in the hour of need and found instantly ready. (WALTER, 2006, p. xiv)

Here we notice a kind of paradox. Although the poems are heralded for their great “beauty”, de la Mare clearly interprets the poems as a rallying cry to England’s youth, at a time when “her call has come in the hour of need”. There does not appear to be a contradiction between aesthetics and politics here. The “beauty” of the poetry does not prevent it being used to urge more of England’s “youth” to show solidarity with the nation and volunteer to take part in mass slaughter. However, it is important to recognise that we are looking back one hundred years: notions of patriotism need to be understood historically as at any given time they clearly have different connotations.

This appropriation of Rupert Brooke in 1915 was clearly of great importance for promoting the war in England, but it highlights the inconsistencies of literary criticism. “Three years earlier, Brooke’s poetry had been described as ‘disgusting’ and he himself full of ‘swagger and brutality’; now he was being regarded as ‘the only English poet of any consideration who has given his life in his country’s wars’.” (WALTER, 2006, p. xv) Any faults that Brooke may have had as a poet or human being were conveniently forgotten when an opportunity presented itself to make a martyr of him. The significance of this mythologizing of the first soldier-poet to perish in the war was that it created a *mould* both in terms of the selfless young patriot, and as a model of the kind of response appropriate for budding poets heading to France. Eventually the horrors of human slaughter and the inhuman conditions faced by the soldiers turned the tide and the patriotic mould was broken, but at least for the first year of the war Brooke’s *War Sonnets*, and especially *The Soldier*, cast a conceptual shadow over the poetic representation of the war. The effect was consolidated with the publication, just six weeks after his death, of a collection of Brooke’s poetry, *1914 and Other Poems*, which rapidly sold out. The influence of Brooke’s war poems inspired, what Walter describes as “a vast amount of poetry which made no secret of its debt to him,

borrowing the language of his sonnets to express the heartfelt conviction that the war had awakened the nation from its pre-war decadence and given it a heaven-sent opportunity to purge its peacetime sins". (WALTER, 2006, p. xvi) What began, for Brooke, as a personal and sentimental meditation on his English life and the prospect of dying in foreign territory had become a cultural phenomenon. The fact that Brooke's sonnet was crafted as an *aesthetic* response to the war was conveniently ignored: *The Soldier* was as clear a *message* as a piece of eyewitness reportage; aesthetic fabrication had become political propaganda. Paradoxically, as we have seen, it is the *form* of the poem, its technical accomplishment, which successfully delivers the meaning in subtle and complex ways, and it is this which needs to be considered: the poem *as a poem*, as music.

The centrality of *The Soldier* and Brooke's legacy can hardly be overestimated. Although the sentimental patriotism of his outlook was later displaced by more shocking depictions of carnage and slaughter, his reputation did not suffer with the reading public. Indeed, *The Soldier* remains one of the quintessential poems of WWI, revealing how Brooke's poetic vision triggered a profound and collective emotional reaction in the English population. After the war, Brooke's poetry became more popular than ever: "For a nation in mourning for its dead, his poetry offered consolation to the bereaved whilst at the same time transforming their sacrifice into something which transcended the squalid realities of post-war life." (WALTER, 2006, p. xxiv) According to the critic Bernard Bergonzi, Brooke's *War Sonnets* "formed a unique focus for what the English felt or wanted to feel" during the war and after. (BERGONZI, 1996, p. 36) This is a unique phenomenon in English poetry: *The Soldier* has not only become a deeply significant record of collective feeling about the war amongst the English public, it also managed to produce that feeling. Brooke's portrayal of the selfless soldier willing to sacrifice his life for an Edenic, "gentle" England continues to resonate one hundred years later. For many English people, reading the poem even today stimulates an emotional response similar to that of hearing the national anthem, *God Save the Queen*, played at a public event. In a sense, the poem serves as one definition of patriotism in England: single-handedly, Brooke managed to establish, unwittingly, what the correct response to the war should be for the English sensibility. However, *The Soldier* is a pronouncement not about war, but about the preciousness of "England", or Brooke's version of it. Although, physically at least, England may be a very different place a century later, Brooke's daydream of an idyllic nation holds formidable sway in English culture and the English imagination.

Certainly, Brooke's homage to an Arcadian England is not the only English poem published in the first year of the war that falls under the rubric of patriotism. Etched into the English imagination is another poem that bristles with patriotic sentiment – Laurence Binyon's *For The Fallen*. Binyon's poem, however, is not a hymn to English "gentleness" but a lament for the English victims of the war, the young soldiers who perished in the trenches and on the battlefields. Binyon was forty-five and too old to enlist when war was declared, but contributed to the war effort as a volunteer for the Red Cross in France. What *For The Fallen* shares in common with *The Soldier* is the immortalisation of the dead English soldier, as well as the fact that both poems hold a fixed place in English culture, emerging and re-emerging whenever the nation remembers the victims of the war.

For The Fallen

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
 England mourns for her dead across the sea.
 Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
 Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal
 Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.
 There is music in the midst of desolation
 And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
 Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
 They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
 They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
 Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
 At the going down of the sun and in the morning
 We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
 They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
 They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
 They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
 Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
 To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
 As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
 Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,
 As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
 To the end, to the end, they remain. (KENDALL, 2013, p. 43)

On first reading, it appears these four-line stanzas have little of the formal regularity and control showcased in *The Soldier*. Gone are the iambic pentameter and the very regular

shape of the sonnet. Apart from the rhyme scheme (a, b, c, b), the lines seem unmeasured. However, beneath this apparent irregularity, we can detect a rhythmic pattern: four beats for lines 1 – 3 and three beats for the last line of each stanza. The clue to this underlying metrical pulse is in line five, where we find “Solemn the drums thrill”. Beneath the surface of the poem is a distant, funereal drum beat which complements the sentiment of the poem as an *ode* to the dead. The reader is reminded of this hidden drumbeat in the last line of each verse, when the three-beat pattern strikes home the “message”, enhanced by the rhyme. However, despite this detectable pattern, it is clear that here we have a poem that fails to fit neatly into a formal framework precisely because the meaning of the poem surpasses its form. The lines appear haphazard because the poet is chiefly concerned with communicating certain sentiments, rather than crafting an elaborate, formal design. Despite these differences, we immediately notice some common ground between *For The Fallen* and *The Soldier* almost as soon as the poem begins.

In lines one and two, we find “a mother for her children, / England mourns for her dead across the sea.” This personification of “England” as a “mother” in a state of “mourning” clearly has echoes of Brooke’s poem, which idealises “England” as a place and a cause worthy of self-sacrifice. In fact, Binyon’s poem was published five months before *The Soldier*, in September 1914, but both poems play a central role in representing the war in English culture and consciousness. The fourth stanza of Binyon’s poem is known as *The Ode of Remembrance* and is recited every year at commemoration ceremonies throughout the country. Like *The Soldier*, *For The Fallen* (or at least part of it) is etched into the English psyche as the *appropriate* emotional response to the war. The martyrdom associated with Brooke’s poem is also located here, with the glorification of death: “Death august and royal / Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres. / ...a glory that shines upon our tears.” Death is not senseless and wasteful, but noble: “august”, even “royal”; the “glory” of the dead soldiers somehow lightens our sorrow. Of course, focusing on the “noble” dead is perhaps the correct response for a nation remembering those who died to preserve the lives of fellow-English men and women. Yet it clearly leaves many other issues unresolved: the political reasons for the conflict – military hubris, imperial ambition, national pride, and so on – are conveniently forgotten.

Let us take a closer look at the famous fourth stanza. “They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: / Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. / At the going down of the sun and in the morning / We will remember them.” The first thing we notice is an

instance of intertextuality in the second line: Binyon has appropriated the grammatical basis of a line from one of Shakespeare's plays, *Anthony and Cleopatra*. In Act Two, Scene Two, Enobarbus pays tribute to Cleopatra's charms with the lines, "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety." As the lines are often quoted and would have been known by the majority of English readers in 1914, Binyon is injecting his own lines with a certain authorial endorsement, even though the reader (or listener) may only experience the effect at a subliminal level. The idea of the stanza is clear: the dead will be spared the frustrations and irritations of growing old; that in a sense the soldiers who perished are better off than us, the survivors. For this sacrifice, we must pay homage to "the fallen" each day. Again, the emotional response of gratitude is the one expected of the reader. Those who died in the conflict should be seen as victims; casualties of a political struggle at a higher level, though that struggle should not be the focus when we remember the dead. We should mourn the men who died, not condemn the men responsible for the kind of power-mongering that triggers war in the first place. These are the insinuations of patriotism here, a form of heroic, national pride inscribed by the poet and implied as the appropriate response from readers, as well as from those who hear the lines solemnly read aloud every year in memorial services throughout England.

For Binyon, the memory of the "fallen" finds expression in an abstract space "known" to the English mourners at home, what he characterises in stanza eight as "the innermost heart of their own land". This is a Romantic image, adopting the "heart" as the seat of the emotions and suggesting that there is a deeper or truer "well-spring" of emotion, something characterized as "the innermost heart". What is interesting about this deeper "heart" is that it represents a space somewhere within the English people that is also, at the same time, associated with the English "land". To unscramble this metaphor, we might paraphrase it thus: the "England" that feels the loss of the dead is both a nation of people and a country personified. For Binyon, the Englishness that defines the inhabitants of the "land", along with their "innermost heart", are both produced by their occupying a certain physical and cultural space. Patriotism depends upon such romantic images as these to sustain its conceptual force. In 1914, hearing news of more soldier deaths, it would have been difficult for an English reader not to feel the impact of Binyon's sentiments: England as a nation with a collective identity needed to grieve the tragic loss of one of its compatriots. The fact that those sentiments have managed to maintain their influence for a century leads us to make a number of inferences. Firstly, notions of national pride and collective identity are still acceptable;

secondly, “Englishness” has benign (even maternal) characteristics that are identifiable; thirdly, there is something “noble” and “glorious” about sacrificing one’s life for the sake of the nation you represent. Acts of patriotism, including the writing of poetry, play an important role in reinforcing cultural superiority: the idea that one’s own nation and culture, its language, traditions and history have superior qualities. As Kendall points out, “The close identification of war poetry with a British national character persists to the present day. Its origins can be found in the belief that the writing of verse was a patriotic act because it celebrated and (at least potentially) enhanced the nation’s cultural ascendancy.” (KENDALL, 2013, p. xv)

Another poem etched in the English imagination was written by a Canadian doctor and published in December 1915. *In Flanders Fields*, by John McCrae, was an immediate success and quickly became associated with propaganda efforts to persuade more young men to enlist. Unlike *The Soldier* and *For The Fallen*, *In Flanders Fields* has universal appeal as it is not aimed at one particular national audience. Nevertheless, the poem has become highly significant in the English ‘*Remembrance Day*’ culture through its use of the poppy, a flower that has become the symbol of self-sacrifice in France.

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields. (WALTER, 2006, p. 155)

Here we return to the gentler tone of Brooke’s *The Soldier*, the effect produced by the regular iambic line, this time with only eight syllables (iambic tetrameter) instead of the ten we found in the pentameter of the sonnet. We also notice the repetition of part of the first line at the end of the second two stanzas, as well as the regular rhyme scheme, which begins in the first stanza and continues through the length of the poem. This is, in fact, a rondeau, originally a

lyric form from medieval France sung at court. The general effect of this combination of iambic metre, regular rhyme and repetition is to make the poem memorable; the gentle delivery, sound repetition and shorter length fix the poem more easily in the memory. The simplicity of the form is almost akin to a nursery rhyme, a poem or song designed to be easily learnt and often repeated. This easily-digestible pattern hints at the way the poem should be approached: not as a complex or abstract set of ideas, but as a straightforward “message” that is understood on first reading. Consequently, it is only a short step from grasping the “message” to approving it; the message in this case being a call to arms similar to Lord Kitchener’s poster pointing a finger at young British men and telling them “YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU”.

The central idea of the poem comes at the beginning of the second stanza, with “We are the Dead.” The poem is an imaginary reproduction of the thoughts of the dead soldiers buried in the fields of France; an eerie *despatch* from a ghostly subterranean place, under “the crosses.../ That mark our place”. For the poem to achieve its effect, it is important for the reader not only to sympathise with this “voice” of the victims, but also to feel pity for the dead, to react emotionally. The lines that follow “We are the Dead” induce this reader reaction: “Short days ago / We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, / Loved and were loved”. These dead souls are able to reminisce about the natural beauty of the earth and the joys of love. Listening to their thoughts or sentiments, we as readers identify with their human plight. This feeling of empathy prepares the reader for the next stanza of the poem, which is a call to action: “Take up our quarrel with the foe: / To you from failing hands we throw / The torch; be yours to hold it high.” Clearly, it is not enough to feel sympathy with the dead soldiers: our duty is to replace those victims of battle and selflessly risk our own lives in mortal combat. The use of the commonplace words “quarrel” and “foe” give a lighter tone to the appeal, as if the poet were asking for support in a conflict with his unruly father; this makes acceptance of the challenge appear less daunting and more natural. There is also an inference that fighting to defeat the “foe” is a noble cause, as we are urged to grasp the “torch” and “hold it high” with a sense of pride. The poem also includes a veiled threat: if we “break faith” with those “who die”, they will never be at rest. The word “faith” clearly has religious connotations, but more importantly, it suggests there is a shared understanding between the dead and the reader to support each other in bloody conflict. Although this is blatant propaganda, in 1915 the idea of writing a poem to encourage more recruits to enlist would hardly have been controversial: men were dying in increasing numbers and needed replacing in order to stop the enemy advancing.

Today the element of propaganda in McCrae's poem is perhaps less striking than the unselfconsciously sentimental tone. The crucial "message" of the poem is nestled within images of flowers blowing in the wind, birds singing, glowing sunsets and loving men. There are common elements to *In Flanders Fields* and Brooke's *The Soldier* in that both poems employ pastoral images of natural beauty and highlight benign human qualities or emotions ("gentleness", "hearts at peace", men who "loved and were loved") in order to produce patriotic responses to the war. In fact, all three of the poems examined so far achieve their effect by romanticising the selfless heroism of dying for one's country. Their success – all three poems are still widely read, quoted from and anthologised in England – leads us to a number of conclusions. Firstly, perceptions of WWI in England are infused with forms of patriotic discourse stemming from the prominence and repeated use of these poems in *Remembrance Day* commemoration services and other national tributes. Secondly, the centrality of these poems within the culture instils them with a moral authority which elevates the patriotic response to a position that makes its acceptance seem natural. Thirdly, the portrayal of England, at least in two of the poems, mythologizes the country as an idyllic space of natural beauty, and characterises the nation as imbued with "gentleness", peaceful "hearts" and even having maternal qualities.

At this point we face the paradox of determining how much of the meaning we attribute to poetry (and history) is perceived or located in the text, and how much is produced. As readers, we have preconceptions that are inextricable linked with the dominant ideas within the political and cultural spaces we occupy. This means our interpretations are always coloured by the ascendant discourses at any given historical moment. However, in the case of WWI poetry, certain discourses, including forms of patriotism, have been regularly *reconstituted*, breaking the cycle that normally transforms or replaces them. In certain liberal ideologies, patriotism is dismissed as an outmoded concept linked to imperialism and dubious notions of nationhood. However, the idea of "noble" soldiers selflessly giving their lives to save England – the country and the nation – has become a powerful discourse in English culture that remains in place. The fact that this patriotic interpretation of the war has fluctuated in cultural and political value over the century shows how such interpretations are never natural or self-evident, but always formulated and relative.

The changing fortunes of patriotism as an appropriate poetic response were already apparent during the war. "By the end of 1915", Michael Hamburger reminds us, "the traditional affirmation of war in heroic or patriotic terms was no longer a decent subject for poetry." (HAMBURGER, 1996, p. 149) Once the enormity of the human losses and the

atrocious conditions of trench warfare had become horrifically apparent to all those involved in the conflict, the ethics of the war were inevitably questioned. Many soldier-poets cast aside romantic conceptions of bravery, honour and martyrdom and aimed instead to communicate the senselessness of mass killing. They also began to react against the patriotic mood at home in England, where the machinery of war propaganda had to be kept running to perpetuate public assent to British involvement in the conflict. After 1915, poems of protest began to emerge from the muddy fields of France. The politicians had propagated a version of the war they thought would pacify the British people and encourage young men to enlist in the armed forces (conscription did not begin until 1916). Now the poets began to question the underlying principles of mortal combat, pitting nation against nation in senseless slaughter.

Whether they began with preconceived pacifist ideals or were converted by the sheer brutality, boredom and waste of trench warfare; whether their protests were dignified and urbane or callow and hysterical – the fact is that the poets were right about the war, the politicians and the press were wrong. (HAMBURGER, 1996, p. 151)

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that patriotism as a poetic response was somehow effaced by the brutality of war. Rather that, as the war progressed and the killing became relentless and shocking, a variety of personal forms of patriotism emerged.

One poet who grasped the horror and futility of war but also harboured a deep affection for the English countryside was Edward Thomas. “Thomas was not naively patriotic nor was he one of those who believed in innate national superiority [...] His patriotism was not about hatred or suspicion of the foreigner, it was about love of the place he knew and its traditions.” (MURRAY, 2010, p. 238) Although Thomas had been a professional writer (albeit a struggling one) for more than a decade when war broke out, he only began to write poetry in late 1914 after a chance meeting with the American poet Robert Frost who admired Thomas’s poetic style of prose. Despite his age (37), Thomas enlisted in the British Army in 1915 and was killed in France two years later. With his poem *This is no case of petty right and wrong*, published in December 1915, we find a questioning, belligerent tone aimed at the purveyors of war, but also an emotional attachment to England as a kind of “earth-mother”.

This is no case of petty right and wrong
 This is no case of petty right or wrong
 That politicians or philosophers
 Can judge. I hate not Germans, nor grow hot
 With love of Englishmen, to please newspapers.
 Beside my hate for one fat patriot
 My hatred of the Kaiser is love true: –
 A kind of god he is, banging a gong.
 But I have not to choose between the two,

Or between justice and injustice. Dinned
 With war and argument I read no more
 Than in the storm smoking along the wind
 Athwart the wood. Two witches' cauldrons roar.
 From one the weather shall rise clear and gay;
 Out of the other an England beautiful
 And like her mother that died yesterday.
 Little I know or care if, being dull,
 I shall miss something that historians
 Can rake out of the ashes when perchance
 The phoenix broods serene above their ken.
 But with the best and meanest Englishmen
 I am one in crying, God save England, lest
 We lose what never slaves and cattle blessed.
 The ages made her that made us from dust:
 She is all we know and live by, and we trust
 She is good and must endure, loving her so:
 And as we love ourselves we hate her foe. (WALTER, 2006, p. 15)

Taking the form of one continuous piece of text, without neat stanza separation, we immediately get the impression that this is a kind of statement that might have been written in prose. However, there is an iambic pentameter neatly disguised in every line, giving the poem a regular metrical pattern. As we have seen, the iambic pentameter is a widely used rhythmic form deeply embedded in English culture that carries with it a certain *authority*, almost like a ghostly voice speaking to us. According to Afro-American poet, Sonia Sanchez, “we do speak in iambic pentameter...if you listen to people speaking, that’s how they speak, really.” (SANCHEZ, 2007, p. 37) To put it another way, the consistent use of the iambic pentameter as part of the foundations of the English poetic tradition “is a major contribution to the cohesion of the discourse”. (EASTHOPE, 2013, p. 24) The “cohesion” of this “speaking voice” is significant here as Thomas attempts to persuade the reader to accept his argument. The confrontational stance he adopts, however, is clearly a departure from the romanticised and reflective tones of the three previous poems examined here. The hostility hits the reader in the face with the phrase “my hate for one fat patriot”. Suddenly the very notion of patriotism has itself become the subject matter of the poem. Clearly, as readers, we are expected to accept that “fat patriots” (with “fat” strongly connoting the idea of complacency) should be derided not celebrated.

The perception of the poem as a number of prosaic statements is also confounded in line nine where a metaphorical image of nature suddenly appears. After telling us that choosing between “justice and injustice” is unnecessary, we find this: “Dinned / With war and argument I read no more / Than in the storm smoking along the wind /Athwart the wood.” The argument of the poem is held up as we drift from culture to nature, from the ethics of patriotism to a “storm smoking along the wind” and across “the wood”, a vision that appears

to have more resonance for the I-narrator of the poem than reading newspaper reports of the war. In a sense, the wind in the wood and the “smoking storm” are natural phenomena that appear to both represent the chaos of the battlefield and at the same time highlight the contrast between the petty squabbling of war and the power of nature. This sudden switch of imagery is the beginning of a contrast in tone, from the contentious voice of the opening lines to a meditation on the natural beauty of Thomas’s version of England. After the “smoking storm” image, we find another representation of war as the “roar” of “two witches’ cauldrons” from which a thing of beauty will “rise”, “an England beautiful / And like her mother that died yesterday.” Here we are reminded of the *The Soldier* and *For The Fallen* with the depiction of England as both “beautiful” and maternal. This highlights Thomas’s particular brand of patriotism, which can encompass emotional feelings towards one’s country of birth, but recoils from militaristic jingoism. Despite these reservations, the I-narrator is prepared to join with all classes of soldier and patriot – “the best and meanest Englishmen” – to cry “God save England”. For Thomas, “England” is worth saving at any cost, even by paying the ultimate price. Two months after the war began, Thomas wrote: “it seemed to me that I had never loved England, or I had loved it foolishly, aesthetically, like a slave, not having realised that it was not mine unless I were willing and prepared to die rather than leave it as Belgian women and old men and children had left their country”. (THOMAS, 1928, p. 221)

For Thomas, “Love of England – a form of self-love – was the only justification for fighting.” (KENDALL, 2013, p. 55) As a lover a nature, Thomas identified emotionally with England as a geographic space, though one *consecrated* by self-association through childhood experiences, love of places and natural spaces, family and friends. This emotional response to the threat of losing England is crystallized in the last four lines of the poem: “The ages made her that made us from dust: / She is all we know and live by, and we trust / She is good and must endure, loving her so: / And as we love ourselves we hate her foe.” Here we notice the irregular rhyme scheme of the opening lines replaced by rhyming couplets, an instance of poetic *foregrounding* that complements the emotional sense; where the earlier lines had been rhetorical and less obviously “poetic”, here the matching sound patterns of the couplets imply resolution, closure; a softening end to the outburst. There is none of the superior posturing of the patriotic bigot here: the narrator only “trusts” that England is “good”; he only “loves” her because “she is all we know and live by”. The love of country begins with self-love, not hatred of foreigners. Thomas’s use of “hate” in the last line is hardly convincing, coming immediately after “as we love ourselves”. It is as though the narrator has been forced to feel

animosity towards the “foe” by unwanted circumstances. Thomas’s poem represents the first stage of a mood change in poetic representations of the war. Patriotism has not been displaced, but its credibility has to be defended. *This is no case of petty right and wrong* functions, like *The Soldier* and *For The Fallen* as an elegy to an idyllic England, but the caustic tone of the opening lines shows the emergence of a new antagonism, as the soldier-poets began to use their voices to protest about the horrific conditions and the senselessness of human slaughter.

One of the most distinctive and provocative voices of the war belonged to Siegfried Sassoon, who not only used poetry to register his anger at popular misconceptions about the conflict, but also risked imprisonment by making a public declaration criticising the English government’s handling of the war. Sassoon was an officer who had been born into the English aristocracy; as a young man, he left Clare College, Cambridge, without taking a degree, opting instead for foxhunting and the life of a country gentleman. Despite his privileged background, he was a fearless and dedicated soldier, winning the Military Cross in July 1916, “For conspicuous gallantry during a raid on the enemy’s trenches”. (MURRAY, 2010, p. 98) Sassoon’s name is infamously associated with a public protest he wrote in July 1917, known as “Finished With the War: a Soldier’s Declaration”, which he arranged to be read out in the House of Commons and which was printed in *The Times* newspaper the following day. In the open letter, he spells out his reasons for refusing to return to the Western front, following a period of convalescence.

I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the War is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it [...] I believe that this War, which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest [...] I am not protesting against the military conduct of the War, but against the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed. (MURRAY, 2010, p. 115)

Sassoon was determined to publicise the senseless slaughter happening daily on the battlefields of France, a waste of human life that appeared to have no clear military solution or political resolution. The statement marks a decisive historical shift in representations of the war in 1917, challenging public perceptions of young English soldiers sacrificing their lives on the Western Front for “noble” and “heroic” reasons. “Although he was never a pacifist, his protest was one event in a great civilian debate about war aims in 1917, when liberal opinion believed that peace might be achieved by negotiation if the hostile powers could be persuaded *to say what they were fighting for.*” (HIBBERD & ONIONS, p. 24, my italics) What is extraordinary is that after three years of fighting and millions of lives lost, it was difficult to

be clear about what exactly each side in the conflict was “fighting for”. This absurdity maddened Sassoon, and, as an officer, he was concerned for the spiritual and physical welfare of his men. He confided in his diary in 1917, at the time of the publication of his statement: “The soldiers who return home seem to be stunned by the things they have endured...Poor heroes! If only they would speak out; and throw their medals in the faces of their masters; and ask their women why it thrills them to know that they, the dauntless warriors, have shed the blood of Germans. Do not the women gloat secretly over the wounds of their lovers?” (MURRAY, 2010, p. 114) This diary entry demonstrates the bitterness Sassoon felt about the plight of his fellow-soldiers, but it also introduces an element of sourness aimed at the glorification of war and the heroism of sustaining injury in battle, particularly as he imagined this was experienced by the women at home in England.

This resentment concerning the apparently misguided perception of women towards their warrior heroes spilled over into Sassoon’s poetry. *Glory of Women* was written shortly after his public protest and published in December 1917.

Glory of Women

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,
 Or wounded in a mentionable place.
 You worship decorations; you believe
 That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.
 You make us shells. You listen with delight,
 By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled.
 You crown our distant ardours while we fight,
 And mourn our laurelled memories when we're killed.
 You can't believe that British troops 'retire'
 When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,
 Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood.
 O German mother dreaming by the fire,
 While you are knitting socks to send your son
 His face is trodden deeper in the mud. (KENDALL, 2013, p. 100)

Here we have fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, but this sonnet could hardly be further removed in tone from Brooke’s *The Soldier*, written two years earlier. Neither do we have the studied regularity of Brooke’s poem, but instead a kind of cracked mosaic of a sonnet deliberately designed to defeat expectations and unsettle the reader. For example, the rhyming scheme begins regularly with the two quatrains of the English sonnet form, a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, but then the expected e-f-e-f-g-g of the sestet, with the final rhyming couplet, is wrenched out of joint. Instead, we find e-f-g-e-f-g of the traditional Italian sonnet, with the final three lines shifting to the right of the page and drawing attention to themselves. In addition, the sestet traditionally signals a shift of emphasis or change of mood, whereas here Sassoon continues

his rant for three lines of the sestet before suddenly addressing a completely new implied reader, the German mother of the final three lines. By choosing the sonnet, a poetic form associated with lyric grace and declarations of love, Sassoon establishes the link with poetic tradition precisely in order to unleash within that respected framework an angry outburst which cannot be contained within the form, but instead breaks loose, shattering the tradition with a jumbled form and an ugly sense. *Glory of Women* is a clear example of how form *directs* interpretation and produces meaning; form is not a mere background for the content, but *delivers* that content in specific ways.

Sassoon's tone is obliquely ironic, shifting into sarcasm as the poet-narrator's indignation hits home. The first quatrain introduces the idea almost gently until we reach the final phrase "war's disgrace" which signals the political thrust of the underlying "message". This is followed by a cruel, punning short sentence designed to stun the reader: "You make us shells." The power of this image is firstly a formal one, a sentence standing alone conspicuously on the line. That force is heightened by its ambiguity: it suggests that men at the front have become somehow hollow or emptied of feeling, but also callously reveals the fact that women in England are making the bombs, or "shells" used to kill more soldiers. Kendall calls this phrase a "vicious pun" and interprets the poem as an example of "frank misogyny". (KENDALL, 2013, p. xxvi) This apparent "misogyny" is reinforced by the next phrase: "You listen with delight, / By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled." The alliteration of "dirt" and "danger" with "delight" implies that English women are not so much fantasizing about the war, but somehow "thrilled" by the suffering of their men, seeing armed combat as heroic and the wounds of battle as marks of bravery. The bitter tone continues with accusations that women "crown our distant ardours" and "mourn our laurelled memories" using images of "crown" and "laurel" associated with ancient customs of official decoration for heroism, the inference being that women actively condone death by elevating its status. There is a shift in semantic emphasis in line eleven when the soldiers, broken by "hell's last horror", decide to run in fear, "Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood." Again, we have an example of alliteration reinforcing and complementing the shocking imagery. Sassoon is forcing the reader to confront the horrific daily scenes of death and squalor which he has experienced at first hand, and banish delusions of noble and heroic dying on the Western Front.

The last three lines, conspicuously alone and pushed to the right, not only signify a new implied reader, but also reveal a slightly softer tone with the use of the sentimental image of a "German mother dreaming by the fire". Sassoon, however, deliberately lightens the

intensity very briefly so that he can then shatter the illusion by the use of a final shocking image of the “son’s face” being “trodden deeper in the mud”. By linking the two images of the British troops “trampling terrible corpses” and the face of the German soldier being “trodden deeper in the mud”, Sassoon highlights the arbitrary nature of death on the battlefield, with soldiers of different nationalities killing each other indiscriminately in acts of faceless slaughter. The sarcastic tone of bitter resentment at the ignorance of English women, which holds sway throughout most of the poem, is tempered at the end by the pathos of the German mother’s ignorance about her son’s brutal treatment. This powerful, yet pathetic ending to the poem doesn’t eclipse the rancour of Sassoon’s diatribe against naïve soldiers’ wives and lovers, but in a sense excuses and justifies the cruelty of his tone.

From the light, ironic tone of Thomas’s dig at patriotism and homage to the English countryside two years earlier, we have now reached the brutal senselessness of slaughter angrily thrust in front of our noses by Sassoon. Notions of heroism, martyrdom and noble self-sacrifice in the name of one’s beloved country have been rudely replaced by horrific images of soldiers “blind with blood”. Sassoon’s outrage at false perceptions of the war at home in England marks a shift in poetic sensibility in 1917. With no end to the war in sight, many soldier-poets felt compelled to relay some of the horrors they had to face in the trenches. In the preface to *In Parenthesis*, regarded as one of the most important poems about the war published in 1937, poet and soldier David Jones writes that after 1916, the war “hardened into a more relentless, mechanical affair, took on a more sinister aspect”. (FEATHERSONE, p. 239) Kendall tells us many poets “experienced this fall, out of a world where gallantry and decency might still be possible and into an inferno of technological slaughter.” (KENDALL, 2013, p. xx) However, it would be a mistake to conclude that the reading public in England were well aware of this “fall”, this radical shift in poetic depictions of the conflict, from naïve patriotism to shocking realism. Sassoon’s poetry was only recognised as significant *after* the war: he was seen as “something of a minor poet during the war years, and his presence is barely registered in wartime anthologies.” (WALTER, 2006, p. xxii)

This clearly demonstrates how poetic representations of the war are historically conditioned. With the fashion for Great War poetry growing since the 1960s, and hence the availability of a wide range of anthologies, we are now able to construct a representational narrative which marks certain shifts in ideological emphases. However, this historical narrative, plotting the changes in poetic sensibility, could not have been assembled in the same way during the conflict: my readings are based on the current availability of readings

and are in no way definitive. Value judgements and political allegiances play a role in interpretation and publishing as well as propaganda. “Experience may have introduced a new realism into war poetry, but this realism didn’t necessarily bring in its wake the pessimism and resentment so often attributed to the later years of the war.” (WALTER, 2006, p. xxii) The reading public’s conceptions and interpretations of the war during the years of conflict were based on the representations made available to them, and this included publishers’ choices of poetry, for whatever aesthetic, moral or political reasons.

Today, one of the most anthologised of English WWI poets is Wilfred Owen, who only saw five of his poems in print before he died in action in 1918 in northern France. Owen had provincial, lower-middle-class roots, but despite a pious, evangelical Christian upbringing, developed a passion for the poetry of John Keats, who he tried to emulate in his early work. Owen’s graphic and shocking WWI poetry is seen as a powerful antidote to the patriotism of Rupert Brooke and the romanticised overtones of other soldier poets. However, deciphering the aesthetic dimensions of Owen’s war poetry is challenging. In a famous preface to his collected poems, published posthumously in 1921, Owen wrote: “This book is not about heroes...Nor is it about deeds or lands, or anything about glory, honour, dominions or power, except War. Above all, this book is not concerned with Poetry. The subject of it is War, and the pity of War. The poetry is in the pity.” (MURRAY, 2010, p. 7) Here, Owen wants to dispense with any notions of “beauty” normally associated with poetry, and warn the reader that his poems function as representations of “War”. We might presume from this, that the “poetry” will not be located in the formal attributes of his verse – rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and so on – but only in the “pity” of the reader’s response. Ironically, however, Owen does not abolish the aesthetic response, but diverts it: from the sonorous, metrical qualities of verse usually experienced by the reader, to an imagined emotional effect that somehow connects more directly with the experience of war. These positions, I would suggest, are not mutually exclusive. We can indeed feel the emotional power of Owen’s graphic and pathetic depictions of war, but we can also appreciate the formal, poetic aspects of his verse: they are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin and depend upon each other for a full appreciation of his war poetry.

The fate of Owen’s WWI poetry, particularly its growing popularity since the 1960s, not only underlines how publishers can make or break literary reputations, it also demonstrates the relative nature of public perceptions about the realities of war. It would hardly be an exaggeration to suggest that most English people who have developed an

emotional or ethical response to the war, will cite Owen's poems as an influence. According to Walter, school pupils in England today

are more likely to encounter the poetry of the First World War not in English lessons, but as part of their History curriculum. A handful of poems, mostly by Owen and Sassoon, have become central to the study of the war as history at school level, with students being asked to analyse them not for their literary qualities, but for what they reveal about the experience of the war – in other words, as historical evidence. (WALTER, 2006, p. xxxv)

Although the patriotic poems we have seen so far remain a powerful force in the collective English psyche, reproduced in thousands of annual commemorative ceremonies, the poems of Wilfred Owen are looked upon within the culture as key historical texts. Educationalists plunder Owen's poems for non-patriotic reasons, to strengthen liberal arguments *against* the propagation of war.

The most famous of Owen's poems has the ironical title *Dulce et Decorum Est*, a Latin quotation from Horace's Odes, which finishes with "pro patria mori" and may be translated as "It is sweet and decorous to die for one's country." Owen wrote the poem in October 1917, but it remained unpublished until 1920.

Dulce et Decorum Est

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
 Pro patria mori. (KENDALL, 2013, p. 154)

Knowing this poem is presented in thousands of English schools as an accurate representation of the reality of warfare on the Western Front, we may justifiably ask about its status as poetry. Does *Dulce et Decorum Est* have recognisable aesthetic qualities or is the subject matter too gruesome to consider questions of beauty? Although the poem may have been misappropriated as a realist text highlighting the horrors of war, what gives the language its singular force are its formal, poetic qualities. Owen's nightmare images are conjured artistically from the raw material of daily life on the battlefield to shock the reader; the music of his language is contrived to amplify the sense-impressions; the rhythms are markedly irregular, stifled or truncated to ape the action and prevent the easy flow of ideas. The opening lines with their graphic similes, "Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, / Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge," achieve their powerful effect on the reader by tonal intensity, alliteration, assonance and a halting rhythm, as much as by the starkness of the imagery. By concentrating these language forms – images, sounds and rhythms – within a short, irregular poetic frame, Owen achieves the startling effects necessary to convey his powerful message. Pound describes great literature as language "charged with meaning to the utmost degree", where words "stimulate associations with other words" and induce "emotional correlations by sound and rhythm of the speech". (POUND, 2011, p. 28) This is how *Dulce et Decorum Est* achieves its intensity.

The frame of the poem appears to be two sonnets of fourteen lines each, broken into four parts. This gives Owen a traditional poetic model he can use ironically: instead of the lyrical, sentimental declaration associated with the sonnet form, Owen intends to fill his frame with harrowing images designed to mock poetic tradition. He also employs the iambic pentameter associated with the sonnet form, but breaks the metrical pattern for effect in several places. For example, the rhythm is halted by punctuation in the first two lines, which become in effect five phrases. This forces the reader to pay attention to the five startling images. This halting rhythm is particularly noticeable in line six, "But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind." The ten beats of the pentameter are there, but they are submerged under four phrases that start and stop, start and stop, stumbling along metrically, aping the slow, difficult "trudging" of the soldiers. This is another instance of how form does not somehow hover in the background of a poem, but delivers the meaning in specific ways. In line nine, when the soldiers realise they are being gassed, they reach for their masks in "an ecstasy of fumbling". The word "ecstasy" is, of course, associated with feelings of heightened

pleasure and would not look out of place in a traditional sonnet. However, Owen chooses the word here, I think, for two reasons: firstly, to highlight how such feelings are pathetically inappropriate in the midst of chemical warfare; and secondly, to force the reader to imagine a heightened feeling, not of pleasure, but of fear.

At the end of the first sestet of the poem, we find a four-line section separated in the middle. “Dim through the misty panes and thick green light, / As under a green sea, I saw him drowning. / / In all my dreams before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.” In the first two lines, the “misty panes” (lenses) of the gas mask and the green-coloured gas obscure the view for the narrator, transforming the scene into a nightmare vision in which, unable to breathe, the victim appears to be drowning “under a green sea”. It is feasible for the reader to grasp the simile used here, “thick green light” like a “green sea”, and imaginatively reproduce the image. However, the challenge to decipher Owen’s sense becomes more difficult with the lines that follow: “In *all my dreams* before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me, *guttering*, choking, drowning.” (my italics) “All my dreams” is clearly hyperbole and not meant to be understood literally (‘every dream I ever have’): it is used to intensify the nightmare vision of the dying fellow-soldier. Similarly, “guttering” is not a word we are immediately familiar with, though as readers we can grasp the idea of falling, like water from a gutter. This is an example of how unrealistic images do not defeat the attempt to read the poem as a realistic whole. In one sense, the reader may gloss over such inconsistencies, or semantic gaps, if the purpose of the reading is to produce a realistic interpretation: this is apparently what schoolteachers in England are prone to do with *Dulce et Decorum Est*. However, I would argue that the power of the poem resides in these unrealistic phrases or images. By means of hyperbole and grotesque caricature – in other words the inventive linguistic processes employed by poets – Owen produces something only half realistic but more memorable for its uniqueness.

This inventiveness is also in evidence later in the poem, when the dying comrade is being carried in the wagon. The narrator describes “His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin” and watches “the blood / Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs, / Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud / Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues.” We may not question on first reading whether there is such a thing as a “devil” or as “sin”, or that such a “devil” could have a “face” that appeared to be “sick of sin”. Similarly, the idea that cancer is “obscene” or that blood can be “bitter as the cud of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues” may not cause us too much *suspension of disbelief*. In effect, what Owen is tapping into is our imaginative powers as readers; the poet invents intoxicating, unrealistic images and

metaphorical connections that we are able to grasp at a deeper, unconscious level, at the level of the nightmare where we do not expect realism.

I think it is important to paraphrase the sense at this point in order to grasp how readers are able to interpret the poem as an example of the horrific reality of trench warfare. Here is my rendition: ‘*A group of wounded soldiers, half-dead with fatigue, try to make their way back to camp while bombs explode all around. Suddenly there is a gas attack and the men desperately reach for their masks. One of them fails to find his mask and begins to choke to death. The dying soldier is loaded onto a cart while the men trudge behind, watching him coughing blood and writhing in agony. The narrator then tells us that if we had witnessed this horrific scene, we would not tell children the old lie that it is sweet and honourable to die for one’s country.*’ Read in this way, we have a piece of propaganda: the thrust of Owen’s poem is to shatter any illusions of heroism or noble self-sacrifice. We may conclude this is an *anti-war* poem, though one that failed to affect the public’s perception of WWI during the conflict, as it was not published until 1920, and did not prove popular with the public until much later. Nevertheless, since the 1960s, as we have seen, liberal-minded teachers in England have interpreted the poem as a powerful antidote to illusions about military glory. Indeed, the predominance of *Dulce et Decorum Est* as the most influential WWI poem in England today suggests that one of the most enduring public responses to the war is disillusion, or even despair. “In accounts of the War and the art that it inspired, futility has defeated glory as the appropriate response, and Wilfred Owen has become the antidote to Rupert Brooke.” (KENDALL, 2013, p. xxi) However, because Owen only became popular following the success of C. Day-Lewis’s edition of his poems in 1963, we can see how historically relative such a public response can be. According to one critic, these conditioned responses form a complete narrative of the war based on publishing choices and the popularity of certain anthologies – from what we might call the “naïve patriotism” of Rupert Brooke to the “angry indignation” of Wilfred Owen. Andrew Rutherford describes, “First of all a naïve enthusiasm for war and then, after the shock of battle experience, an overwhelming sense of disillusion, anger and pity, culminating in pacifism and protest.” (RUTHERFORD, p. 65)

The problem with elevating Wilfred Owen to a position where he has the last word on poetic responses to WWI is that other voices are either ignored or seen as irrelevant. According to Walter, this *hegemony* of Owen’s particular stance assumes that his individual response to the realities of war was shared by all who saw active service. Today, the trajectory outlined above by Rutherford, “is accepted as the truth about the war and can be found reiterated not only in fiction, drama, and film, but also in both popular and serious journalism,

in radio and television documentaries and, in particular, in textbooks and other educational materials.” (WALTER, 2006, p. xxx) Sassoon has also become a national spokesman on the reality of the WWI first-hand experience. He and Owen were friends and influenced each other’s work. Sassoon wrote of Owen: “His conclusions about War are so entirely in accordance with my own that I cannot attempt to judge his work with any critical detachment.” (MURRAY, 2010, p. 162) Today their particular visions of the war are looked upon in English culture as almost irrefutable. “[T]he two friends were to exercise a far-reaching influence on modern attitudes to war. Critics observe the failings of their verse, historians point out that few soldiers shared their views, but no other poets of the Great War have surpassed them as its spokesmen”. (HIBBERD & ONIONS, p. 30)

This elevation in status of Owen and Sassoon has meant that in England their particular poetic voices have become part of what Walter defines as a “conservative canon” of WWI poetry. This “canon” is, by definition, restrictive and exists at a cost to plurality.

[R]estricting the canon only to poems which are judged to be worthwhile because they combine the presentation of direct experience with the articulation of a ‘seared conscience’ has meant that readers naturally enough use one or both of these criteria to judge the worth of any other war poems they may encounter. (WALTER, 2006, p. xxxiv)

The arbitrariness of this particular representation of the war has become difficult to challenge. Since the 1960s, it has become natural to assume that a great poem about WWI will present graphic images of death and contain an underlying “message” about the senselessness of war. As we have seen however, this has not always been the case. Patriotic poets, writing elegies to the English countryside or inspiring new recruits to acts of selfless valour have also had their periods of popularity. This is because the war has been *packaged* and reproduced by the poetry anthologies that have held sway in the popular imagination at various moments in history. “Ever since 1914, anthologists have influenced, and been influenced by, contemporary attitudes to war [...] Most Great War anthologies have been designed to reinforce one view or another of the war; few, if any, have been based exclusively on aesthetic criteria.” (HIBBERD & ONIONS pp. 2-3)

This negation of aesthetic criteria is fundamental to an understanding of how poetry deemed to be experimental was deliberately ignored by editors, not only for the duration of the war, but also “ever since”. As we shall see in the following chapters (2.3 – 2.5), poets such as Herbert Read, whose work often resembles both Pound’s Imagism and Eliot’s Modernism, were conveniently left out of Great War anthologies. When Wilfred Owen says that his book “is not concerned with Poetry” and that “The subject of it is War, and the pity of War”

(MURRAY, 2010, p. 7), he is unwittingly issuing a kind of *manifesto* for war poetry: war is too serious a business for aesthetic considerations of the “beauty” of form or the niceties of poetic effects. This is clearly a paradox: poetry is not *reportage*, but an essentially playful medium, using rhythmic and sound effects to stimulate an aesthetic response. For the duration of the war, however, formal technique in poetry was enlisted in the service of truth-telling, to deliver a powerful “message”, either as a call to arms or to highlight the horror and injustice of the conflict. This is why it has become commonplace to interpret the war as a period when Modernist experiments were suspended; it was as if poetry had been stripped of its aesthetic dimension and reduced to realistic representation.

The power of anthologies to control and limit the public perception of the war has been much more a case of exclusivity than inclusiveness. Many poets have been ignored because they do not fit the indeterminate criteria established by the anthologist. According to Walter, the present-day *hegemony* of Wilfred Owen has not only marginalized a vast amount of poetry, it has also created “a highly distorted but enduring image of what the poetry of the First World War is actually like.” (WALTER, 2006, p. xxxii) Labelling poets as belonging to certain movements or holding certain positions and then establishing a hierarchy of critical value only serves to distort the images of the war we produce imaginatively as readers. Critics, editors and poetry anthologists have been allowed to *reproduce* the war for us based on their arbitrary choices. This has meant silencing many of the poetic voices who struggled to be heard, each with a contribution to make to the history of the Great War.

With the poetry of WWI more popular in England today than ever before, a number of societies and associations have emerged dedicated to preserving the memory and promoting the work of the poets who took part in the conflict. One of them, the War Poets Association, makes some interesting observations on its homepage about the status of this unique body of writing.

War poetry is currently studied in every school in Britain. It has become part of the mythology of nationhood, and an expression of both historical consciousness and political conscience. The way we read – and perhaps revere – war poetry, says something about what we are, and what we want to be, as a nation.” (<http://www.warpoets.org/> accessed 04/07/16)

I would suggest there is a certain ambiguity about the expression “mythology of nationhood”, which infers, on the one hand, that the work of the war poets forms part of a collective national identity or consciousness about Britain’s historical role in international conflicts. However, the word “mythology” also suggests something imaginary and intangible – a body of narratives that depend upon re-interpretation to have significance within a culture. If there

is such a thing as “national identity”, then it is always in a state of being historically re-constituted and re-presented; it is not something definite or definable, but signifies different things to different people at different times. Similarly, “historical consciousness” and “political conscience” are fluid concepts that depend upon the dominance of certain moral and political ideas within a culture at particular historical moments. As we have seen, WWI poetry which may be classed as patriotic still has significant power within certain sections of English culture, while the more politically censorious work of Owen and Sassoon is esteemed in other quarters. This demonstrates how developing an understanding of the war through its poetry is a *process*; it is not a position to be reached or attained, it is always something to be discussed and deliberated.

Perhaps the most revealing sentence of the quotation from the War Poets Association is the following: “The way we read war poetry says something about what we are, and what we want to be, as a nation.” Modern anthologies of WWI poetry, such as the ones I have been quoting from in this essay, are conscious of the need for plurality, for breaking down barriers erected by earlier anthologists who tried to “reinforce one view or another of the war.” The latest anthologists aim for inclusivity, featuring many women poets and other voices previously ignored by editors. In this sense, “the way we read war poetry” has become less restrictive through the availability of a wider variety of poetic voices.¹⁸ However, the sentence also appears to suggest that by reading war poetry, English people will develop a better sense of their national identity; by engaging with poetic responses, we will understand more clearly our “Englishness” or “Britishness”. As I hope to have shown in this review of certain key poems, it is important to listen to the *distinct* poetic voices we hear in WWI, not attempt to categorize poets under some indiscriminate rubric. By labelling poets under “patriotism”, “realism”, “protest” or “anti-war” we always reduce their uniqueness. Equally, by concentrating on the meaning, or “message” of the poem, we ignore the richness of those formal qualities that make poetry an art form. In a famous maxim, the critic Walter Pater wrote, “All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music”. (KIVY, 1997, p. 98) In all art forms except music, Pater explained, the distinction between “matter” and form could be perceived by the observer. In this sense, music symbolised the purest form of art. The music of poetry, the assonance, alliteration and consonance of its language, and the rhythms which present that language, are the elements that invest poetry with its unique power. Despite this,

¹⁸ Such contemporary anthologies are responsible in many ways for inspiring this thesis: by featuring the work of more experimental poets such as Read, Monro and Gibson, they have opened up the territory for critical revaluations of the period.

the intricacies of poetic form are often overlooked by content-based analyses; by the “will to paraphrase”. We might say that, too often in war poetry, politics stifles aesthetics. To appreciate more fully the wealth of poetry produced during WWI, to hear the distinctness of those distant voices, we need to listen to the verses as songs, not as statements.

2.3 Forgotten voices: Wilfrid Gibson

Dark waters into crystalline brilliance break
 About the keel, as through the moonless night
 The dark ship moves in its own moving lake
 Of phosphorescent cold moon-coloured light;
 And to the clear horizon, all around
 Drift pools of fiery beryl flashing bright
 As though, still flashing, quenchless, cold and white,
 A million moons in the dark green waters drowned.

(from *Troopship: Mid-Atlantic* by Wilfrid Gibson, 1917)

Although the Victorian era had produced a wealth of literary masterpieces to match any other period in English history, poetry in the first decade of the 20th century was criticised by a younger generation of artists and critics as stale and derivative. The grandeur of more than half a century of Victorian poetry had intimidated young English poets who felt unable to break free from the styles and themes they had inherited. Looking back in 1924, two years after publishing *The Waste Land* to wide acclaim, T. S. Eliot wrote: “The situation of poetry in 1909 or 1910 was stagnant to a degree difficult for any young poet of today to imagine”. (MURRAY, 2010, p. 14) The Edwardian period had lasted less than a decade when George V acceded to the throne in 1910, hardly long enough for any new movement in literature to establish itself after the indomitable influence of the Victorians. Despite this mood of debilitation, one young English poet had set himself firmly against the oppressive tide of Victorian and Edwardian verse, determined to strip away verbosity and pompousness and write a much plainer more direct poetry: his name was Wilfrid Wilson Gibson. Perhaps more than any other poet, Gibson is unequivocally associated with the so-called *Georgians*, having appeared in all five of the influential *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, published between 1912 and 1922. As outlined in 2.1, the intervening century has not been kind to the *Georgians*, most of whom have been completely forgotten, and the movement is now looked upon as quaint, pastoral and overly-sentimental. However, the poetry written during the Great War was heavily influenced by the *Georgians* and many of the famous trench poets - Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, Ivor Gurney - openly admitted their debt to this new movement.

Many young men who wrote poetry and took it seriously in the war years were either Georgians or were aware of the Georgians. In place of the grand, vague diction of the late Victorians, the new poetry offered plain language, simplicity, sharpness of detail, and a commitment to realism that did not duck the unpleasant. (HIBBERD & ONIONS, p. 9)

Gibson (1878-1962) hailed from a market town in rural Northumberland, a lower middle class boy whose father kept a chemist shop. Having decided at a young age that his calling was poetry, he never wavered from this path, producing volume after volume of verse throughout his life. According to Dominic Hibberd, who has read through Gibson's correspondence, the young poet was deeply affected by the poverty he witnessed in the agricultural communities that surrounded his Northumberland home. At the age of 20, he admitted to having "a horror of ultra-poetic words" and by 1905 had already decided "that it was 'the poet's business to make poetry out of the life of his day', writing about social realities in plain language":

Gibson's change of subject and language was momentous. He was the first poet of his generation to become consciously 'modern', rejecting the high-flown subject matter and diction of most late-Victorian verse and recognising, as Wordsworth had done long before, that poetry needed to be brought up to date and down to earth. (HIBBERD, 2006, p. 9)

An automatic choice for the first anthology of *Georgian* poetry, masterminded by Edward Marsh, Rupert Brooke and Harold Monro, Gibson's work embodied a new mood of directness and plainness of style, even reaching a certain severity or harshness as the new century's poets struggled to make their voices heard. Victorian and Edwardian poetry had been too complacent and self-satisfied, weighted down by mythical themes and ornate verbosity. Gibson pioneered a new social awareness which matched the candid sincerity of his poetics. Hibberd classifies the Georgians as being "committed to a poetry that would not only be unornamented, 'austere, direct and free from emotional slither' [as Ezra Pound had suggested], but would also face up to social realities and the need for change." (HIBBERD, 2006, p. 11)

Looking back with hindsight, and bearing in mind the profound shift in poetic sensibility which followed the publication of *The Waste Land* (TWL) four years after the war, it is difficult to imagine the shocked reactions of the many critics who first encountered the early *Georgian* efforts. One example will suffice to set the scene of controversy within literary critical circles. Traditionalist poet William Watson, a disciple of Tennyson, feared a new and dangerous radicalism had infected the young *Georgian* breed of poets when he barked: "Certain of our Georgian singers, and even one or two poets whose roots go down into late Victorian antiquity, are so haunted by a dread of smoothness that they have very

nearly erected cacophony into a cult. They pursue it as an end in itself laudable...” The extreme language of “haunted”, “dread”, “cacophony” and “cult” expose the fearful attitude of some members of the critical establishment at the prospect of a *Georgian* takeover. According to Hibberd, however, Gibson and other *Georgians* did not have a political agenda or a particular creed to follow as their aim was to be honest rather than dogmatic, plain-spoken rather than allusive or oblique. In assessing the contribution to Great War poetry made by both Gibson and Harold Monro, neither of whom ever saw action, Hibberd eulogises the pair for establishing new poetic principles in the years leading up to the conflict:

Monro, like Gibson, was a civilian in 1914 and was never to serve abroad, but between them these two poets anticipated some of the principle elements in the best war poetry that was to come: simplicity of diction, realistic detail, the role of the poet as observer and pleader, the ‘pity of war’, the ruthlessness of ‘old men’, the beauty and innocence of youth that dies. (HIBBERD & ONIONS, p. 9)

Gibson’s war, in particular, was to be a frustrating one. Despite suffering from short-sightedness, he attempted to enlist on four different occasions, finally being granted an ancillary role as a clerk in the Army Service Corps in London. Although keen to play his part in the war effort, Gibson was harshly critical of the mass-slaughter he narrowly avoided. In a letter written in 1941, during World War II, he wrote: “However noble our ends must be, it does not do to forget that the means we are forced to deploy to defeat evil are in themselves horrible.” Summing up his feelings about war in the same letter, he writes: “I cannot think of war only in terms of armies or of contending nations: it is to me a business of innumerable personal tragedies.” (HIBBERD, 2006, p. 15) The personal tragedy for Gibson was, in a sense, a double-edged sword: his noble attempt to join the fighting was repeatedly refused; and his poetry suffered the ignominy of being ignored and forgotten. Despite these setbacks, Gibson should take the credit for pioneering a realistic style, purged of ornament, which served the trench poets well when they came to depict the cruelty of combat. As Tim Kendall reminds us, the Great War was very much a “Georgian War” and Gibson was, perhaps, the quintessential Georgian. For the poets heading to France, “Georgianism became the touchstone for poetic quality: [Wilfred] Owen felt no greater literary honour than to be ‘held peer by the Georgians’, while [Ivor] Gurney believed that ‘The best way to learn to write is to read classics like Milton, Keats and Shakespeare, and the Georgian poets’.” (KENDALL, 2013, pp. xvi – xvii)

As Gibson was recognised as one of the most famous of the new Georgian voices¹⁹, at least in poetry circles if not in the public mind, it is clear that Eliot would have been aware of his work. The two men were among several young poets invited to speak at Harold Monro's *The Poetry Bookshop* in Bloomsbury, London, in the years preceding the war. Eliot was a poetry scholar and would have certainly had access to copies of the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, all of which featured poems by Gibson. In early 1913, Gibson published a single volume containing a long poem in blank verse, *Akra the Slave*. The poem, written in a mock-classical style, tells the tragic story of a young man and his family who are set upon and captured by bandits; Akra and his brothers are taken by their captors to Babylon to be sold into the royal court. On spying the Queen in the opulent splendour of her chamber, Akra develops an overwhelming passion for her. At first, the King indulges Akra, allowing him to offer gifts to the Queen. Later, however, when he discovers the extent of Akra's passion, he orders the slave's death. Reading the poem today, I am struck by how the imagery is redolent of at least one passage of *TWL*; but more than this, I hear a mock-heroic tone of voice that has echoes in Eliot's poem, though two important differences are in evidence. Firstly, *Akra the Slave* is narrated in the first person, a style Eliot deftly and deliberately avoids in *TWL*. Secondly, Gibson writes sincerely, with hardly a trace of irony, managing to maintain a steady mood of tension as the story unfolds. Eliot's style is more eclectic and yet elusive, with the poet positioning himself at a distance which borders on the parodic, staging a classical scene only to rudely shatter the illusion by cutting through the lofty tone with an image of modern banality.

I am reminded again at this point of my earlier quotation from Jorge Luis Borges, in which the Argentinian poet and critic stresses the importance of reading backwards, as it were, noticing influences or associations that would not have come to light without the later work. Borges says "every writer creates his own precursors", and that his (or her) work "modifies our conception of the past".²⁰ With this in mind, my aim here is to show how

¹⁹ In April 1914, according to Hibberd, Rupert Brooke had just returned from a tour of America "where he had found that Gibson's name was better known than that of any other Georgian". (HIBBERD, 2006, p.12) As the Georgian poets, besides Brooke, included D. H. Lawrence, Walter de la Mare and Siegfried Sassoon, Gibson's work, clearly, was highly-regarded at this time.

²⁰ In a paper written for a conference about the influence of the Bloomsbury group, Sarah Roger compares Eliot's and Borges's approaches to the literary and critical tradition. She writes: "Eliot proposes a literary order in which room is made for new writers without disrupting the relationship between existing ones, and in which the best aspects of a poet's work shine through in the poet's acknowledgement of the tradition. Through his extension, or ironic inversion, Borges builds on Eliot so that the later writer draws out the greatness of the earlier writer, which would otherwise not exist...Borges does what he says a reader should do: he draws out new connections in texts that would not be perceived if it were not for the author who serves as the intermediary..."

Gibson's earlier work gains in stature when pitted against Eliot's great poem. The first extract from *Akra the Slave* is, in terms of imagery, reminiscent of the opening section of *A Game of Chess* from part II of *TWL*.

I looked upon the Queen,
 Where, in a secret close,
 Set thickly round with screens of yew and ilex,
 She stood upon the dark, broad brim
Of a wide granite basin, gazing down,
 With dreaming eyes, into the glooming cool,
 Unraimented, save of the flickering gleam,
Reflected from the lucent waters,
 That flowed before her silently:
 And slowly, from her feet,
 The cold light rippled up her body, till,
Entangled in the meshes of her hair,
 It flooded the calm rapture of her face:
 When, dreaming still, she lifted up her eyes,
 Unseeing; and I looked upon her soul,
 Unveiled, in naked immortality,
 Untrammelled by *the trappings of brief time,*
 And cloaks of circumstance.
 How long I looked upon the perfect beauty,
 I cannot tell--
 Each moment, flowing to eternity,
 Bearing me further from *time's narrow shores;*
 Though, yet, a little while,
From those unshadowed deeps time sought to hold me. (GIBSON, 2015, pp. 24-26)

Here is the opening to *A Game of Chess*:

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
 Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
 From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
 (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
 Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
 The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
 From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
 In vials of ivory and coloured glass
 Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
 Unguent, powdered, or liquid - troubled, confused
 And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
 That freshened from the window, these ascended
 In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
 Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
 Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
 Huge sea-wood fed with copper
 Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
 In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.
 Above the antique mantel was displayed
 As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene

The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
 So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
 And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
 “Jug Jug” to dirty ears.
 And other *withered stumps of time*
 Were told upon the walls; staring forms
 Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
 Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
 Spread out in fiery points
 Glowed into words, then would be savagely still. (NORTH, 2001, pp. 8-9)

I have marked in italics several similarities of imagery: “granite” with “marble”, “reflected gleam” with “reflected light”, the “trappings of brief time” and “time’s narrow shores” with “withered stumps of time”. Although these similarities could be explained as coincidences, I believe Eliot’s passage has certainly gained in estimation from being part of *The Waste Land*, a poem universally judged to be a masterly performance, whereas Gibson’s effort has been consigned to obscurity, a victim of the vanquishing power of Pound and Eliot’s Modernism which, in the eyes of many critics, swept away the efforts of the Georgians. Clearly, there are notable differences. Eliot’s passage is written in iambic pentameter, at least until the appearance of the line “Jug Jug to dirty ears”, which signals a shift of tone and mood. Eliot is paying homage to Elizabethan blank verse, citing in his notes the influences of Thomas Middleton’s satirical play *A Game of Chess* and Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra*. In a sense, this makes Eliot’s passage more stately than Gibson’s, an effect which gains in poetic significance when juxtaposed with the lower registers of everyday speech which appear in *TWL* (the line which immediately follows this passage is “My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.”) Gibson’s shorter line gives his passage a certain urgency which heightens the narrative suspense. Eliot’s language and imagery are also more complex than Gibson’s as they are not intended to convey the narrative, rather to showcase a classically-conceived poetic scene. This complexity can stretch logic into the realms of the nonsensical: “And other withered stumps of time / Were told upon the walls” is a mixed metaphor which is defiantly irreducible to explanation; “her hair / Spread out in fiery points / Glowed into words” is, perhaps, intoxicating as an idea (that strands of hair could symbolize a kind of language) until, as readers, we try to make logical sense of this. If part of the “modern experiment” is to be non-representational in the semantic sense, we have to resist the impulse to apply thematic reductions of *TWL* and judge the poem with different criteria. In other words, we should be prepared to place “meaning(s)” in parenthesis in our interpretations of the poem. As a final word on the contrast between the two passages, I would also argue that

one or two of Gibson's lines would not look amiss in *TWL* or elsewhere in Eliot's *oeuvre*. For example: "Untrammelled by the trappings of brief time, / And cloaks of circumstance." or "Each moment, flowing to eternity, / Bearing me further from time's narrow shores;"

Here is part of the closing passage of *Akra the Slave*, when the hero, facing death at dawn the next day, reflects upon his life:

And so, down from the hills, my life has flowed,
 Until, at fullest flood, it meets the sea.
 With calm and unregretful heart, I wait
 Till dawn shall loose the arrow from the bow.
 I, who, with eager, faltering hand have sought
 To fashion a little beauty, in the end,
 Have looked on the perfect beauty, and I die--
 Even as the priest, who, in the heart of night,
 Trembling before the thunder-riven shrine,
 Looks on the face of God, and perishes.
 I die...
 And yet, maybe, when earth lies heavily
 Upon the time-o'ertoppled towers,
 And tumbled walls, and broken gates of brass;
 And the winds whisper one another:
 "Where, Oh! where is Babylon?"
 In the dim underworld of dreaming shades,
 My soul shall seek out beauty
 And look, once more,
 Upon the unveiled vision...
 And not die. (GIBSON, 2015, p. 32)

There is something about Gibson's tragic, reflective tone here that appears reminiscent of an imaginary speech by *Tiresias* in *TWL*, particularly in the lines "In the dim underworld of dreaming shades, / My soul shall seek out beauty / And look, once more, / Upon the unveiled vision..." What is blatantly missing from Gibson's conception of classical tragedy, when compared to *TWL*, is irony. It is Gibson's *sincerity* that appears pathetic to modern readers; in *TWL*, Pound and Eliot include certain passages of lyric poetry which appear sincere, only to undercut the serious tone by juxtaposing them with lines of bathos. In this sense, *TWL* is emblematic of a loss of faith in the Romantic lyric voice: Eliot and Pound's Modernism can be seen as a deconstruction of the ghostly voice of Romanticism which had lost its credibility in the wake of mass murder and the spiritual crisis of WWI. Adorno takes the view that Romanticism practised what he calls a "transfusion of the collective into the individual through which the individual lyric poem indulged in a technical illusion of universal cogency" (RICE & WAUGH, 2001, p. 115) This encapsulates the pretention of Romantic poets who believed their lyric voices possessed a kind of transcendental capacity to reach a universal *realm* or space, and by which their poetry had universal significance. In this sense,

Modernism amounted to a *deconstruction* of the Romantic lyric voice, a development that can be seen as an inevitable cultural response to a historical crisis. Eagleton, in explaining the shift from Realism to Modernism in the early 20th century, describes how “a deep enough crisis of cultural form is usually an historical crisis as well”. (EAGLETON, 2007, p. 8) What is important to register here, is that *Akra the Slave* was written in 1912, two years before the war, whereas *TWL* was published ten years later in 1922, four years after the conflict.

Akra the Slave hardly exemplifies the elements of Gibson’s poetry which were deemed to be modern in spirit in the years leading up to the war. However, the next poem I want to examine reveals a very different style and is more obviously comparable with Eliot’s stylistic experimentation in *TWL*. *Strawberries* was written in 1915²¹ but published five years after *Akra* in 1917, when the war was an everyday reality and Gibson had begun to respond to the conflict in his verse. Having failed in his attempt to enlist in the army and get himself sent to the front in France, Gibson had to imagine what life might be like for the soldiers in the trenches and, as in this poem, how the wives were coping with the emotional strain:

Strawberries

Since four she had been plucking strawberries:
And it was only eight now; and the sun
Already blazing. There'd be little ease
For her until the endless day was done...

Yet, why should she have any ease, while he --
While he...

 But there, she mustn't think of him,
Fighting beneath that burning sun, maybe, --
His rifle nigh red-hot, and every limb
Aching for sleep, the sweat dried on his brow,
And baking in the blaze, and such a thirst,
Prickly and choking, she could feel it now
In her own throat. He'd said it was the worst,
In his last letter, worst of all to bear,
That burning thirst -- that, and the hellish noise...

And she was plucking strawberries: and there
In the cool shadow of the elm their boys,
Their baby-boys, were sleeping quietly...

But she was aching too: her head and back
Were one hot blinding ache; and dizzily
Sometimes across her eyes the light swam black
With dancing spots of red...

 So ripe and sweet
Among their fresh green leaves the strawberries lay,
Although the earth was baking in the heat,

²¹ Tim Kendall notes that *Strawberries* was written “Probably between January and September 1915” but appeared in published form in *Livelihood: Dramatic Reveries* in 1917. (KENDALL, 2013, p. 250)

Burning her soles -- and yet the summer day
Was young enough!

 If she could only cram
A handful of fresh berries sweet and cool
Into his mouth, while he...
A red light swam
Before her eyes...

*She mustn't think, poor fool,
What he'd be doing now, or she'd go crazed...
Then what would happen to them left alone --
The little lads!*

 And he would be fair mazed,
When he came back, to see how they had grown,
William and Dick, and how they talked. Two year,
Since he had gone -- and he had never set
His eyes upon his youngest son. 'Twas queer
To think he hadn't seen his baby yet, --
And it nigh fourteen months old.

 Everything
Was queer in these days. She could never guess
How it had come about that he could bring
Himself to go and fight. 'Twas little less
Than murder to have taken him, and he
So mild and easy-tempered, never one
For drink or picking quarrels hastily...
And now he would be fighting in that sun...
'Twas quite beyond her. Yet, somehow, it seemed
He'd got to go. She couldn't understand...
When they had married, little had they dreamed
What things were coming to! In all the land
There was no gentler husband...

*It was queer:
She couldn't get the rights of it, no way.
She thought and thought, but couldn't get it clear
Why he'd to leave his own work -- making hay
'Twould be this weather -- leave his home, and all --
His wife and his young family, and go
To fight in foreign lands, and maybe fall,
Fighting another lad he didn't know,
And had no quarrel with...*

*The world was mad,
Or she was going crazy. Anyhow
She couldn't see the rights of it ... Her lad
Had thought it right to go, she knew...*

*But now
She mustn't think about it all ... And so
She'd best stop puzzling, and pluck strawberries...*

And every woman plucking in the row
Had husband, son, or brother overseas.

Men seemed to see things differently: and still
She wondered sore if even they knew why
They went themselves, almost against their will...

But sure enough, that was her baby's cry.
'Twas feeding time: and she'd be glad to rest
Her back a bit. It always gave her ease,
To feel her baby feeding at her breast,
And pluck to go on gathering strawberries.

(*my italics*) (KENDALL, 2013, pp. 70-72)

Here, the sense of irony conspicuously lacking in *Akra* immediately becomes apparent in the contrast between form and content. *Strawberries* is conceived within a framework of iambic pentameter; after opting for this classic form, which as we have seen is deeply ingrained in the English cultural psyche as a ghostly, authoritative voice, Gibson proceeds to fill the frame with the simple and lowly voice of a provincial wife and her stream-of-consciousness-style reverie. On a grander scale, this is very much how *TWL* works, by establishing a huge structure of elevated poetic styles, only to defeat the reader's expectations by suddenly scene-cutting to a common conversation overheard in a pub. In the closing section of *A Game of Chess*, we find this:

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said -
 I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
 He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave
 you
 To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
 You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
 He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
 And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
 He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
 And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
 Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.
 Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight
 look.
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.
 Others can pick and choose if you can't.
 But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.
 You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.
 (And her only thirty-one.)
 I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
 It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
 (She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)
 The chemist said it would be alright, but I've never been the
 same.
 You are a proper fool, I said.
 Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,
 What you get married for if you don't want children?
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,
 And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot -
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 (...) (NORTH, 2001, pp. 9-10)

I want to compare *Strawberries* and the above section of *TWL* by selecting several idiomatic phrases from each poem. In *Strawberries*, we are listening in on a form of internal dialogue wherein the narrator-wife is holding a conversation with herself in a colloquial style, trying to understand her husband's decision to fight in the war and lamenting the fact that he missed

the birth of their second son. As an experiment, I will compare my italicised lines with selected lines from the last section of *A Game of Chess*. First, the Gibson lines:

(...)
*She mustn't think, poor fool,
 What he'd be doing now, or she'd go crazed...
 Then what would happen to them left alone --
 The little lads!*
 (...)
 *It was queer:
 She couldn't get the rights of it, no way.
 She thought and thought, but couldn't get it clear*
 (...)
*The world was mad,
 Or she was going crazy. Anyhow
 She couldn't see the rights of it ... Her lad
 Had thought it right to go, she knew...*
 (...)

Now, lines from *TWL*:

*When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said -
 I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,*
 (...)
*Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
 He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
 And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.*
 (...)
*You are a proper fool, I said.
 Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,
 What you get married for if you don't want children?*
 (...)

Clearly, there are important differences in tone here, and yet there is also a striking similarity in the *artistic decision* of both poets to feature the mundane voice of a working class woman as a narrator in poetic form. It was this kind of artistic choice which earned Gibson the epithet of 'modern' before the advent of Modernism proper. The irony which characterises both these voices reveals much about the difference in *intention* of the two poets. Gibson's wife is confused and yet stoical, displaying a loyalty to her husband and a pragmatic acceptance of the emotionally challenging circumstances: her voice is genuine and the effect, touching. Eliot's gossip-woman, on the other hand, is rude and offensive, ridiculing and humiliating the young soldier's wife she is addressing in the pub ("Hurry up please its time" was shouted in English pubs at closing time). Gibson's Modernism lies in his decision to import an ordinary, idiomatic voice into a poetic context by framing it with the iambic pentameter form; the irony is implicit. His intention as a poet is to *elevate* the prosaic thoughts of an ordinary wife, to try and capture the beauty which emanates from her simple self-doubting, from her phlegmatic acceptance of the tragic circumstances. Eliot's Modernism does not lie in the *elevation* of the

woman's voice in the pub, but in highlighting her *low* commonness when juxtaposed with the *elevated* and ornate language of classically-influenced poetry. Eliot's irony is maintained by his ability as a poet to position himself at a distance from the various voices which narrate *TWL*. I am reminded of Hugh Kenner's description (see 1.3) of *TWL* as "a parody of modern poem", suggesting that Eliot manages to perform as a ventriloquist, mixing the speech registers to comic and ironic effect. In 1917, Gibson, in a poem like *Strawberries*, was still attempting sincerity. By 1922, Eliot had found it necessary to inhabit the realms of parody, a position which might be seen as the polar opposite of sincerity. Clearly, post-war Europe was a place of doubt and profound disillusion with the human condition, a cultural climate in which poets could no longer trust the voices of authority, or even their own voices.

As far back as 1907, Gibson had been smuggling bleak images of urban decay into his rural poetry. *On The Threshold*, a verse drama published by Harold Monro's *Samurai Press*, is a sustained lament for a lost rural life of rolling hills, shepherds and smoky cottages (a world, incidentally, very similar to that portrayed in Thomas Hardy's novel *Far From the Madding Crowd*). Suddenly, in the midst of reminiscing about the old country ways, one of the characters, an old woman called Ellen, warns a young wife about the depravity of industrial city life:

Ellen:

I have dwelt long in grey and narrow streets,
 A stranger among strangers, where men snatch
 A starveling living from each other's clutch;
 Yea, I have toiled in cities where men grind
 Their brothers' bones for bread, where life is naught
 But labour and starvation to the end.
 Lass, may thy kind eyes never need to grow,
 As mine have grown, accustomed to the sight
 Of the evil and the wretchedness and want
 That huddle in dark alleys; though e'en there
 Love shineth, cooped in stifling misery,
 A candle in a garret. To the poor,
 Life is not easy underneath the sun,
 But in the dark and reeking city ways
 Yet more relentless, grim and terrible
 The struggle ever rages. I ne'er thought
 To look upon the hills of home again (...) (GIBSON, 1907, p. 30)

I want to draw out some of these phrases and images and assemble them together, to emphasize Gibson's murky vision of city life, and then to compare it with several snippets from Eliot's poetry of 1917, taken from *Prufrock and other Observations*, along with a short extract from *TWL*. Here is an edited version of Ellen's speech:

I have dwelt long in grey and narrow streets,
 A stranger among strangers
 (...)

Yea, I have toiled in cities where men grind
 Their brothers' bones for bread
 (...) accustomed to the sight
 Of the evil and the wretchedness and want
 That huddle in dark alleys;
 (...) cooped in stifling misery,
 A candle in a garret.
 (...) in the dark and reeking city ways
 Yet more relentless, grim and terrible
 The struggle ever rages.

Eliot's poetry from 1917 is suffused with images of the city, of fog and smoke, dusty streets and drains, factories and rust; it is one of the hallmarks of Eliot's modern idiom to pepper his poetry with the dingy reality of urban street life. Here are a few examples:

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
 The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
 Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
 Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
 Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
 (*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*) (ELIOT, 1980, p. 13)

Well! And what if she should die some afternoon,
 Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose;
 Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand
 With the smoke coming down from the housetops;
 (*Portrait of a Lady, part III*) (ELIOT, 1980, p. 22)

The morning comes to consciousness
 Of faint stale smells of beer
 From the sawdust-trampled street
 With all its muddy feet that press
 (*Preludes, part II*) (ELIOT, 1980, p. 23)

A broken spring in a factory yard
 Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left
 Hard and curled and ready to snap.
 (*Rhapsody on a Windy Night*) (ELIOT, 1980, p. 27)

And from *TWL* five years later, in 1922:

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
 Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
 While I was fishing in the dull canal
 On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
 (...) White bodies naked on the low damp ground
 And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
 Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.
 (...) Unreal City
 Under the brown fog of a winter noon
 (*Part III, The Fire Sermon*) (ELIOT, 1980, pp. 70-71)

Needless to say, I am not suggesting that there is any direct connection between the extract from Gibson's verse play and Eliot's imagery. What is clear is that in the first two decades of the 20th century, the dynamic growth of industrial city life, and the ugliness and decay that this caused, served as one of the central symbols of modern poetry, registering a fundamental shift away from the pastoral lyric of late-Romantic poetry and the salvaging of myths which dominated the work of Victorian poets in their flight from industrial reality. In these examples, we notice immediately that Eliot's tone is more measured and lyrical as he imports and transforms the images of industrial decay into the settings of urban scenes of human encounters. In contrast, Gibson's images are harsh and direct, serving as a relentless assault on the contagion which spreads from the grime of industrial waste into the attendant human experience. These differences are worth exploring in more detail.

When Gibson says, "Yea, I have toiled in cities where men grind / Their brothers' bones for bread", the tone is distant and oblique rather than direct and literal, a tone similar to that which Eliot maintains in certain sections of *TWL*. Grinding "bones for bread" is a hyperbole of poetic conceit which highlights Gibson's attempt to explore new territories of the imagination which befit a harrowing industrial environment of poverty and starvation. Similarly, "the evil and the wretchedness and want / That huddle in dark alleys" is a kind of modern, urban personification of misery that does not sit well in a rural lyric verse-drama, showing how Gibson is attempting to modify his lyrical tendencies to encapsulate the industrial landscape. Eliot's "The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes" and "Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening" is another kind of personification (Eliot's love of cats is clear from the imagery), but the tone, ten years after Gibson's piece, is modern in a significantly different way. Eliot is not denouncing the horrors of city life, but accepting and importing such images into his poetry: Eliot's Modernism *shows* and *tells* ironically, it employs the detritus of industrial waste as raw material to be worked up into poetry; it does not sit in judgement on that material. When Eliot writes "White bodies naked on the low damp ground / And bones cast in a little low dry garret, / Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year." in *The Fire Sermon*, the images, though shocking, appear in the midst of other, mundane images which, in a sense, reduces the shock value precisely to show how a modern poet has to work with the everyday remnants of an industrialised landscape. Eliot's resigned *stoicism* is already apparent in *Preludes*, where we find, "The morning comes to consciousness / Of faint stale smells of beer / From the sawdust-trampled street / With all its muddy feet that press". Here Eliot is *recording* these perceptions from an ironic distance, not holding them up as contemptible appurtenances of industrial squalor, as Gibson does. In 1907,

Gibson was still struggling to find a way to express, lyrically, the contradictions of the modern, industrial environment. By 1917, Eliot had embraced this contemporaneity as a way of both *engaging* with the city environment, and of blending the quotidian with the more reflective tone of the poet-narrator. By the time of *TWL*, Eliot had gone further, exhibiting ornaments of poetic distinction like museum pieces to clash against images of urban decay and the doggerel of common speech; in the midst of this apparent disparity, he attempted a modern lyric voice which could characterise the contradictions, *not* for critical scrutiny, as Gibson does in *On The Threshold*, but as a bewailing, personal performance.

I want to look at another example of Gibson's work, a sonnet written to express the fear and shock to the senses caused by an air-raid during the war. The poem, called simply *Air-Raid*, was first published in 1920, though anthologist Tim Kendall believes the poem was probably written between May 1916 and April 1919. (KENDALL, 2013, p. 250)

Night shatters in mid-heaven: the bark of guns,
 The roar of planes, the crash of bombs, and all
 The unshackled sky pandemonium stuns
 The senses to indifference, when a fall
 Of masonry nearby startles awake,
 Tingling wide-eyed, prick-eared, with bristling hair,
 Each sense within the body crouched aware
 Like some sore-hunted creature in the brake.

Yet side by side we lie in the little room,
 Just touching hands, with eyes and ears that strain
 Keenly, yet dream-bewildered, through tense gloom,
 Listening in helpless stupor of insane
 Drugged nightmare panic fantastically wild,
 To the quiet breathing of our sleeping child. (KENDALL, 2013, pp. 73-74)

It might be argued that this poem is fairly representative of the Georgian style of realism written by soldier-poets during the conflict. We might also cite Wilfred Owen's famous poem *Dulce et Decorum Est*, which I examined in the previous chapter. However, I believe there is a certain uniqueness about Gibson's poem, which again shows us how he is straining to be 'modern'. Once again we find the ubiquitous iambic pentameter, an accepted requirement of the traditional sonnet, but Gibson employs a free hand with the metre, breaking up the rhythms to halt the flow and exacerbate the starkness of the imagery. From the very beginning, with the first image, Gibson forces the reader into an alien space: "Night shatters in mid-heaven", employs the onomatopoeic word "shatters" to stress the horror of the situation, but the image cannot be resolved because "night" cannot "shatter"; only the personal experience of one particular night. This confusion is heightened by the location of the shattering: "in mid-heaven". Immediately we are in a place of confusion, an "otherness"

where night may “shatter” in the idyllic, biblical space called “heaven”, a place we normally imagine as serene and all-forgiving: here Gibson’s figurative contradictions reflect the madness, the unreasonable, inhumane space of murderous bomb attacks. Then, in lines 2 to 4, we find: “and all / The unshackled sky pandemonium stuns / The senses to indifference”. The first thing to notice here is that line 3 does not scan metrically; the iambic pentameter has been crushed under the bulk of the long words “unshackled” and “pandemonium”, an effect which highlights the line and forces our attention to it. If we then read the full sentence from line 3, “The unshackled sky pandemonium stuns / The senses to indifference”, we have an image which sounds ‘modern’ to our ears, the tone of which might not look out of place in *TWL*. The collocation “unshackled sky pandemonium” has an *Imagist* feel to it, as if the words have been concretised out of their context, thrown into relief as elements of a reified language. Also, the seven sibilant sounds of this line not only make the hissing noise of falling bombs, they also create a distance from sense, suggesting a symbolic space (an “otherness”) where meaning has been held in check.

In lines 6 and 7 we find: “Tingling wide-eyed, prick-eared, with bristling hair, / Each sense within the body crouched aware”, a shocking image crowded with ideas and body parts (skin, eyes, ears, hair) which is difficult to fully comprehend on first reading. The senses are “indifferent”, line 4, but now also “aware”, an apparent contradiction. However, this suggests a kind of dehumanised state, when bodily awareness is coupled with desensitized feeling or blankness. Again, this complexity points towards a re-evaluation of the poetic sensibility on Gibson’s part, as he strives to make sense of mass murder and a new kind of meaninglessness. The flight from sense which Gibson appears to be attempting here reaches its climax in lines 12 and 13, where we find a string of adjectives, nouns and adverbs piled together in a state of confusion: “helpless stupor of insane / Drugged nightmare panic fantastically wild”. The linguistic complexity of these two lines is ground-breaking: I believe it would be difficult to find comparable poetic inventiveness with language and imagery amongst Georgian poets in 1917, five years before the *TWL*, particularly as Gibson appears to be aiming not at realistic representation, but a new form of expression. We can imagine an “insane, drugged, stupor” which induces “nightmare panic”, but then to crown this by describing the feeling as “fantastically wild” stretches the imagination to the limits of comprehension. Pressing all the words together tightly clearly heightens the tension, but then offers no resolution, only bafflement, as if Gibson has reached, by 1917, a place we might call “the end of meaning”. In terms of metrics, line 13, “Drugged nightmare panic fantastically wild” is virtually unscannable, defiantly jumping outside the pentameter frame that *Air-Raid* establishes.

Poems such as *Air-Raid* are deceptively complex and under-exposed, caught in the trap of being associated with both WWI poetry, most of which is ransacked for realistic depictions of trench warfare, and the Georgian style, now deemed to be outdated. In his urge to be different, to employ a plainer, more direct style, Gibson pioneered a unique and personal poetics, though without the precocity of vision which characterised Pound's and Eliot's Modernism. Clearly, he did not possess the mastery of form or depth of intellect which Eliot employed to great effect in *TWL*. However, Gibson was certainly making progress with his personal vision and poetic experimentation, and some of his work has a flavouring of the modern, as we have seen. Unfortunately, in his later work, he was not able to sustain this early urge to be different, perhaps hampered by his modesty and his identification with the simple, rural life. In a letter to Robert Frost in 1934, Gibson told the American poet: "I am one of those unlucky writers whose books have predeceased him". (KENDALL, 2013, p. 64) Gibson's fate was bound up with two dangerous entities: the vicissitudes of literary fashion, which can topple reputations and reverse fortunes, and the ill-fated Georgians. According to *The Literary Encyclopedia*, "Gibson's was the saddest fate of all the Georgians. Once acclaimed as the leader of an exciting new movement, when that movement came into derision the critics found in him the epitome of its vices."²² As I hope to have shown here and in other parts of this study, neither the Georgians nor the name of Gibson deserve to flounder forever in the realms of poetic oblivion.

²² See website: http://www.poetrysoup.com/wilfred_wilson_gibson/biography, consulted on 24/10/2015

2.4 Forgotten voices: Harold Monro

Several of Monro's poems seem to be echoed in *The Waste Land*. One of the many curious notes he made about London characters – 'Albert's story:- woman in pub...False teeth' suggests that he provided material for the Cockney monologue in Eliot's poem...Eliot could have found no better informant about nightlife in the 'unreal city'. The two men often met, sharing a fondness for cats and whisky as well as poetry.

Dominic Hibberd (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 19)

Monro was active at the time when the schism between Modernism and Georgianism occurred, and since then, poetry in English has never quite managed to heal the breach.

Tim Kendall²³

Of all the poets associated with the ill-fated Georgians, there is one in particular who played a pivotal role in the development of English poetry in the years leading up to WWI. Harold Monro was not only a ground-breaking poet in his own right, he also acted as an adviser, editor and facilitator of new poetry in his position as owner of the famous *The Poetry Bookshop* in Bloomsbury, and as the publisher of both Pound and Eliot's early work, along with all the volumes of Georgian Poetry and the Imagist Anthology (*Des Imagistes*, 1914).²⁴ Eliot's designation of Pound in his *TWL* dedication as "il miglior fabbro" (the better craftsman) might have been applied by the Georgians to Monro, in the sense that he served as handmaiden to all forms of experimental poetry in the same way that Pound guided Eliot and the Imagists. According to Eliot himself, Monro was "One of the few poets of whom it can be said that they cared more for poetry in general than for their own work." (GRANT, 1967, p. 3) Monro (1879 – 1935) had a comfortable upper middle class background which later provided him with inherited funds and allowed him to invest in the bookshop and poetry publishing. After attending Cambridge, he became a free spirit, travelling widely in Europe, experimenting with alternative ways of living and undergoing psychoanalysis. Monro's individual instinct as a poet prevented him from becoming attached to any of the "isms" which began to dominate the poetry scene in the years leading up to the war. Despite this reluctance to be typecast, Monro was always a Modernist in the sense that he embraced all attempts at breaking with what he called the "stultification" of late Romantic Victorianism:

²³ This quotation is taken from an obituary of Dominic Hibberd, the biographer of Wilfred Owen and WWI scholar, written by Professor Tim Kendall in August 2012. See website: <http://war-poets.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/in-memoriam-dominic-hibberd.html> accessed on 01/07/16

²⁴ See MURRAY, 2010, p. 20. Murray also reveals how Monro modestly declined from admitting that it was *he* who first coined the expression "Georgian poets" in June, 1911. (MURRAY, 2010, p. 19)

he saw the importance of Modernist ideas. ‘London Interior’ and several other 1912 poems reflect the principles of ‘Impressionism’ recently laid down by T.E. Hulme, soon to be reformulated by Pound and F.S. Flint as ‘Imagism’: direct treatment of the object, and freedom from abstractions, rigid forms, superfluous words and what Pound called ‘emotional slither’ (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 14)

Monro was 35 when war broke out in 1914, and, like Gibson, was a victim of ill-health which scuppered his chances of fighting in France. In 1916, he volunteered and was made Second Lieutenant in the Royal Garrison Artillery based in England, ultimately being given a desk job at the Ministry of Information in London because of his fluency in French, German and Italian.²⁵

Monro’s relationship with Eliot was one of mutual admiration, the two poets both dedicated to carving out new forms of expression which would reflect the seismic shifts in political, cultural and intellectual life which defined the ten-year period between 1912 and 1922. Monro organised public readings of both of Eliot’s seminal poems *Prufrock* and *The Waste Land* in his role as proprietor of the *Poetry Bookshop* and London’s ambassador for new poetry.²⁶ In his turn, Eliot heaped high praise on Monro’s work, reflecting in 1933, in the introduction to Monro’s *Collected Poems*, “I think that his poetry, as a whole, is more nearly the real right thing than any of the poetry of a somewhat older generation than mine except Mr Yeats”. (HAMILTON, 1994, p. 360) In his use of the phrase “real right thing”, Eliot implies that Monro’s voice was an original one, moving the “tradition” forward, taking steps for others to follow. As I hope to show, the two poets can, on occasions, sound uncannily similar, leading us back to the conundrum of who exactly echoes whom, or, as Eliot would have it, who “steals” most efficiently from the other.²⁷ Clearly, Monro made headway himself, outside the new movements which were springing up, though he was also basking in the shadows of Pound’s Imagism, Eliot’s *Prufrock* and some of the Georgian pioneers. Eliot believed originality was one of Monro’s greatest strengths, predicting (wrongly, as it turned out) that his poetry would remain “because, like every other good poet, he has not simply done something better than anyone else, but done something that no one else has done at all.”²⁸ Hibberd suggests, as I will try to show, that the most helpful approach in any

²⁵ See HIBBERD, 2003, pp. 17-18.

²⁶ See HIBBERD, 2003, p. 14.

²⁷ In his essay on Philip Massinger in *The Sacred Wood*, 1932. Eliot writes: “Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal”.

²⁸ This quotation from Eliot’s “critical note” of 1933 contained in Monro’s *Collected Poems* is taken from a page about Monro and a selection of his poems on the website *The HyperTexts on-line poetry journal*. <http://www.thehypertexts.com/Harold%20Monro%20Poet%20Poetry%20Picture%20Bio.htm> accessed on 29/10/2015.

comparison of Eliot and Monro, is to view the influences as going “both ways”, in the sense that we can read backwards and forwards, historically, and notice the echoes:

Sometimes he seems to echo Eliot (...) and others among the many writers he knew, but if there are echoes they usually go the other way: Monro was there first. The success of his labours on behalf of other people’s poetry has tended to obscure the value of his own, but he wanted above all to be remembered as a poet on his own right. (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 7)

Hibberd even makes the claim that “several of Monro’s poems seem to be echoed in *The Waste Land*”, including the Cockney monologue in the pub scene, which evidently originated from notes Monro had made for future use and then communicated to Eliot on one of the many occasions when the pair met.²⁹

However, I want to begin my examination of Monro’s poetry and its relationship to *TWL*, by looking at a poem which appears to have a definite correlation with another section of Eliot’s epic, part of *The Fire Sermon*. The poem is *Suburb*, first published in 1914.³⁰

Dull and hard the low wind creaks
Among the rustling pampas plumes.
Drearly the year consumes
Its fifty-two insipid weeks.

Most of the grey-green meadowland
Was sold in parsimonious lots;
The dingy houses stand
Pressed by some stout contractor’s hand
Tightly together in their plots.

Through builded banks the sullen river
Gropes, where its houses crouch and shiver.
Over the bridge the tyrant train
Shrieks, and emerges on the plain.

In all the better gardens you may pass,
(Product of many careful Saturdays),
Large red geraniums and tall pampas grass
Adorn the plots and mark the gravelled ways.

Sometimes in the background may be seen
A private summer-house in white or green.
Here on warm nights the daughter brings
Her vacillating clerk,
To talk of small exciting things
And touch his fingers through the dark.

He, in the uncomfortable breach
Between her trilling laughters,
Promises, in halting speech,
Hopeless immense Hereafters.
She trembles like the pampas plumes.
Her strained lips haggle. He assumes

²⁹ See HIBBERD, 2003, p. 19.

³⁰ See HIBBERD, 2003, p. 117, where he records that Monro’s third volume of poetry, which contained *Suburb*, was published under the title *Children of Love* by *The Poetry Bookshop* in December 1914.

The serious quest. . .

Now as the train is whistling past
He takes her in his arms at last.

It's done. She blushes at his side
Across the lawn – a bride, a bride.

The stout contractor will design,
The lazy labourers will prepare,
Another villa on the line;
In the little garden-square
Pampas grass will rustle there. (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 44-45)

In the second half of the poem, parts of which I have italicised, we can hear the distinct echo of an encounter between a “clerk” and her lover in *The Fire Sermon* section of *TWL*. Here I have extracted the lines for comparison:

A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
(...)
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(...)
Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
“Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.” (NORTH, 2001, p. 13)

Despite the obvious stylistic contrasts between the two poems, there appears to be an anecdotal similarity, as if *Monro* reported to *Eliot* an incident involving a clerk, or the latter poet ingested *Suburb*, consciously or unconsciously, only to work up the anecdote in his own way for inclusion in *TWL* (eight years separates the two publishing dates, 1914 – 1922). A positive identification of a “borrowing” though this might be, it is important to consider the significance of finding a definite echo. We know *Eliot* cited many texts in *TWL*, and was fond of pastiche and parody: surely this may be just another example of legitimate “theft”? The short answer to this question is yes. However, what this “borrowing” shows is not how *Eliot* gleaned material for *TWL* – which has now become common knowledge – but how the influence of *Eliot*'s English contemporaries, including *Monro*, has been all but ignored. In this comparison, we immediately notice the sophistication of *Eliot*'s mock-melodramatic style and the concentration of ideas compared with the quiet simplicity of *Monro*'s technique. What

sets them apart formally speaking, however, is Eliot's insistence on employing the iambic pentameter as his framework, a choice which greatly enhances the irony of his banal subject matter. In this sense, Monro's poem could be classified as more "modern" in approach, in that he dispenses with any strict metrical pattern, allowing his verses to emerge organically in a free-form style, with stanzas of varying length.

There are several phrases in the first half of Monro's poem which appear to anticipate the urbane and, at times, disparaging tone which sets the mood for much of *TWL*. Three examples are: "Drearly the year consumes / Its fifty-two insipid weeks", then "The dingy houses stand / Pressed by some stout contractor's hand", and "Through builded banks the sullen river / Gropes, where its houses crouch and shiver." Collectively, the choices of language here – drearily, insipid, dingy, sullen, gropes, crouch – begin to sound a note of modernity, corroding the image of the Romantic lyric by importing a language derived from the tedium and decay of city life. The first example in particular, "Drearly the year consumes / Its fifty-two insipid weeks" suggests both a spoken immediacy and a sardonic tone of world-weariness that clearly sets it apart from Monro's contemporaries in 1914, most of whom were clinging onto traditional definitions of the lyric. This effect is also present in "the sullen river / Gropes, where its houses crouch and shiver", a personification charged with associations of sexual transgression and human depression which relate to the new mass-societies of modernity. However, Monro's "vacillating clerk" is of a noticeably different breed to Eliot's "carbuncular" specimen. Before he "takes her in his arms", Monro's clerk, "in the uncomfortable breach / Between her trilling laughters, / Promises, in halting speech, / Hopeless immense Hereafters", demonstrating not only his nervousness ("uncomfortable", "halting") but also a more traditionally romantic approach to love-making, "promising" future happiness. Eliot's clerk, in stark contrast, "assaults at once", propelled by his own "vanity", before "groping" his way out, the sequence leaving a distasteful impression of sexual abuse, with none of the sentimentality invoked by Monro. The outcome of the two encounters – sexual intercourse – is arguably the same, but the portrayal very different. As in the sarcastic pub monologue, Eliot highlights the house-agent's clerk's low commonness, his sordid intentions, his lack of humility. The polite rectitude of Monro's lyric reminds us of Gibson's sincerity of tone, both poets only able to suggest and hint at new possibilities for verse, rather than producing full-blown experimental work. Eliot's "groping" clerk and sarcastic pub croupy are new intruders into the poetic scene, pushing the boundaries of the lyric by smuggling in characters of vulgar hue and with sordid motives. If Eliot's "carbuncular" clerk represents an echo of Monro's "vacillating" version of the same, it also highlights the disparity between the

two approaches, marking the radical transformation of the lyric that had taken place in the eight years that separates the two texts.

Between 1915 and 1916, Monro wrote a longer poem called *Strange Meetings*, containing 21 stanzas of varying lengths and metrical patterns, each marked off by a Roman numeral.³¹ The sequence form and apparent haphazard shape immediately suggest an attempt by Monro to diversify his voice and create mood shifts from *within* the same poem, as Eliot clearly does in *TWL*. I want to examine the final four stanzas of Monro's poem to try and establish contrasts and similarities between *Strange Meetings* and *TWL*.

XVIII

Wipe away, please,
That film from your eyes.
I can't see you plainly. Are you
The friend that I seem to remember? Are we
The people I think we must be?
We have talked for an hour: it seems you are he.
I know you, I'm sure, though your eyes are so altered.
Oh, in what life of our lives did we meet?—
But you smile, then you sigh, then you frown:
Now you stare at me angrily. How can it be?
I know you—you do not know me.

XIX

A man who has clung to a branch and he hangs—
Wondering when it will break.

A woman who sits by the bed of a child,
Watching for him to wake.

People who gaze at the town-hall clock,
Waiting to hear the hour.

Somebody walking along a path,
Stooping to pick a flower.

Dawn; and the reaper comes out of his home,
Moving along to mow.

A frightened crowd in a little room,
Waiting all day to go.

A tall man rubbing his eyes in the dusk,
Muttering "Yes"; murmuring "No."

XX

It is not difficult to die:
You hold your breath and go to sleep;
Your skin turns white or grey or blue,

³¹ A complete version of *Strange Meetings* may be found in the appendices.

And some of your relations weep.

The cheerful clock without a pause
Will finish your suspended day.
That body you were building up
Will suddenly be thrown away.

You turn your fingers to the ground,
Drop all the things you had to do:
It is the first time in your life
You'll cease completely to be you.

XXI

Memory opens; memory closes:
Memory taught me to be a man.

It remembers everything:
It helps the little birds to sing.

It finds the honey for the bee:
It opens and closes, opens and closes. . . .

-Proverbs for the humble wise;
Flashes out of human eyes;
Oracles of paradise. (HIBBERD, 2003, pp. 70-72)

It is verses like these, I believe, which prompted Eliot to write (as cited earlier), that Monro had achieved something new, had “done something that no one else has done at all”. The experimentation takes place on a number of levels. Firstly, there is Monro’s decision to construct a poem using a number of disparate verses with distinctive formal patterns and yet retaining a single title. Secondly, he defeats reader expectation by not insisting on semantic or thematic links between the various verses, thereby provoking confusion. Even within the verses themselves, resolution of the sense is not always possible, as Monro juxtaposes images in an oblique fashion. In addition, the tone of the verses changes considerably, jeopardising the natural inclination to find a continuous voice that somehow unites the incongruent elements. However, what prevents our immediate classification of *Strange Meetings* as an early example of *Modernism* which clearly predates *TWL* is difficult to define with any certainty. We might call it Monro’s *timidity* of style or his polite English tone; his inability to reach beyond the boundaries of his small world, to shock or infuriate his audience. However, the poem was written when the war had not yet become the apocalyptic horror that captured the realist soldier-poets’ imaginations, at a time when hope of salvaging spiritual values from the crisis was not an unreasonable prospect. Monro is experimenting, but he doesn’t seem to have the confidence or artistic conviction to put down a radical marker in 1915, to break with

tradition more convincingly through irony or detachment, or by playing the ventriloquist as Eliot does in *TWL* seven years later.

Despite these contrasts between the two poems, closer analysis reveals a lingering echo, almost symbiotic, between *Monro* and Eliot as poet-friends both engaged in finding new forms of expression. Here are several phrases from *Strange Meetings* that I have selected in an attempt to invoke the ghost of Eliot:

XVIII

(...)
 Are you
 The friend that I seem to remember? Are we
 The people I think we must be?
 We have talked for an hour: it seems you are he.
 I know you, I'm sure, though your eyes are so altered.
 Oh, in what life of our lives did we meet?—
 (...)

XIX

(...)
 People who gaze at the town-hall clock,
 Waiting to hear the hour.
 Somebody walking along a path,
 Stooping to pick a flower.
 (...)
 A frightened crowd in a little room,
 Waiting all day to go.
 A tall man rubbing his eyes in the dusk,
 Muttering "Yes"; murmuring "No."

XX

(...)
 Your skin turns white or grey or blue,
 And some of your relations weep.

The cheerful clock without a pause
 Will finish your suspended day.
 (...)

XXI

Memory opens; memory closes:
 (...)

It remembers everything:
 (...)

(...)

It opens and closes, opens and closes. . . .

-Proverbs for the humble wise;
Flashes out of human eyes;
Oracles of paradise. (HIBBERD, 2003, pp. 70-72)

Admittedly, selecting particular phrases in this way is highly artificial and hardly representative of either Monro's or Eliot's work; it could be argued that the parts I am leaving out are as important as those I am including. However, I believe it is a valid means of demonstrating what I believe to be a similarity of poetic *sensibility* between the two writers. What we can notice here is not necessarily echoes of *TWL* specifically, but resonances between the *voices* of Monro and Eliot over several years of poetry writing: in these extracts we can hear *Prufrock* as much as Tiresias, or even echoes from *Four Quartets*, which of course came much later. In verse XIII of Monro's poem, we find a hint of that tentative, self-conscious, questioning voice which suffuses Eliot's poetry from *Prufrock* in 1917 to *TWL* in 1922. Compare these two examples:

(...)
Are you
The friend that I seem to remember? Are we
The people I think we must be?
We have talked for an hour: it seems you are he.
I know you, I'm sure, though your eyes are so altered.
Oh, in what life of our lives did we meet?—
(...) (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 70)

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
(...)
I do not know whether a man or a woman
- But who is that on the other side of you?
(*TWL*: Part V. *What the Thunder Said*) (NORTH, 2001, p. 17)

Both of these lyric voices are speaking to themselves from within a kind of shadowy dream-world, uncertain of the identity of the person they are addressing or alluding to. Rhetorical questions are, of course, central to the lyric, as the poet examines his feelings, motives or behaviour. Eliot's voice here is personal and unusually tender, seeking for answers in a poetic wilderness of his own imagination. Monro's voice is more recognisably lyrical in the post-Romantic sense, though he manages to produce an ironic distancing effect, arguably modern in scope, in the ambiguous phrase, "in what life of our lives did we meet?". Monro's detached tone is maintained in verse XX, when he hints at suicide ("It's not difficult to die") and then offers an image of the decaying body which is bereft of what Pound called "emotional slither": "Your skin turns white or grey or blue, / And some of your relations weep." Monro's

approach here is bloodless and impassive, recalling Eliot's neutrality of tone in *TWL* and elsewhere. In *The Fire Sermon*, we are presented with the image of "White bodies naked on the low damp ground / And bones cast in a little low dry garret", the horror of which does not strike the reader with full force because of Eliot's ability to hold his material at arm's length by parody: a few lines earlier, we find, "But at my back in a cold blast I hear / The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear." In this context, bones and bodies lose their shock effect; become part of the Modernist's palette, part of his or her unsentimental detachment, a new approach suited to modernity, to a secular society which has been forced to ingest mass-slaughter and the mendacity of political propaganda.

One of the leitmotifs of Eliot's poetry is the idea of memory. Monro attempts to characterise memory in *Strange Meetings*, but his Modernist tendency is held back by his lyrical instincts. Hence, as postmodern readers, we recoil from the childlike sentimentality of verse XXI:

Memory opens; memory closes:
Memory taught me to be a man.

It remembers everything:
It helps the little birds to sing.

It finds the honey for the bee:
It opens and closes, opens and closes. . . . (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 72)

Arguably, however, the kernel of what Monro is trying to say is contained in my filleted version. I will compare this with some of Eliot's lines.

Memory opens; memory closes:
(...)

It remembers everything:
(...)

(...)
It opens and closes, opens and closes. . . . (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 72)

Whispering lunar incantations
Dissolve the floors of memory
(...)
And through the spaces of the dark
Midnight shakes the memory
(...)
The memory throws up high and dry
A crowd of twisted things;
(*Rhapsody on a Windy Night*) (ELIOT, 1980, p. 26)

By this, and this only, we have existed
 Which is not to be found in our obituaries
 Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
 Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
 In our empty rooms
 (*What the Thunder Said, TWL V*) (NORTH, 2001, p. 19)

What we notice immediately is the sophistication of Eliot's inventiveness in attempting to depict the complexity of memory. The memory is constructed in "floors", is something "shakeable" or that may "throw up twisted things" or be "draped by a spider"; such images are not merely "modern", they are products of Eliot's poetic imagination. Monro resorts to pastoral images in his attempt to portray memory in *Strange Meetings*. However, two things are worth noting: firstly, Monro's use of the metaphor of opening and closing, which gives the image a psychological depth that contrasts with his inclusion of "birds" and "bees". Secondly, we need to ask if we can rely on Monro's sincerity here, his apparent lack of irony, his reaching for the pastoral. In the context of *Strange Meetings*, a "modern" poem full of disparate ideas and uncertainty, I would argue that this last verse should not be taken at face value but read ironically, particularly when followed by the oblique phrases which end the poem: "Proverbs for the humble wise; / Flashes out of human eyes; / Oracles of paradise." On first reading, this finale sounds remarkably positive ("humble", "proverbs", "paradise"), even though it was probably written at the beginning of the war. It also sounds as if Monro is labelling the poem at the end as a collection of "proverbs" or "oracles of paradise", an idea that seemingly would not add much to the poem's intrinsic value. However, I think there is a little more depth here as these phrases actually function as separate images. There is a grammatical discrepancy between lines one and two, as "proverbs" would "flash" out of human eyes, not "flashes". As three distinct images, therefore, these closing phrases take on a significantly modern, fractured aspect, unresolvable and disquieting. The second phrase, "Flashes out of human eyes" is notably stark and unsettling, and although we might presume Monro was thinking of "flashes of genius", it also has eerie associations with the "flash" of bombs reflected back from the terrified eyes of soldiers on the battlefield, all of which is in acute contrast to the "pastoral" of the previous stanza.

The war cannot have been far from Monro's mind during the composition of the poem, and the whole of stanza XIX can be read as an allegory of the conflict. Here are the last three images:

Dawn; and the reaper comes out of his home,
 Moving along to mow.

A frightened crowd in a little room,
Waiting all day to go.

A tall man rubbing his eyes in the dusk,
Muttering "Yes"; murmuring "No." (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 71)

Although the stresses of the metre show some disparity, there is a regularity about the line-lengths here which hint at Monro's attempt to present an apparently traditional form (four stresses followed by three in each couplet) and then fill the frame with unsettling content. "Dawn", on its own, stopped by a semi-colon, forces attention to itself, the silent early morning when battles began in WWI. "The reaper" is the symbol of the devil, about to "mow" human life. The "frightened crowd" are the soldiers in their dugouts or shelters, waiting for the call to attack. The mystery of the sequence comes at the end with the appearance of the "tall man", presumably someone specific Monro had in mind. In fact, his "muttering" indecisiveness recalls one of Eliot's shadowy *personas*, such as the tentative *Prufrock*, the inscrutable *Sweeney*, or even the world-weary *Tiresias*. These comparisons, though speculative, are important in establishing links between Eliot and Monro, as one of the English poets who formed part of his literary *milieu* during the Great War period. As Eliot himself reminds us in his essay on *Hamlet*, making comparisons, rather than interpretations, is what we are engaged in as critics of literature, as "the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret; we can only criticize it according to standards, in comparison to other works of art". (ELIOT, 1975, p. 45) This is, of course, a sharp riposte to those who continue to search for a continuity of "meaning" or a single, monolithic "message" in *TWL*.

Two years before the war, in 1912, Monro published a lyric that appears deceptively simple in terms of subject matter and with a seemingly narrow focus. *London Interior* is a meditation on an everyday London afternoon:

Autumn is in the air,
The children are playing everywhere.

One dare not open this old door too wide;
It is so dark inside.
The hall smells of dust;
A narrow squirt of sunlight enters high,
Cold, yellow.
The floor creaks, and I hear a sigh,
Rise in the gloom and die.

Through the hall, far away,
I just can see
The dingy garden with its wall and tree.
A yellow cat is sitting on the wall

Blinking toward the leaves that fall.
 And now I hear a woman call
 Some child from play.

Then all is still. Time must go
 Ticking slow, glooming slow.

The evening will turn grey.
 It is sad in London after two.
 All, all the afternoon
 What can old men, old women do?

It is sad in London when the gloom
 Thickens, like wool,
 In the corners of the room;
 The sky is shot with steel,
 Shot with blue.

The bells ring the slow time;
 The chairs creak, the hours climb;
 The sunlight lays a streak upon the floor. (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 40)

Again we find a kind of organic, evolving form rather than a traditional frame, the line-length and metrical patterns seemingly haphazard as Monro details his observations. The beginning is naïve, amateur even, not promising. However, by the close of the second stanza we have: “A narrow squirt of sunlight enters high, / Cold, yellow. / The floor creaks, and I hear a sigh, / Rise in the gloom and die.” By placing “Cold, yellow” alone on the line, Monro begins to unsettle the imagery, stopping the easy flow which the content seems to demand. What “enters high”, we are asked to imagine, is “a cold, yellow, narrow squirt of sunlight”, an image which is stripped of the “emotional slither” much derided by Pound. Monro’s lyric has a kind of static, Imagist feel to it, particularly in the second half, which I want to examine more closely. The two lines which indicate a shift of mood are “Then all is still. Time must go / Ticking slow, glooming slow.” There is a kind of *stoical* detachment from the subject matter here, as Monro exchanges sentimentality for the tone of the impassive observer which we associate more with Eliot. The next stanza begins with two independent phrases, marked off with full stops: “The evening will turn grey. / It is sad in London after two.” Although we have the word “sad” here as an emotional intruder, the form suggests a kind of deliberate reaction on Monro’s part, an unwillingness to shape the material into a more traditional verse pattern. The idea of “sad” London continues in the next verse:

It is sad in London when the gloom
 Thickens, like wool,
 In the corners of the room;
 The sky is shot with steel,

Shot with blue. (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 40)

Here we find no adjectives, apart from the repetition of “sad”, the imagery displayed coldly. We might also remember an image from *Prufrock* (1917) here, “The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes, / Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,” as Eliot, in similar fashion, maintains a distance with his lack of emotional engagement. Depicting the sky as “shot with steel, / Shot with blue” reveals a harshness of tone, the word “shot” more associated with guns.

The closing images of the last stanza maintain the static, detached mood Monro has created, reminiscent, in a sense, of a still-life painting:

The bells ring the slow time;
The chairs creak, the hours climb;
The sunlight lays a streak upon the floor. (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 40)

There is a definite world-weariness about Monro’s depiction of this London scene, an anonymous tone which represents a kind of withdrawal from, or revision of the Romantic lyric inherited from the 19th century. In the second half of the poem, the I-narrator, who appears twice only in the third stanza, has disappeared from view, the lines being delivered by a detached observer, a kind of ghostly non-presence we associate with Imagism and with *TWL*. In the last line, Monro summons the iambic pentameter which he employs earlier in the poem but not after the third stanza. Whether deliberate or not, the regular line highlights the irregularity of the previous lines. Although Monro keeps order in the poem by the use of rhyme (though without a regular pattern) I think there is evidence here, even in 1912, of an attempt to break with the past, as the poet shows the influence of Imagism and the modern trend towards a plainer, more direct style, one which breaks the stranglehold of the Romantic lyric voice which held sway for more than a century.

After the war, in the same year *TWL* was published, 1922, Monro brought out a collection entitled *Real Property*. In a sense, *Real Property* set a new standard of experimentation for English poetry, and although in retrospect we recognise in Monro’s tone the vestiges of traditional lyrics, we also notice a pathfinding individuality about the poems, both formally and in terms of subject matter. Many of the poems are quiet, personal meditations on the spaces, rooms and houses of Monro’s every day surroundings. Joy Grant recognises the poetic symbiosis between Monro and Eliot at this time, and claims that the *Real Property* collection was only upstaged, as it were, when *TWL* was published. “There was nothing in English poetry to parallel the scope of ‘Real Property’ until, in 1921, T. S. Eliot wrote a series of poems which, pruned and edited by Ezra Pound, was published as ‘The

Waste Land'. (GRANT, 1967, p. 216) Interestingly, Grant refers to *TWL* here as a "series of poems" rather than a singular, linking poem with a continuous voice (and identifiable meaning or overall sense). Nevertheless, that ghostly voice continues to haunt both private readings and public performances of Eliot's epic. One of the poems in *Real Property*, *Introspection*, first appeared in the magazine *Poetry* in March 1920.³²

Introspection

That house across the road is full of ghosts.
The windows, all inquisitive, look inward.
All are shut.
I've never seen a body in the house.
Have you? Have you?
Yet feet go sounding in the corridors,
And up and down, and up and down the stairs,
All day, all night, all day.

When will the show begin?
When will the host be in?
What is the preparation for?
When will he open the bolted door?
When will the minutes move smoothly along in their hours?
Time, answer!

(Can you see a feverish face
Pressing at the window-pane?)

The air must be hot: how hot inside.
If only somebody could go
And snap the windows open wide,
And keep them so!

All the back rooms are very large, and there
(So it is said)
They sit before their open books and stare.
Or one will rise and sadly shake his head,
Another will comb out her languid hair;
While some will move untiringly about
Through all the rooms, for ever in and out,
Or up and down the stair;

Or gaze into the desolate back-garden
And talk about the rain,

³² See HIBBERD, 2003, p. 122.

Then drift back from the window to the table,
Folding long hands, to sit and think again.

They can never meet like homely people
Round a fireside
After daily work....
Always busy with procrastination,
Backward and forward they move in the house,
Full of their questions
No one can answer.
Nothing will happen.... Nothing will happen....(HIBBERD, 2003, pp. 90-91)

Again we have an apparent haphazard construction, as if Monro is building his poem in fits and starts, more concerned about setting a scene and creating a mood than balancing metrics or establishing a rhyme scheme. In the first stanza, for example, Monro chooses two lines of iambic pentameter: the first line “That house across the road is full of ghosts”, and the penultimate line “And up and down, and up and down the stairs”. In stark contrast, the other lines in stanza one are all of varying lengths, many with little or no rhythmical pattern; Monro also dispenses with any rhyme scheme. It is as if he is deliberately breaking up the form here in order to break with tradition and make a new kind of sense, one that grows organically from the oblique and disturbing content. The shorter lines don’t allow the images any space to breathe; instead they are packed on top of each other, creating an unnerving frenzy of ideas. This stop/start configuration, along with the questioning tone, builds tension which adds to the mystique of the imagery: the house “full of ghosts” that nobody has ever seen.

The overall mood of the poem is one of frustration (for the speaker) and haunting silence as the disturbed occupants of the prison-house, walking back and forth aimlessly, cannot be seen or heard, only imagined. These “ghosts” who “sit before their open books and stare” or “move untiringly about”, sometimes “up and down the stair” appear to represent intellectuals who have become psychologically damaged by their ineffectuality and may even prefer to be locked away in the closed house. There is undoubtedly a feeling here that Monro, writing in 1920, is trying to encapsulate a post-war mood of quiet desperation and despondency among intellectuals and artists, like himself, who are still trying to find ways of being creative and meaningful after the human catastrophe. Something of this deep intellectual self-doubt, this self-conscious questioning, is present in parts of *TWL*. Compare these two extracts from Eliot’s poem:

"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"
(...)
"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"
I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
"With my hair down, so. What shall we do to-morrow?"
"What shall we ever do?"

(*A Game of Chess*) (NORTH, 2001, p. 9)

- Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
(*Burial of the Dead*) (NORTH, 2001, p. 6)

Monro's "ghosts" go backward and forward silently in the house, "full of questions" that "no one can answer", as the poet concludes that "nothing will happen". Eliot's inquisitive, frustrated voice in my first extract from *Game of Chess* also confronts a kind of "ghost", a character who may be "alive or dead" with "nothing in his head". The blankness continues with the question "What shall we *ever* do?", a rhetorical question that communicates a feeling of desperation in keeping with Monro's "nothing will ever happen". Eliot's doubting, rhetorical voice is one of self-questioning and self-examination, one that goes unheard as it is addressing only imaginary characters; both poets characterise a kind of hopeless solipsism. This unresolved chasm between the speaking voice and the mute and incomprehensible figures who appear in *Introspection* is also mirrored in the lines I have chosen from *Burial of the Dead*, where Eliot's speaker says "I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, / Looking into the heart of light, the silence." Here we have another "ghost" who was "neither living nor dead", one whose blankness is enhanced by his vision of "silence" stemming from "the heart of light". If we speculate that "the heart of light" could be a kind of darkness (rather than bright and white, which would signify a kind of enlightenment), a blank space of incomprehension, then we can see here how both Monro and Eliot are concerned with the impossibility of communication, both of hearing and of being heard: both poets are speaking in the dark, with only muteness and silence as their response.

Monro asks when the "bolted door" will be opened, when the silenced ghosts will be released from their prison-house. Eliot introduces the final section of *TWL, What the Thunder Said*, with an image of "the frosty silence of the gardens", and then reveals that "He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying", suggesting both desolation and isolation. This bleak vision of silence, of being trapped, reappears near the end of the poem: "I have heard the key / Turn in the door once and turn once only / We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison". We are drawn towards the conclusion here that Eliot's and Monro's imagery of muteness, incomprehensibility and ghostly silence serves as a poetic rendition of historical circumstances. Both of these poems were written not long after the war, when death was still an everyday reality and artistic or

intellectual endeavour might easily have seemed futile, or at least had to be qualified and shaped to reflect the aftermath of human slaughter. Monro's ghostly prison-house where "no one can answer" and "nothing will happen" can be read as an allegory of this ineffectuality of the intellectual after the war. In parts of *TWL*, as we have seen, Eliot also alludes to this feeling of hopelessness, in parts even hinting at a kind of paranoia. In another section of *A Game of Chess*, Eliot sets up a dialogue between two voices, one of which shows his anger at the lack of response to his questioning, a frustration that Monro's speaker also demonstrates in *Introspection*. Eliot writes:

"What is that noise?"
 The wind under the door.
 "What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
 Nothing again nothing.
 "Do
 "You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
 "Nothing?" (NORTH, 2001, p. 9)

The speech marks here make one half of the dialogue sound "loud", as if the speaker is shouting, voicing his irritation at the lack of a satisfactory response and leading him finally to deride his addressee as one who "knows", "sees" and "remembers" nothing, the final "Nothing" gaining much greater emphasis by being placed on a line by itself. In the first two stanzas of *Introspection*, Monro's speaker is also barking questions, though he receives no response at all. Monro's lyric stays "quiet", as the poet muses upon the mystery of the house, only losing his temper at the end of stanza two, perhaps, when he shouts "Time, answer!". *Introspection* clearly lacks the *drama* of *TWL*, partly because Monro is still tied to a more traditional lyric voice and does not have the audacity, it seems, to wrench free from tradition and go boldly into a new, dramatic territory peopled by Eliot's disparate voices.

Arguably one of the most revealing lines in Monro's poem is the question "When will the minutes move smoothly along in their hours?". The line is rhythmically regular, with a basic pentameter construction, though starting with a trochee to emphasise the "When" question. However, it is not the formal aspects of the line which distinguish Monro's voice from Eliot's, but the tone. Monro's question has a *politeness* that anchors it in the Georgian pastoral, rather than the Imagist concrete. It is a question that, if given a tinge of irony, might not look out of place in *Prufrock*; after *TWL*, however, it sounds almost banal. The complexity of the idea – minutes moving "smoothly" – is lost in the polite delivery, aided by the regular rhythm. Taken as a single poem, *TWL*'s performative boldness, its dramatic mixing of registers and array of characters produces a stark effect that makes Monro's

attempts at experimentation look slight in comparison. Nevertheless, I would argue there are two short passages from *Introspection* that have more than a suggestion of Eliot's tone about them. The first we find in the last three lines of stanza one:

Yet feet go sounding in the corridors,
And up and down, and up and down the stairs,
All day, all night, all day. (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 90)

The punctuation and the repetition here mimic the action of the "ghosts" in the house, as they endlessly perform their mindless movements, stopping and starting, then repeating. Monro's tone here, however, is that of the detached observer rather than the sincere lyrical poet. This distance reminds us of Eliot's elusiveness in *TWL*, the ventriloquist voice of the poet never allowing for positive identification. Similarly, the "ghosts" of Monro's house have been stripped of their identity here, reduced metonymically to bodiless "feet", an image which sounds distinctively modern. In *Burial of the Dead*, after "Madame Sosostriis" has been announced and the "wicked pack of cards" is being considered, suddenly we come upon ghosts, "I had not thought death had undone so many. / Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, / And each man fixed his eyes before his feet." These unidentified creatures seem both alive and dead, parading before the speaker only to vanish in the next line, an eerie presence that has echoes of Monro's house ghosts.

The second passage for comparison is the whole of the penultimate stanza, when Monro continues listing the enigmatic behaviour of the house occupants:

Or gaze into the desolate back-garden
And talk about the rain,
Then drift back from the window to the table,
Folding long hands, to sit and think again. (HIBBERD, 2003, p. 90)

Again we are reminded of *Prufrock* here, the stasis and indecision, when the next mindless activity might be the taking of "tea and cakes". However, I believe Monro has established an ironic tone here for his "ghosts", who "gaze" and "talk" and "sit and think" like automatons; Monro is keeping his distance, beginning to parody the ineffectuality of his house occupants, who "sit before their open books and stare". It is the sense of this detachment in Monro, the beginning of a *disengagement* with the lyric, which allows us to make creditable comparisons with Eliot. When Eliot announces suddenly in *Burial of the Dead*, "I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring", we presume they are ghosts, another version of those we have already met, each "man" with his eyes "fixed before his feet". This familiarity, coupled with Eliot's ironic distancing effect, numbs the shock. *TWL* is, essentially, a disturbing poem, not because of its harrowing images of death and desolation, but because its voices insist on

parody. By 1920, with the enigmatic “ghosts” of *Introspection*, Monro was beginning to disengage his voice, reflecting the mood of self-doubt which afflicted all intellectual and artistic temperaments after the war. Despite the development of this ironic distance, however, Monro’s sentimental attachment to the lyric, his poetic sincerity, prevented a complete transformation to the kind of modernism achieved by Eliot and Pound.

Monro’s reputation has suffered less than Gibson’s, partly because of his work as an editor, publisher and owner of a London bookshop that for more than a decade served as the axis of new movements in poetry in England before and after the war. Through the tireless efforts of Dominic Hibberd in particular, who published a new biography of Monro in 2001 and a collection of his poetry in 2003, Monro’s work has not been totally forgotten. Nevertheless, his legacy as a poet in his own right, one who was willing to experiment with new forms and disparate voices, has not stood the test of time, either critically or in terms of public acclaim. Monro was perhaps not a great poet in the sense that Eliot was; he lacked Eliot’s intellectual scope and erudition, his mastery of form and poetic imagination. However, I believe there is much that we can learn from studying the work of Eliot’s English contemporaries, as poetry is nothing if not the cross-fertilisation of ideas and Monro was positioned, like Pound, at the very heart of the modern movement in England during the Great War period.

2.5 Forgotten voices: Herbert Read

True poetry was never speech, but always song. Modern poetry, in so far as it aspires to establish the integral form of a poem, is a refinement of song – a containment of our symbols of discourse in a singular melody.

Herbert Read (READ, 1966, p. 273)

Herbert Read is another poet who is virtually unread today, though he was a friend of both Eliot and Pound and his work has significant resonances of Imagism and the style of Modernism we have come to recognise as Eliot's. One reason Read's poetry has been forgotten is that after the war his work as an art critic, educationalist, academic and champion of Modernism overshadowed his poetic output, placing him at the centre of progressive English culture as a spokesman for the avant-garde.³³ Another reason is that, as a war poet, his verses strayed too far into Modernist territory for the compilers of Great War poetry anthologies, who, as we have seen, were on the lookout for patriotic or Romantic lyrics that were easily digestible by a reading public clamouring for emotional representations of the conflict. Read's formal experiments, however, offer a further example of the kind of poetry Eliot was exposed to in wartime England; part of a poetic milieu that has a role in the formulation of *TWL*.

Although Read is notable as the most recognisably Modernist poet of the three I have chosen to examine, a self-confessed anarchist who went on to become an establishment figure, earning a knighthood in 1953, he had humble, rural beginnings, brought up on a farm in Yorkshire. Like Eliot, Read worked in a bank, though only for a brief period before becoming a student at Leeds University. When war broke out he interrupted his studies to join the army, and in 1915 was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Yorkshire regiment 'the Green Howards'.³⁴ In the same year Read's first volume of poetry, with the ominous title *Songs of Chaos*, was published by Elkin Matthews. According to Read's biographer, David Goodway, Read approached Matthews at Pound's suggestion because he was also Pound's publisher at the time. (GOODWAY, 1998, p. 14) Although Read had met Pound and was clearly enthused by and sympathetic to Imagist practices, his poetry was always personal, with thematic elements that evoke his rural childhood. And though he also became close

³³ See Mark Rawlinson's essay in *The Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War*, edited by Santanu Das, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2013, p. 92.

³⁴ See David Goodway (Ed.), *Herbert Read Reassessed*, Liverpool University Press, 1998, p. 14

friends with Eliot, Read's version of Modernism diverges distinctly from Eliot's erudite, cosmopolitan and stylistically complex versifying. Read was certainly an early experimenter in form, as we shall see from the first poems he published during the war. However, there are two other important considerations to make about Read which are relevant here: firstly, his views about the relationship between art, literature and aesthetics, critical opinions which help us to understand his poetry; secondly, his changing critical stance towards Imagism, which mutated as the relentless horrors of war took their toll.

As Read is remembered today as a spokesman for the avant-garde art and literature of his time, and as a champion of English and European Modernism, it is interesting to examine his vision of the aesthetic encounter. Referring to Read's critical writings of the post-war 1920s, following the publication of *TWL*, David Thistlewood writes:

At this time in his life [the 1920s], like his poet friend T.S. Eliot, and the classicist T.E. Hulme, whose collected works he had edited (Hulme, 1924), Read considered the goals of aesthetic contemplation to be formal precision, harmony and elegant proportion, principles which, he firmly believed, when evident in literature, art and conduct, offered the world the prospect of an international medium of understanding. (THISTLEWOOD, 1994, p. 3)

As a poet and critic clearly serious about the value of art and of "aesthetic contemplation", it is useful to study Read's work as a self-conscious attempt to create poetry which displays "formal precision", "harmony" and "proportion", precepts which have echoes of both Pound's Imagism and Eliot's Modernism: principles which include the avoidance of lyrics which are formally derivative, over-elaborate and intimately personal; and paying heed to the formal mechanics of poetry whilst forging new forms of expression, forms which may be stark or oblique. For Read and other early Modernists, poetry was not a hobby or an outpouring of sentiment: it was a form of art that could *change* perception through its adherence to carefully controlled linguistic and rhythmic patterns. Read's Modernism was driven by a belief that experimentation in art was a necessary part of its mission to enhance the human experience. "His concept of the avant-garde was...not élitist: it simply referred to the extraordinary insight required to give shape to some value or truth newly perceived or perceived anew." (THISTLEWOOD, 1994, p. 4) The fact that Read accepted the label of "anarchist" for most of his life is indicative not of any radical political views that he may have held, but of conventional views about art and aesthetics which permeated English society. Read's mission, as an advocate of pioneering movements in art and literature, was

to raise the consciousness of ordinary people by means of education through art; and his amused realization that this was considered subversive (while encouragement of really

subversive avant-garde art was not) reinforced his inclination to call himself an anarchist. (THISTLEWOOD, 1994, p. 4)

This highlights the pervasive absence in English culture, between the wars and beyond, of any serious consideration of the primary role of aesthetic contemplation: art, literature and music were essentially decorative; even the prolific poetry produced during the Great War was not viewed *artistically*, but as emotional propaganda; as, for instance, a patriotic call to arms or a realistic depiction of life in the trenches.

Read and Eliot first met during the war, when Read was home on leave from active service on the Western Front. According to Read's memoir about Eliot,³⁵ the pair had dinner together at a restaurant in London's Soho in July 1917, on the invitation of Frank Rutter, the self-appointed joint editor (Read being the other) of a new magazine called *Art and Letters*. Following the meeting, there is evidence of a growing mutual respect between the two poets, who, with their shared friendship of Ezra Pound and their sympathies with his Imagist project, shared some common ground in their approach to poetic composition. According to Matthew Bevis, "T. S. Eliot once praised Herbert Read's war poetry as 'neither Romance nor Reporting...it has emotion as well as a version of thing's seen'". (HIBBERD, 1981, p. 52) Eliot's categorisation of most, standard war poetry as either "Romance" or "Reporting" neatly characterises the way the multitude of verses written during the conflict have been divided in the public imagination into either the sentimental and patriotic ("Romantic"), or the shocking and realistic ("Reporting"), both terms depriving poetry of those essential aesthetic qualities which Pound wanted to reinstate with Imagism. Hibberd also unearths another comment made by Eliot concerning Read's work, in a review he wrote following the publication of *Naked Warriors*, a book of Read's war poems: "Eliot reviewed Read's book in the *Egoist* of July 1919 as 'the best war poetry I can remember having seen'" (HIBBERD & ONIONS, 1986, p. 33-34) For Eliot, Read's Imagist sympathies and experiments with form made his war poetry stand out in a marketplace crowded with the imitative and predictable. However, in the eyes of the editors of poetry anthologies, Read's work was neither digestible nor relevant enough for the general reading public, and very little of his war poetry was anthologised.

Despite Read's distinguished army career (he was awarded both the Military Cross and the Distinguished Service Order) he also found time to edit the new journal *Art and*

³⁵ See Herbert Read: *T. S. E. - A Memoir*, p. 1, from the JSTOR website, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27541383?seq=1#fdtn-page_scan_tab_contents, accessed on 19/05/16

Letters. In 1918 he wrote a piece in the magazine outlining his poetic principles, the substance of which serves as a response to Pound's directives in his Imagist manifesto:

The poem is an artistic whole demanding strict unity...Form is determined by the emotion which requires expression...not an unchanging mould into which any emotion can be poured. The criterion of the poem is the quality of the vision expressed...Rhyme, metre, cadence, alliteration are various decorative devices to be used as the vision demands, and are not formal qualities pre-ordained. (SILKIN, 1998, p. 169)

Like Pound, Read is keen to break with a tradition which is slavish to metrical patterns: form in a poem is something which develops organically, driven by the intensity of the emotion being communicated. Nevertheless, form is the guiding principle of the poem in that it cannot be dispensed with, or allowed to go slack, for the sake of communicating an emotion, or what Read calls a "vision". Form may free itself from tradition in order to capture new modes of expression, but the form the poem takes will *shape* its effect in the reader's imagination, and that form must comply with the "strict unity" of the "artistic whole". Pound and Read both understood how form produces aesthetic effects by *presenting* the meaning of the poem *beyond* the words themselves; rhythm, in particular, is crucial as uneven line lengths break up the flow and give Imagist poems and some of Read's work a halting, dramatic quality.

Read began the war as a self-confessed Imagist; only later, as we shall see, did he feel the need to diverge from the Imagist pathway. Looking back on his wartime experiences as an enthusiastic trench poet, he writes:

The war came, but that did not make any essential difference to our poetry. I myself wrote imagist poems in the trenches, and did not see or feel any inconsistency in the act. War was one thing, and poetry was another; and if the war was to be expressed in poetry, the imagist technique was as adequate as any other. (SILKIN, 1998, p. 171)

The very first entry in Read's *Collected Poems* is a poem written during the war (probably in 1914)³⁶ and one which immediately gives us a sense of Read's unique voice.

1. MEDITATION OF A LOVER AT DAYBREAK

I can just see the distant trees
and I wonder whether they will
or will not
bow their tall plumes at your passing
in the carriage of the morning wind:

Or whether they will merely
tremble against the cold dawnlight,
shaking a yellow leaf
to the dew-wet earth. (READ, 1966, p. 15)

³⁶ *Meditation of a Lover at Daybreak* is the first poem from the collection *Eclogues*, which begins the *Collected Poems* and has been marked by Read as written between 1914 and 1918.

There is nothing here of Victorian sententiousness or of the traditional, pre-modern lyric; instead we have a delicate pattern of images and a mood reminiscent of French Symbolism. Although the poem begins immediately with an “I” narrator which anchors the verses to a speaking, lyric voice, the short third line “or will not”, coming suddenly and starkly, breaks the spell and from that moment on the “I” disappears and the images are allowed to take precedence. The next two lines, “bow their tall plumes at your passing / in the carriage of the morning wind:” sees a significant falling away of sense and the introduction of a more ethereal, abstract dimension. Again we have the personification and anthropomorphism that we saw in several Imagist poems: here Read makes the “distant trees” active agents reacting to the passing of his lover. The line “in the carriage of the morning wind” establishes the need for the reader to make an imaginative leap to visualise the sense, and at the same time shows how Read, in one of his very first published poems, wants to break new ground in terms of “aesthetic contemplation”. There is a distinct lack of punctuation and capital letters which also add to the poem’s modern feel, along with unusual compound words and phrases such as “dawnlight” and “dew-wet”. Rhythmically, the poem dispenses with any standard metrical pattern: there is distinct absence of iambic lines; most lines are trochaic, beginning with a stressed syllable. These accented line beginnings give the poem an urgency which contrasts with the ethereal images to create a strangeness of mood, a dark melancholy heightened by trees which are “distant”, which “tremble” and “shake” in the “morning wind” and the “cold dawnlight”.

One of the defining features of Read’s early published poetry is the manner in which he places a number of short poems in sequence, dividing them, like Eliot was to do in *TWL*, with Roman numerals. *Eclogues*, for example (1914-1918), is a sequence of 20 numbered poems (I - XX.). What is remarkable about this unifying principle is that the poems do not follow each other in sequence, anchored by an overarching narrative, though there are thematic links: in *Eclogues*, the poems begin with impressionistic and imagistic representations of the natural world, then diversify into personal impressions of childhood, and continue with a number of poems which refer to the war. However, there are a number of poems which resist these categories, defying any attempt to identify a unifying principle. This is the first hint of a connection between Read’s early published work and *TWL*; Eliot’s long poem, despite appearing as a montage of mutually exclusive sections, is *suggestive* of a singular theme, though it denies, categorically, any attempt to reduce the whole to a unifying statement. Read’s first published poems, in their obtuseness and impressionistic imagery,

demonstrate the influence of modern approaches to art and aesthetics; of late 19th and early 20th century movements such as Symbolism, which clearly influenced Pound's Imagist movement, and Surrealism and Cubism which fracture the fallacy of realistic or naturalistic representation. Read's choice of title, *Eclogues*, also reveals a Modernist tendency: by associating the poems with classical poetry – the *Eclogue* being originally a short pastoral or 'bucolic' lyric, associated first with Theocritus and then made famous by Virgil – Read is able to present his modern voice ironically, filling the classical form with stark and, at times, disturbing imagery. Eliot, as we know, was a self-confessed "classicist"³⁷ the evidence for which we only need note the proliferation of classical references and quotations which appear in *TWL* (Eliot's famous essay, *What is a Classic?*, was a published version of his Presidential Address to the Virgil Society in London in 1944).

I want to examine three more of the *Eclogues* which appear in sequence, numbers XII, XIII and XIV, in order to make a more detailed comparison of Read's early work and *TWL*.

XII. ON THE HEATH

White humours veining Earth,
the lymphic winds of Spring
veil an early morning
when on the hill
men in cool sleeves dig the soil,
turning the loam or acrid manure
with forks that clink on stones.

Silently horses speed on the sandy track.

Lithe in white sweaters
two runners lean against a fountain.

XIII. GARDEN PARTY

I have assumed a conscious sociability,
pressed unresponding hands,
sipped tea,
and chattered aimlessly
all afternoon,

Achieving spontaneity
only
when my eyes lit at the sight
of a scarlet spider
running over the bright
green mould of an apple-tree.

³⁷ In the Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* in 1928, Eliot wrote: "The general point of view [of these essays] may be described as a classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion". See KERMODE, 1975, pages 18-19 and page 26.

XIV. CONCERT PARTY

That white hand poised
 above the ivory keys
 will soon descend to
 shatter
 the equable surface of my reverie.

To what abortion
 will the silence give birth ?

Noon of moist heat and the moan
 of raping bees,
 and light like a sluice of molten gold
 on the satiate petitioning leaves.

In yellow fields
 mute agony of reapers.

Does the metallic horizon
 give release?

Yes: higher,
 against the wider void the immaculate
 angels of lust
 Lean
 on the swanbreasts of heaven. (READ, 1966, pp. 20-21)

It is important to establish the historical facts before making any legitimate comparisons of the *TWL* and these early poems by Read. Eliot and Read became friends following their first meeting in July 1917; *Eclogues* was first published two years later in 1919 (though Read may, of course, have shown Eliot his poems in manuscript form); and *TWL* was first published in 1922. These dates reveal that during a five-year friendship prior to *TWL*'s publication, Read and Eliot would have had numerous opportunities to discuss poetic form and share their views, and possibly their unpublished work. We can therefore assume that a degree of cross-fertilisation between the two poets took place during this period, though we have no way of knowing who influenced whom, and to what degree.

On first reading these three *Eclogues*, written during the period Read was fighting in the Great War, we are aware of a modern voice, a *detached* voice that switches tone and register, as Eliot was to do so successfully in *TWL*; a voice that is heard through the juxtaposition of images that are impressionistic, erratic and sometimes difficult to digest. By placing these three poems together, as I have chosen to do, we get a similar sense of bewilderment that occurs when reading *TWL*, as Eliot's poem constantly defies the reader's expectations by shifting tone, form and mood. The formal evidence of a Modernistic bent that we notice immediately with these *Eclogues* is the absence of punctuation, the irregular line length with several instances of single words on the line, the fractured rhythms and lack of

any obvious rhyme patterns. The imagery is not only sporadic: it appears oblique and lacking in emotion, the scattered impressions of a disinterested observer that we also sense in parts of *TWL*. In the first poem, *On the Heath*, we may even get a sense of the opening of *TWL*: the dryness of Read's rendition of industrialised nature, its "soil" full of "stones" and "acid manure" remind us of Eliot's "dead land", "dull roots" and "dried tubers". Read's claim, mentioned earlier, that during the war he continued to write Imagist poetry, is also clearly in evidence. In *On the Heath*, we have at least four juxtaposed images which are not easily resolved sequentially: the "white humours" and "lymphic winds"; the "men in cool sleeves"; the "silent horses"; and the "lithe runners". The effect of this disparity of imagery is intensified by Read's decision to split the poem, physically, into three stanzas of seven, one and two lines respectively, an arrangement that, when contrasted with most Great War poetry, appears both daring and heretical. The images are static, frozen in time, a stillness which is heightened by the detached tone of the observer; the horses move "silently" as in a painting; the only sound we hear is the "clink" of stones. Like Eliot, Read achieves an "impersonal" detachment here which starkly challenges Romantic notions of transferring "feelings" through the lyric. In a sense, the dryness and stillness of the imagery represent a kind of *blockage* in the expected flow of emotion between poet and reader, an "impersonality" that also issues from *TWL* due to Eliot's shifting perspectives and shadow-play with voices.

Following the obliqueness of *On the Heath*, the apparent lightness of tone and mood in *Garden Party* brings the sense of Eliot more firmly into this three-poem montage by suggesting what T. E. Hulme called the "diffident" voice, the "tentative and half-shy" poetry Hulme advocated as the Imagist objective³⁸, and which we recognise more from *Prufrock*, perhaps, than from *TWL*: from the self-conscious Eliot persona of lines such as "And would it have been worth it, after all, / After the cups, the marmalade, the tea... Would it have been worth while, / To have bitten off the matter with a smile" and "Do I dare to eat a peach?". Read's drawing-room voice in *Garden Party*, in the lines "I have assumed a conscious sociability, / pressed unresponding hands, / sipped tea, / and chattered aimlessly", is urbane and civilised like Eliot's, but more importantly it is the ironic voice of detachment, of a *persona*, a mask. The Read persona here admits he is "conscious" of a sociability he merely "assumes" for the role he is expected to play at the party. This deliberate use of an ironic persona goes against the grain of Romantic notions of emotional *engagement*: the Modernist voice is detached, sceptical, tentative, self-conscious; the masquerade suggests language as a

³⁸ See McGUINNESS, Patrick (Ed.). *T. E. Hulme: Selected Writings*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. xii

currency has lost its intrinsic value – seized, we might say, by the propagandists of mass conflict. The poet’s response is to celebrate the aesthetic qualities of words themselves, to assert their rhythmic, musical and textural properties, and, by doing so, to make an attempt at a new cultural identity for poetry.

The levity of *Garden Party* is sustained by the use of a covert rhyme scheme which begins with the first line, with the “ee” sound of *sociability*, which is repeated in *tea* (line 3), *aimlessly* (line 4), *spontaneity* (line 6), and the last line, *apple-tree* (line 12), linking the two stanzas. In the second stanza, we also find *sight* rhymed with *bright*. The effect of this subtle, unorthodox rhyming pattern is to underscore the musicality of the verse, a lightness of tone which matches the sense of “aimlessly” fulfilling the social duty of an afternoon party. The introduction of a “scarlet spider” running over “bright green mould” is, for the poet, the only moment of “spontaneity”. This image performs various functions in the poem: it is suggestive of nursery rhymes which feature spiders to fascinate and frighten children; it highlights the inanity of polite conversation when compared with the natural world; and it shifts the emphasis of the poem away from the personality of the I-narrator and towards an aesthetic image intensified by bright colours. The overall effect of the spider’s appearance is one of *suggestion*, a sudden shift towards the symbolic, a contrast of images between tea-sipping and spider-running which defeats the reader’s expectation and remains unresolved.

The third poem in this sequence, *Concert Party*, is both disturbing and enigmatic, sharply contrasting with *XII* and *XIII*. The poem consists of six short stanzas which, because of their confusing disparity, could be looked upon as a kind of miniaturised version of *TWL*. The speaker of the first lines is detached, an observer, watching the anthropomorphic “white hand” (rather than the pianist) about to “shatter” his “reverie”. The image of the first stanza immediately confuses the reader following the title *Concert Party*, the music of which we would expect to be pleasant. The next two-line stanza, an unresolved question, intensifies the dark mood: “To what abortion / will the silence give birth?”. The image is disturbing, the use of the word “abortion” shocking; the impact heightened by the levity of the previous poem, *Garden Party*, when the lyric voice “sipped tea”. The next stanza does not answer the rhetorical question but shifts into what we presume to be the poet’s “reverie”, the change of key emphasized by the use of italics. The stanza could stand alone as an Imagist poem:

Noon of moist heat and the moan
of raping bees,
and light like a sluice of molten gold
on the satiate petitioning leaves. (READ, 1966, p. 21)

The images of “moist heat”, of light like “molten gold” and of “petitioning leaves”, though appealing, are starkly compromised by the “raping bees”, the shock compounded by the previous “abortion”. Acts of rape and abortion, which seem out of place in lyric poetry, do appear in *TWL*, though in Eliot’s poem the presentation is more subtle and the words themselves are not used. For instance, in *A Game of Chess* we find “The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / So rudely forced” (lines 99-100), and later, in the pub scene, “Lil” defends her “antique” appearance by claiming “It’s them pills I took, to bring it off, she said” (line 159); in *The Fire Sermon*, referring to the “house agent’s clerk”, Eliot recounts how “Flushed and decided, he assaults at once” (line 239). Clearly, Eliot’s treatments of these taboo subjects in *TWL* are very different from Read’s poem and the similarity is likely to be coincidental, though it is notable how Eliot, by his detached and ironic tone, is able to achieve a level of disinterestedness in his portrayal of rape and abortion. When we reach the question in the penultimate stanza, “Does the metallic horizon / give release?” we realise that perhaps *Concert Party* is a “reverie” about war, an impressionistic and metaphorical rendition of Read’s experiences in the trenches, with “metallic horizon” suggesting tanks or bullets (the next two poems in *Eclogues*, *Champ de Manoeuvres* and *Movement of Troops* are more clearly concerned with the war). The answer to the question in the final stanza, however, hardly supports this idea. Instead we find “immaculate angels of lust” who “Lean / on the swanbreasts of heaven”, images which do not build upon the “metallic horizon” to represent an experience of war.

Taken together, Read’s images in *Concert Party* are highly inventive and enigmatic: “what abortion”, “raping bees”, “petitioning leaves”, “metallic horizon”, “immaculate angels of lust”, and “swanbreasts of heaven”. The contrast between these images and the forms of war poetry being written by Read’s contemporaries is startling, and it is hardly surprising that Eliot was impressed by Read’s work. *Concert Party* is a powerful and bewildering poem whose effect is greatly enhanced by the arrangement of the stanzas on the page, the unequal line lengths, the italics, the shifts in tone and the general breaking up of the poem into disparate groups of words and incongruent images. This complexity makes the aesthetic encounter with the poem difficult to define. As readers, we are unable to *penetrate* the poem to retrieve any paraphrasable “message” or single memorable image; we are forced to skate over the surface where the images flicker surrealistically, as in a dream. The *beauty* of *Concert Party*, its aesthetic significance, does not rely on interpretation or translation: it is a consequence of the *aesthetic encounter* with the language on the page, with the solidity of the

images, the arrangement of the stanzas, the rhythmic diversity, and, overall, with an imaginative leap into the conceptual dark.

Although Eliot was never an Imagist and *TWL* shows little evidence of the Imagist style, certain sections of *Eclogues*, with their titles preceded by Roman numerals, appear like an expanded and extended Imagist poem which sometimes strays into the poetic territory we associate with Eliot. As Pericles Lewis reminds us, it was not only Pound's editing skills which produced the version of *TWL* which we all know, it was his pioneering work before and during the war which paved the way for Eliot's experiments with form: "*The Waste Land* could not have been written without the assault on the English poetic tradition undertaken by Ezra Pound and the imagists." (LEWIS, 2007, p. 139) As Read clearly identified himself with the Imagist movement and had known Pound since 1915, seven years before *TWL* was published, and because Eliot was openly complimentary about Read's work, we can assume that Eliot's reading of Read's poetry left an impression on him and, as a self-confessed accumulator of poetic styles, Eliot digested and reproduced a little of the Read style in his own work.

Despite Read's readiness to align himself with the Imagists, as the war dragged on he found himself questioning the suitability of the Imagist style for depicting his own personal, poetic responses to the conflict. Jon Silkin, in his book about Great War poetry, argues that by the end of the war Read had begun to search for a less prescriptive poetic style. "Read's growing awareness, immediately subsequent to the war, that the imagist technique, whatever it maintained about 'absolute freedom in the choice of subject' was nevertheless inadequate to cope with a re-creation of war's experiences." (SILKIN, 1998, p. 171). In characterising his own poetic style during the war years, Read describes his attempt to produce an aesthetic response which reached above the everyday horror of watching mass slaughter. Identifying himself with other Imagist sympathisers, Read writes:

We were trying to maintain an abstract aesthetic ideal in the midst of terrible and inhuman events...But as the war went on, year after year, some compromise between dream and reality became necessary. The only worthy compromise, I even then dimly realised, was a synthesis – some higher reality in which the freedom of the mind and the necessity of experience became reconciled. (SILKIN, 1998, pp. 169-170)

It is an impressive achievement on Read's part that despite the ghastliness of his everyday life in battle, he maintained some aesthetic principles, attempting a "freedom of the mind" that could represent "some higher reality" than the death and destruction in front of his eyes. In this sense I believe Read is unique and it explains how he could be both promoted by Pound and praised by Eliot, neither of whom were impressed by the mass of war poetry that had

been anthologised by the time the fighting ended. It also offers an insight into what Read was attempting in difficult poems like *Concert Party*, which we can understand better as, what he calls, a “compromise between dream and reality”.

The war poetry produced by Read which had impressed Eliot so much was that contained in *Naked Warriors*, published in 1919, the year after the war had ended. The collection is made up one long, narrative poem and a set of poems entitled *The Scene of War* and it is this sequence that I want to present as further evidence of a link between Read’s work and *TWL*. *The Scene of War* contains eight poems of varying lengths, again preceded by Roman numerals, but also including three quotations which precede three of the poems, one by H.D., Pound’s Imagist protégé, another by French poet Jules Romain, and a third by Rimbaud, admired by both Pound and Eliot. Dominic Hibberd and John Onions, in their anthology of Great War poetry, explain in the introduction why they have decided to leave out several seminal poems about the war, including *TWL*, before making a crucial comment about the influence of Read’s *The Scene of War*.

We have not included three long poems rooted in the war, David Jones’s *In Parenthesis* (1937), Herbert Read’s *The End of a War* (1933) and, less often mentioned in this context, T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922); but we have included Read’s ‘*The Scene of War*’ in its original form, in which the numbered sections, Modernist style, literary allusions and images of fragmentation clearly prefigure Eliot’s poem. (HIBBERD & ONIONS, 1986, p. 7)

Hibberd and Onions clearly make no bones about directly relating Read’s *The Scene of War* to *The Waste Land*, published three years later. However, it is important to examine whether the comparisons they make about “numbered sections” and “literary allusions” also stretch to valid comparisons of content: by suggesting that the two poems both feature “images of fragmentation” we need to ascertain to what extent the two sequences of poems can be linked thematically and, equally importantly, how they differ.

Scene of War is a sequence of eight poems, with the last two, VII and VIII considerable longer than the others. However, I want to look in particular at the first five poems and the opening stanzas of VII and VIII to gauge the level of similarity between Read’s particular arrangement of his work and Eliot’s masterpiece.

The Scene of War

And perhaps some outer horror,
some hideousness to stamp beauty
a mark
on our hearts.

H. D.

I. VILLAGES DÉMOLIS

The villages are strewn
in red and yellow heaps of rubble:

Here and there
interior walls
lie upturned and interrogate the skies amazedly.

Walls that once held
within their cubic confines
a soul that now lies strewn
in red and yellow
heaps of rubble.

II. THE CRUCIFIX

His body is smashed
through the belly and chest
the head hangs lopsided
from one nail'd hand.

Emblem of agony
we have smashed you!

III. FEAR

Fear is a wave
beating through the air
and on taut nerves impinging
till there it wins
vibrating chords.

All goes well
so long as you tune the instrument
to simulate composure.

(So you will become
a gallant gentleman.)

But when the strings are broken
then you will grovel on the earth
and your rabbit eyes
will fill with the fragments of your shatter'd soul.

IV. THE HAPPY WARRIOR

His wild heart beats with painful sobs,
his strain'd hands clench an ice-cold rifle,
his aching jaws grip a hot parch'd tongue,
his wide eyes search unconsciously.

He cannot shriek.

Bloody saliva
dribbles down his shapeless jacket.

I saw him stab

and stab again
a well-killed Boche.

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

V. LIEDHOLZ

When I captured Liedholz
I had a blacken'd face
like a nigger's
and my teeth like white mosaics shone.

We met in the night at half-past one
between the lines.
Liedholz shot at me
and I at him;
in the ensuing tumult he surrendered to me.

Before we reached our wire
he told me he had a wife and three children.
In the dug-out we gave him a whiskey.
Going to the Brigade with my prisoner at dawn
the early sun made the land delightful
and larks rose singing from the plain.

In broken French we discussed
Beethoven, Nietzsche and the International.

He was a professor
Living at Spandau
and not too intelligible.

But my black face and nigger's teeth
Amused him.

VII. MY COMPANY

Foule! Ton âme entière est debout
Dans mon corps.

JULES ROMAINS

1

You became
in many acts and quiet observances
a body and soul, entire.

I cannot tell
what time your life became mine:
perhaps when one summer night
we halted on the roadside
in the starlight only,
and you sang your sad home-songs
dirges which I standing outside you
coldly condemned.

Perhaps, one night, descending cold,
when rum was mighty acceptable,
and my doling gave birth to sensual gratitude.

And then our fights: we've fought together
compact, unanimous
and I have felt the pride of leadership.

In many acts and quiet observances
you absorbed me:
Until one day I stood eminent
and I saw you gathered round me,
uplooking
and about you a radiance that seemed to beat
with variant glow and to give
grace to our unity.

[12 more stanzas follow]

VII. THE EXECUTION OF CORNELIUS VANE

Le combat spirituel est aussi brutal que la bataille
d'hommes; mais la vision de la justice est le plaisir
de Dieu seul.

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

Arraign'd before his worldly gods
He would have said:
'I, Cornelius Vane,
A fly in the sticky web of life,
Shot away my right index finger.

I was alone, on sentry, in the chill twilight after dawn,
And the act cost me a bloody sweat.
Otherwise the cost was trivial — they had no evidence,
And I lied to the wooden fools who tried me.
When I returned from hospital
They made me a company cook:
I peel potatoes and other men fight.'

For nearly a year Cornelius peeled potatoes
And his life was full of serenity.
Then the enemy broke our line
And their hosts spread over the plains
Like unleash'd beads.
Every man was taken —
Shoemakers, storemen, grooms —
And arms were given them
That they might stem the oncoming host. (READ, 1966, p. 34-41)

[18 more stanzas follow]

First impressions of reading these poems and excerpts, with *TWL* firmly in mind, are that there are both significant similarities and differences. Similarities include the physical arrangement of the poems on the page (an exact likeness of which it is very difficult to produce here) preceded by Roman numerals and with quotations below; the apparent unconnectedness of some of the poems; the variety of forms and lack of standard metrical

patterns or rhyme schemes; a variety of tones with differing levels of engagement and detachment. The contrasts between *TWL* and *The Scene of War* are also very much in evidence: Read's poem is predominantly thematically consistent, presenting a variety of responses to his experiences on the battlefield; the I-narrator features in the majority of the poems, though admittedly not in the first three; there is a lack of citation and borrowing from other literary sources within the poems themselves. Perhaps the most significant difference, however is one of mood: *TWL*, a product of Pound's uncompromising editing, is not only a babel of disparate voices and citations, it is also profoundly parodic in its overall effect; Eliot is a master of the masquerade and ironic detachment, switching registers at will and shifting tones from levity to seriousness, from light to dark and back again. There is also an important contrast between the formal poetics of the two poems, particularly in terms of rhythm, a feature of Eliot's poetry about which he was deeply concerned. Read's approach to rhythm appears haphazard, allowing the line lengths to generate themselves organically, depending on the image, or what Read calls the "vision". In contrast, Eliot's long poem is an epic struggle with the iambic pentameter, the principle metrical form of English poetry stretching back to pre-Shakespearean versifying.

Many verses of *The Waste Land* are composed in iambic pentameter, and others closely resemble that meter. Eliot's frequent adaptation of lines from other poets, such as Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, John Webster, and Andrew Marvell, often reinforces this tendency to revert to the standard meter of English long poems, for example in the opening lines of the second section, "A Game of Chess." Indeed Pound criticized these passages as "too penty," that is, too close to iambic pentameter. (Lewis, 2007, p. 140-141)

TWL is formally rhythmical from beginning to end; that is the principle by which it achieves its ironic effect, by filling metrical frameworks with unusual, quotidian and unpredictable content. *The Scene of War* is rhythmically closer to Imagism, without formal metrical patterns imposed from without, but allowed to develop organically. In Read's poetics "Rhyme, metre, cadence, alliteration are various decorative devices to be used as the vision demands, and are not formal qualities pre-ordained." (SILKIN, 1998, p. 169)

The Scene of War begins with an excerpt from a poem by H. D.³⁹ (Hilda Doolittle), an indication that Read is unselfconsciously displaying his Imagist sympathies from the start. The initial quotation may suggest Eliot, though it is worth noting that none of the eight sections of *TWL* are preceded by quotations: Eliot prefaced several poems with citations, including *Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady* (1917), and *Gerontion*, *Burbank with a Baedeker* and *Sweeney Erect* (1920). As Read's *Naked Warriors* collection, which includes *The Scene*

³⁹ The lines Read uses are an (edited) excerpt taken from the penultimate stanza of H. D.'s 1916 poem, *The Gift*.

of War, was published in 1919, the evidence is inconclusive as to who may have been imitating whom. Read's first poem, *Villages Démolis*, is Imagist in style: short, laconic, impersonal stanzas containing stark images. The second stanza, "Here and there / interior walls / lie upturned and interrogate the skies amazedly" is modern-sounding in the sense that it mixes images of nature and domestic life in an imaginative way, though the image owes more to Pound's prescriptive ideas than it does to Eliot. What may signal *TWL* here is the appearance and repetition of "red and yellow heaps of rubble", the desolate remnants of battle reminiscent of lines from Eliot's opening salvo *The Burial of the Dead*:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock (ELIOT, 1967, p. 51)

The connection may be coincidental, of course, though Eliot's "heap of broken images" and "stony rubbish" are widely interpreted, together with other parts of the poem, as representing the destruction and desolation left behind in the wake of WWI. The fact that Read introduces the image of "a soul that now lies strewn / in red and yellow / heaps of rubble" and that the following poem is entitled *The Crucifix* begins to add a deeper layer of significance to *The Scene of War*, a flavour of Christian symbolism that Eliot also employs extensively in *TWL*, including the reference to "Son of man" which we have just seen above.

Read's third poem, *Fear*, switches tone from the descriptive and Imagistic to the meditative and enigmatic, again adding to the complexity of *The Scene of War* and suggesting that there may be an allegorical undercurrent or unfathomable "mystique" within Read's poem reminiscent of the manner in which *TWL* is widely received. Beneath the metaphors of the poem lies the idea that every soldier of war must learn to keep his fear under tight control, "to simulate composure"; in a stark final image, Read intimates that if this condition is not maintained, "then you will grovel on the earth / and your rabbit eyes / will fill with the fragments of your shatter'd soul." This is a powerful and disturbing image, though its mode of addressing the reader is not suggestive of Eliot's style in *TWL*. However, Read's aside in the third stanza "(So you will become / a gallant gentleman.)", captured in parenthesis, introduces an element of irony and a detached, self-conscious voice that we do connect with Eliot, especially as it appears in the midst of a poem of serious intent about fear of death. Ultimately, however, Read's short lines and stuttering rhythm, coupled with his discursive style, capture very little of Eliot's mood or formal poetics in *TWL*.

The issue of line length and rhythm is one of the salient differences between Read's and Eliot's compositions. The poem *The Happy Warrior* begins with a stanza containing four longer lines, an approximation of the longer line Eliot employs for much of *TWL*. The first and last lines are regular iambic tetrameters (four feet), but lines two and three break the mould, suggesting that Read is not submitting to any predetermined metrical patterns. The poem then changes to shorter lines, most of them only two beats. It is interesting to compare this section of Read's poem, rhythmically, with a section from *TWL* where Eliot also employs the shorter line. Firstly the Read passage, followed by lines 266- 276 from *The Fire Sermon*:

He cannot shriek.

Bloody saliva
dribbles down his shapeless jacket.

I saw him stab
and stab again
a well-killed Boche.

This is the happy warrior,
this is he... (READ, 1966, p. 35)

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.
The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs. (ELIOT, 1967, p. 61)

What we notice immediately is the halted rhythm of Read's lines and the flowing rhythm of Eliot's. The comparison is perhaps unfair, in that Read's lines amount to four separate stanzas separated by full stops and Eliot's sequence only stops once after "heavy spar". Nevertheless, the comparison is an indication of how Eliot is concerned about sustaining rhythm in *TWL*, whereas Read's stop/start rhythm, broken by full-stops and separate stanzas, is more concerned with presenting stark images, one after the other. Read's poetry often appears as a collection of disjointed images designed both to stretch the reader's imagination and to shock; after suffering the horrors of war this is understandable; Read aims to communicate what he has experienced by the juxtaposition of disturbing images. By comparison, Eliot's poetics in *TWL* is *stately*: the longer line, the predominance of the iambic pentameter (the closest metrical form to the speaking voice), the regularity of the rhythms and the concern with

rhyme and continuity. Notice in this short passage from *The Fire Sermon* how we have three rhymes, “tar” with “spar”, “tide” with “wide” and “logs” with “Dogs”. This use of rhyme, together with the regularity of rhythm (eight of the lines have a basic two-beat pattern) holds the passage together as a rhythmic sequence: it is primarily a song. Several passages of *TWL* can be chanted: it is rhythmical and performative, a lightness of tone which deliberately compromises the seriousness of its content. By foregrounding the musicality of his poetry, Eliot deftly suspends the interpretive impulse: that is the aesthetic dynamic of *TWL*.

The fifth poem in *The Scene of War, Liedholz*, extends the contrast between Eliot’s formal poetics and Read’s impulse to describe, impressionistically, his experiences in the war. The poem is essentially narrative and anecdotal, with little evidence of formal composition. The third stanza, in particular, is more prosaic than poetic.

Before we reached our wire
he told me he had a wife and three children.
In the dug-out we gave him a whiskey.
Going to the Brigade with my prisoner at dawn
the early sun made the land delightful
and larks rose singing from the plain. (READ, 1966, p. 36)

The distinct lack of rhythm and rhyme here does not render the verse unpoetic: Imagism and forms of free-verse can successfully bypass formal poetic strictures and achieve a level of poetic integrity. But here Read’s enthusiasm for his subject (the captured soldier, Liedholz) and conveying his impressions of the incident appear to weaken his poetic impulses and leave us with a rudimentary verse that lacks poetic sophistication or aesthetic depth. Liedholz, however, serves as an example of how the variety of styles on show in *The Scene of War* adds to the impression that this is a Modernist poem. This impression is sustained by *My Company*, when Read adopts a more lyrical style and controls the rhythm of the poem. Although the tone appears too intimate for Eliot, with lines such as “I cannot tell / what time your life became mine”, “you absorbed me” and “I saw you gathered around me”, there is a flavour of Eliot, perhaps, in the ruminative tone of self-examination, and in lines such as “In many acts and quiet observances”, “Perhaps, one night, descending cold”, and the three lines which end the extract, “and about you a radiance that seemed to beat / with variant glow and to give / grace to our unity.” Although there is no consistent rhythmic pattern, there are moments when a sense of formal attention to rhythm accentuates the sense, as in stanza four:

And then our fights: we've fought together
compact, unanimous
and I have felt the pride of leadership. (READ, 1966, p. 38)

Here we find the iambic form surfacing: a tetrameter followed by a trimeter and rounded off with a pentameter. Although it is artificial the read these lines emphasising the iambic pattern within (*ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum*), the underlying rhythm gives the lines a semantic weight that can be lost when metrical patterns are dispensed with completely. *My Company* reveals another facet of Read's stylistic palette and adds to the impression that, for the duration of *The Scene of War*, a modern voice is experimenting with various poetic devices to achieve different effects.

The final poem, *The Execution of Cornelius Vane*, is another longer narrative effort which adds a comic element to the sequence, beginning with a mock-heroic style, "Arraign'd before his worldly gods", yet soon descending into parody, "A fly in the sticky web of life". Irrespective of the merits of the poem itself, it is notable that Read, in the wake of bloody battle, is able to reach a level of detachment which allows him to concoct a picaresque fable about the execution of a soldier who deserts his company. We imagine that Read's sense of humour appealed to Eliot when he read these poems in 1919, the ironic absurdity of lines such as "For nearly a year Cornelius peeled potatoes / And his life was full of serenity." The comic effect is enhanced by prefacing the poem with a citation from Rimbaud, a feature that would normally add literary *gravitas* to what follows; Eliot's extensive use of quotations in *TWL* certainly invites scholarly respect. Rhythmically, *Cornelius Vane* displays a greater consistency of line lengths befitting a narrative poem, though when metrical patterns are established and then flouted, it appears coincidental rather than deliberate. There is also a distinct lack of rhyme which, it could be argued, would have heightened the irony of the poem, grafting a nursery-rhyme effect onto a tragic tale. Ultimately the poem, like the others in *The Scene of War*, is *sui generis*, an inimitable product of Read's stylistic approach to poetry, neither distinctly Modernist, nor exclusively Imagist, though displaying elements of both. And though *TWL* is arguably much greater an accomplishment than anything on offer in *The Scene of War*, the inordinate amount of attention which Eliot's poem receives is disproportionate, diverting attention from lesser poets like Read, without whom *TWL* would not have taken shape precisely in the way it did.

Looking back nearly a decade after the war, in a short *Endword* which succeeded an edition of his *Selected Poems* in 1926, Read associates himself with both Pound and Eliot by defending the principles of Imagism and stressing the musical qualities of poetry; he also, perhaps unwittingly, reveals an attachment to Romantic notions about the function of poetry. Although Eliot had extensively employed the iambic pentameter in *TWL*, a form we recognise as fundamentally linked to the rhythms of speech, Read claims that poetry owes more to the

development of song. “True poetry was never speech, but always song. Modern poetry, in so far as it aspires to establish the integral form of a poem, is a refinement of song – a containment of our symbols of discourse in a singular melody.” (READ, 1966, p. 273) By stressing the musicality of poetry, Read, as Eliot had done, defies the interpretive impulse which searches for a *content* that may be paraphrased. A poem, for Read, was not something to be reformulated or reduced by discursive analysis, but a “unified structure”. “A poem is...therefore to be defined as a structure of words whose sound constitutes a rhythmical unity, complete in itself, irrefragable, unanalysable, completing its symbolic references within the ambit of its sound-effect.” (READ, 1966, p. 273) This reverence for the poem as *indefinable* leads to a quasi-mystical notion of a work of art as invested with an *essence* or “unity” which does not lend itself to discursive reduction or paraphrase, a notion associated with the Romantic Movement and with the New Critics’ approach to poetry, based on what Abrams categorised as the “objective” theory of art. It also brings to mind Eliot’s assertion that “a poem has a life of its own”.⁴⁰

Read also appears to ally himself with Eliot on the question of *meaning* in a poem, perhaps the most contentious issue of all for literary critics. The idea that it is futile to reformulate the poem in some way, to *restate* its meaning in some accessible form is prevalent in Eliot’s critical work, particularly in his dismissal of theories which emerged to explain the significance of *TWL*. According to Read, “a poem does not require...a verifiable meaning, an intellectual or moral or social communication. A poem is not a statement, but a manifestation, a manifestation of *being*.” (READ, 1966, pp. 273-274) This hints at the idea of the poet as a Romantic artist, a unique creator of the aesthetic object whose work neither requires justification, nor can be adequately *explained*. However, it could be argued that, broadly speaking, both Romantic and Modernist conceptions of poetry perceive the aesthetic encounter with poetry as an *experience* of the poem rather than an interpretation of it, with the qualification that the former would encourage the reader to *feel* the poem, whereas the latter would stress an encounter with the texture of language. The crucial issue for both approaches is the irreverent *dismantling* of a poem, the impulse to look beyond its form to penetrate the content. “But what is the content of a poem?” Read asks himself, and then answers:

The words are not necessarily arranged in a logical order whose primary purpose is to communicate a meaning of some kind (if by meaning we mean a verifiable statement or proposition). The words in a poem (it might be more exact to speak of the syllables in a

⁴⁰ A fuller version of this quotation from Eliot appears in Part 1, section 1, *Hiding behind form: Modernist poetics and the escape from personality*. See Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*, CUP, 1996, p. 207.

poem) are vocal signs that convey an intangible essence (the 'pattern' of a feeling), an essence that vanishes the moment we approach it with our analytical intelligence. (READ, 1966, p. 273)

Although “intangible essence” has a flavour of Romanticism about it and “pattern of a feeling”, sounds like Eliot’s “objective correlative”, Read’s statement reads like a vindication of Imagism. Nevertheless, Read was more than merely a follower of Pound; he was an inventive and insightful poet who embraced both poetic experimentation and theoretical discussion. A diversity of approach and an openness to new forms are perhaps the qualities which best describe Read’s attitude to poetry. Ultimately, it is not a question of electing one aesthetic approach to poetry over another in order to reach a true understanding of its complexity, but to consider all approaches as having validity. Taken together, Read’s critical observations are worthy of greater consideration, as is his poetry. As I hope to have shown, Read’s poetic voice is provocative and unique; Read was an early pathfinder in the development of Modernist poetry whose work, like that of Monro and Gibson, is rarely mentioned. Inevitably, *TWL* dominates discussions of Modernism and its emergence in post-war England, though the quantity of attention it attracts also serves to detract attention away from Eliot’s English contemporaries, poets who deserve to be re-examined in order to cast more light on the literary context within which Eliot was able to conceive of and assemble his magnum opus.

CONCLUSION

Between the late 18th century and the mid-20th century, the lyric, a short non-narrative poem, came to be identified with the essence of literature. Once seen primarily as a mode of elevated expression, the elegant formulation of cultural values and attitudes, lyric poetry came later to be seen as the expression of powerful feelings, dealing at once with everyday life and transcendent values, giving concrete expression to the most inward feelings of the individual subject. This idea still holds sway.

Jonathan Culler (CULLER, 2011, p. 74)

I would like to summarise, first of all, what I envisage as my original contribution to knowledge before offering some ideas about possible further research avenues. I will then reflect upon the wider significance of my study.

As I hope to have demonstrated, there are a number of misconceptions regarding the development of Modernism in England and the relationship between Imagism, *TWL* and the poetry being written by Pound's and Eliot's contemporaries at the time of the Great War. Although Eliot's long poem is unique, the common perception that its originality bears no resemblance to the work of his English contemporaries does not stand up to close examination. As I have argued, *TWL* has distinctive "echoes" of the work of both Harold Monro and Herbert Read, though, as I have acknowledged, some of these resonances have been highlighted by the process of reading *backwards* from Eliot's poem. Pound's Imagist experiments also influenced both Read and Monro, which seriously questions the preconception that the coming of war signalled the suspension of Modernist writing by English poets. Read in particular, was a war poet who wrote Imagist verses and then arranged them together in sequence, an approach we have come to regard as one of *TWL*'s innovations. One of the reasons why experimental poetry was overshadowed during the years of conflict, as I hope to have shown, is that war poetry was deliberately appropriated by poetry editors and anthologists for patriotic purposes during the war; after the war, when patriotic sentiments had been derided by war poets themselves, war poetry was used to reveal the horrors of human slaughter. This appropriation elevated war poetry to iconic status in England, and in the process froze out any poetry that did not fit these categories, particularly any poetry deemed to be Modernist or experimental. The status of Georgian poetry has also suffered due to a lack of understanding of its historical significance, not only the influence the Georgians exerted over the writing of Great War poetry, but also the innovations made by poets associated with the movement, particularly Wilfrid Gibson.

I also hope to have demonstrated the crucial roles of poetic form and of aesthetic categories in any assessment of the impact of Modernist verse. Part of the problem of content-heavy interpretations of Eliot's text is lack of attention to the sophistication of his technique, in particular the rhythmical qualities of *TWL*; Eliot's formal control and stylistic innovations invest the poem with musical and performative elements which determine the reading process and severely compromise reductive, socio-political interpretations. In terms of aesthetics, I hope to have argued convincingly that both Eliot's "objective correlative" and Pound's Imagist principles depend upon an essentially Romantic notion of the *transfer* of emotion from the poet to the reader. As a consequence, Pound and Eliot's Modernist movement does not represent a revolutionary transformation of the aesthetic approach to the production and reception of poetry. What it does do, however, is to introduce a new and vital element into the concept of aesthetic contemplation: intellectual rigour. Both Pound and Eliot's conception of the lyric is one which demands intellectual engagement: as a consequence, attention has been concentrated on thematic interpretation to the detriment of formal appreciation. As I have argued, the challenge for us, as readers and scholars, is to appreciate the beauty of the Modernist lyric *as poetry*, before we begin to evaluate its cultural and historical significance.

Possible areas for further research

The common perception of Modernist poetry as difficult to comprehend infers that the *aesthetic encounter* with the text is manifestly different to the experience of reading Romantic verse. However, as we have seen, Eliot's "objective correlative" is essentially a *Romantic* concept in the sense that the reader is expected to *decode* the text in order to experience the encoded emotional content. This aesthetic concept, although widely acknowledged as one of Eliot's contributions to poetics, is highly problematical; it makes presumptions about the ability of the poet to represent emotion symbolically, through his or her particular choice of vocabulary and image, though we are not able to determine how the emotion is encrypted and how it is identified or experienced. The "objective correlative" is also complicated by Eliot's insistence that his poetry is "impersonal" and represents an "escape from emotion". Understandably, categories of the aesthetic are speculative by nature. However, I believe the complexities of Eliot's terminology invite further investigation, particularly as they may relate to engagement with the text of *TWL*.

Ezra Pound's conception of the aesthetic encounter with poetry is also problematical. The idea that Imagism represents a negation of the sentimental and the elevation of the intellectual faculties is compromised by Pound's pronouncements about the sounds and rhythms of poetry producing, what he calls "emotional correlations". Pound does not deny that poetry conveys emotion, only about the manner in which it does this. However, to suggest that there is a correlation between intellectual and emotional elements of the aesthetic encounter does not clarify the concept. Accepting that the reading and contemplation of Modernist poetry is essentially an *emotional* experience, I think finer distinctions and definitions are necessary in order for us to understand more clearly how dense or symbolic language achieves its unique aesthetic effects on us as readers. In this study I have only been able to identify this problematical area rather than reach a more satisfactory explanation.

Eliot tells us that in the post-war world poetry must be "difficult" in order to reflect the complexity of modern existence; if we use his own poetry as a guide, we can also deduce that this new poetry must engage with post-industrial cityscapes and urban decay. The problem is that this prescriptiveness has fed into the idea that *TWL* is the *definitive* Modernist poem, the text that most accurately reflects this complex, urban modernity. As a literary touchstone, however, a text by which all other attempts at Modernism are measured, it will always defeat the competition, as it has done to some extent in my study. I might argue that Gibson, Monroe and Read are not true Modernists, but hybrids, and in that sense they are still worth reading and studying. However, that implies that there are certain identifiable characteristics about Modernism by which it can be classified and other, non-Modernist texts compared. Yet, even if we use *TWL* as our guide, we soon realise that the poem is a tissue of paradoxes, a unique fusion of high and low styles, the stately and profane, serious and comic, a poem that can never be imitated, only parodied; a parody that would, in a sense, be a parody of a parody. Although Eliot's poem will always be considered the central Modernist poem in English, I think it is important to see *TWL* as a hybrid itself: neither consistently experimental in its formal construction, nor in some of its stately pronouncements and regal tones. To highlight only one aspect of *TWL*'s incongruity, Eliot insists on battling with the iambic pentameter, the most respected and traditional metrical form in English poetry, throughout the poem (much to Pound's annoyance). This is an aspect of the poem that deserves much more attention as I believe if we can establish more clearly how the iambic pentameter functions in *TWL*, we will have a vital key with which to unlock its particular force *as poetry*. Ultimately, *TWL* is a museum piece, an innovative exhibition of classical poetic styles and symbols of European culture. If *TWL* is looked upon as the quintessential example of Modernist poetry,

then, as I have argued, the modern resides in the pre-modern, and the artist's role is to reshape the icons of the past, to valorise the classics, to re-voice echoes of antiquity. I believe this paradox deserves more attention as it fundamentally questions the Modernist category as representative of modernity; it also invites speculation about the inter-correlation between Modernism and Postmodernism.

Another aspect of Modernism which appears obvious but which does not seem to receive the attention it deserves is the fact that both of its leading architects were Americans living and writing in England. I have pointed out that Eliot's antipathy towards the Georgians could be explained in part by the fact that they were too English for his taste. This observation, however, provokes many more questions than it does explanations. Coetzee suggests Eliot's "New England insecurity" made European culture both alluring and intimidating for the young poet, an observation which provokes more questions. There is also the question of Pound's incalculable influence in the evolution of Modernism, an American who promoted first another American (H. D.), but also supported very English poets like Read and T. E. Hulme. I think there is much to be said about how the particular cultural environments to which Pound and Eliot were exposed before they arrived in England affected the Modernist phenomenon. I also believe it would be fruitful to investigate more closely the activities of both Pound and Eliot during the war years in an attempt to establish how their perceptions of the war affected their conceptions of aesthetics and poetics. The reputations of both poets have been seriously compromised by their alleged antisemitic sympathies: although this aspect of their work has been commented on extensively in more recent years, it would be very productive to investigate if antisemitism bears any relation to the birth of Modernism in England.

In the shadow of Pound's Imagist experiments, England's war poets were busy trying to formulate their responses to the slaughter on the battlefields of France. As we have seen, their work was often appropriated for the purposes of propaganda, though at the time patriotism was not a concept scrutinised and scorned by the liberal intelligentsia, as it is today. However, this appropriation of poetry provokes a number of interesting questions in itself, particularly when we realise that Wilfred Owen's poems have been commandeered because of their *mimetic* function, as imitations of *life*; in the case of *Dulce et Decorum Est*, as a "realistic" representation of the horrors of war. I believe there is a sense in which we constantly appropriate literary texts in the process of interpretation and explanation. Poetry and the novel are essentially fictional forms, and yet we are drawn to invest them with a

certain rhetorical significance (especially when the fiction is a form of Realism). This, of course, is my main argument regarding the “will to paraphrase” *TWL*, to extract an overall meaning from the tissue of quotations and disparate voices. What I am suggesting is that any interpretation of a literary text is also, in an important sense, an appropriation; this is no doubt inevitable, though it does fly in the face of Pound’s Imagist principles and Eliot’s assertion that a work of art cannot be interpreted. Pound’s intention to transform poetry into a “pure” art form as a reaction against the “emotional slither” of post-Romantic and Victorian poetry is also problematical, however. If we regard a poem as a unique juxtaposition of images the effect of which is not translatable, we ignore the fact that the poem is made of words, and words are our common coinage of communication. In this sense, the aesthetic effect of reading poetry can never be quite the same as listening to music, though I think it is productive to consider the possible similarities between the two forms of art.

The wider significance of my study

Let me begin by commenting on one of the poems I featured in my coverage of Great War poetry – Rupert Brooke’s *The Soldier*. The poem, as I demonstrated, has become something of a cultural icon in England, a symbol of selfless patriotism. It would appear that if, like me, you do not have patriotic sympathies, then it would be very difficult to enjoy the poem. This presumes that *The Soldier* is defined by its sentiment, as many presume *TWL* is defined by its themes. However, the political appropriation of *The Soldier* misses vital elements of the poem’s beauty, not least of which is its technical prowess. Yes, the lyric voice is gently persuasive, but it is the great skill Brooke executes in the design of the poem that is most impressive: it is the 14 lines of iambic pentameter within the sonnet framework that establish a gentle, persuasive voice. Of course, the images and choice of language are crucial, too, but it is the *rhythm* of the poem (the quality most esteemed by Eliot) that *produces* the sentiment. This highlights the fact that a greater appreciation of the formal and technical qualities of poetry considerably enhances the aesthetic experience. Or, as Pound might say, lack of attention to form is to do poetry a great injustice. My argument concerning the centrality of form, and in particular metre and rhythm, has been consolidated and enhanced by engaging with individual poems throughout this study, and it will continue to be a guiding principle of my critical approach.

Brooke is still something of a minor poet, despite the fame of his war sonnets, and the opportunity to reappraise some forgotten voices was a major stimulus in the writing of this thesis. To demonstrate the need for a resurrection and reappraisal of minor poets I will offer this example of the current situation. The late poet and poetry critic Ian Hamilton published a critical biography with the subtitle *Some Lives of the Twentieth Century Poets* in 2002. He was asked to write the book as a modern-day equivalent of Samuel Johnson's classic *Lives of the Poets* written at the close of the 18th century, which featured fifty poets. Hamilton explains in his introduction how difficult it was to keep his list of key poets down to just fifty.⁴¹ Despite this, as he admits, many of the names on his list have now been almost completely forgotten (I myself do not recognise at least ten of the names). This sad truth prompted him to title the book *Against Oblivion*, to indicate how he was attempting to save their names and literary reputations not only from the whims of literary taste, but also from the ravages of history.

My attempt to resurrect Gibson, Monroe, Read and others is, in a sense, my contribution to saving some English poets from undeserved "oblivion". Engaging with Gibson's poetry highlights, amongst other things, the significance of *tone* in the critical appreciation of poetry: Gibson's "sincerity" contrasts distinctly with Eliot's ironic detachment, although Gibson's poem *Strawberries*, for example, does show lyrical innovation. Monroe, in contrast, does manage to achieve ironic distance in some of his versifying, though his attachment to the lyric as a sentimental mode of expression prevented a complete transformation to the kind of *depersonalised* Modernism achieved by Eliot and Pound. Herbert Read, who had a true modernising spirit, embracing Imagism and constantly experimenting with form, exemplifies the problem of categorisation; in a very important sense, as I have argued, he was not a Modernist because he did not write *TWL*. This truism, however, only diminishes Read's pioneering efforts. And yet, despite his innovations, Read did not envisage Modernism as compromising the emotional thrust of poetry, only displacing it, as Pound did. Ultimately, I believe that an appreciation of minor poets is not only rewarding in itself, it also offers an opportunity to make comparisons with the work of more highly regarded poets, and by doing so to develop a deeper understanding of how the literary canon has been established.

⁴¹ See HAMILTON, Ian. *Against Oblivion: Some Lives of the Twentieth Century Poets*. London: Penguin Books, 2003, pp. ix – xvi.

What has proved to be of great significance in trying to determine the essence of Modernism is my appreciation of the revolutionary historical transformation in the perception of poetic language. Modernist poetry, like the Symbolism which preceded it, forces us to question our responses to language that does not make immediate sense. If our response is emotional, we are compelled to reflect upon the ability of language *as language* to affect us in this way. I have cited Eliot's comment that poems exist somewhere between the writer and reader. My interpretation of this is that it is language that detaches itself from the poet and becomes the aesthetic object; it is not the poet's feelings which engage us in the Modernist lyric, but the evanescent suggestiveness of language. Language, in a crucial sense, is always independent of the poet's intentions. The key innovation of Modernism, I believe, was to suspend interpretation by foregrounding the aesthetic qualities of language formally, through the medium of poetry.

Engaging with and attempting to contextualise *TWL* has also been a rewarding experience as the poem's diversity of styles and hypnotic rhythms prove endlessly fascinating, like an exotic and enigmatic operetta. The question we have to stop asking is: What is this poem about? Accepting that there is no answer produces first a feeling of relief, then the confidence to enjoy the five sections of the poem as we would the five acts of a musical stage play (Virginia Woolf's description of Eliot reading the poem, in 1.3, as: "He sang it and chanted it, rhythmized it" is enlightening here). The recent Harvard course on Modernism that I mentioned in my introduction promotes an approach to *TWL* that is anatomical, poring over every line of the poem to wring out as much meaning as possible. However, I think it is important to acknowledge (and Eliot's poem helps us to do this) that close reading and detailed exegesis are not the only ways to appreciate poetry. *TWL* is often portrayed as a poem that invites, or even demands, scholarship; for that reason it is looked upon as revolutionary text which transformed the teaching of literature. But this brings us back to the issue of appropriation: Eliot himself, as we have seen, was adamant that his poem should not be invested with socio-political significance, or become prey for propagandists and apologists of every hue. Pound's drastic editing of the original manuscript was arguably the first interpretation of *TWL*, producing a distilled version of the original, muting some of the voices which he found too long-winded. Only when we remember Eliot considered publishing the sections as separate poems do we refrain from what I call "fusing the voices"; the impulse to invest the disparate parts with an overarching meaning, or "message".

In a quotation I used in the chapter on Pound's Imagism, Michael Schmidt says that if the challenges of Modernism have not been accepted, then it is our loss.⁴² In the wider world this is certainly true, though not necessarily in academia. Modernism, to some extent is, and has always been, unpopular: experimental forms of art demand too much from the general public, or so it seems. As the poet Philip Larkin observed (quoted in 1.1), Modernism set the poet apart from the public and, once isolated, he or she concentrated on technique instead of developing a relationship with the audience. Larkin was right about Pound, whose lifetime's project *The Cantos*, a sprawling and often bewildering collection of poems, is ignored by all but the most sympathetic scholars. However, this is certainly not the case with *TWL*: Eliot's poem appears to have infinite capacity to fascinate. I believe Eliot's insistence on employing the iambic pentameter as the rhythmical foundation of the poem is fundamental to its appeal, though this in itself does not explain *TWL*'s success. Ultimately, I believe, it is the ensemble of voices that engages us, the unpredictable switching of registers from stately to colloquial that maintains our fascination. I am convinced that the way to appreciate *TWL* is to remember its original, ironic title: *He Do the Police in Different Voices*. Eliot's little joke is much more than that: it serves to remind us that in the aftermath of the Great War, lone voices could not be trusted, not even the voice inside your own head. Eliot had the courage at that moment to go on stage, as it were, like the music-hall comedians he admired, and don an array of masks all with their unique voices and mannerisms, some singing, some speaking in hushed tones and some pontificating: that was his way of depicting the modern world. As readers we need to hear the dissonance, but appreciate it as a modern harmony of the disparate.

⁴² Schmidt writes: "It is with Eliot and Pound that our poetic and critical language, our sensibility, are thoroughly shaken out. If the dust has settled again, if the challenge of Modernism has not been accepted in the longer term, it is our loss." See SCHMIDT, 1998, p. 686.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX ONE

THE WASTE LAND

By T. S. Eliot (1922)

"Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis
vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent:
Sibylla ti theleis; respondebat illa: apothanein thelo."

I. THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten, 10
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, 20
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust. 30

Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?

"You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
"They called me the hyacinth girl."
--Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,

Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
 Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
 Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, 40
 Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
 Od' und leer das Meer.

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
 Had a bad cold, nevertheless
 Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
 With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,
 Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
 (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
 Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
 The lady of situations. 50
 Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
 And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
 Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
 Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
 The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
 I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
 Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
 Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
 One must be so careful these days.

Unreal City, 60
 Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
 I had not thought death had undone so many.
 Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
 Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
 To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
 With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
 There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying "Stetson!"
 "You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!" 70
 "That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
 "Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?"
 "Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?"

Line 42 Od'] Oed'-- Editor.

"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
 "Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
 "You! hypocrite lecteur!-- mon semblable,-- mon frere!"

II. A GAME OF CHESS

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
 Glowed on the marble, where the glass
 Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines

From which a golden Cupidon peeped out 80
 (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
 Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
 Reflecting light upon the table as
 The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
 From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
 In vials of ivory and coloured glass
 Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
 Unguent, powdered, or liquid-- troubled, confused
 And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air 90
 That freshened from the window, these ascended
 In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
 Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
 Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
 Huge sea-wood fed with copper
 Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
 In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.
 Above the antique mantel was displayed
 As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
 The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
 So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale 100
 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
 And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
 "Jug Jug" to dirty ears.
 And other withered stumps of time
 Were told upon the walls; staring forms
 Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
 Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
 Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
 Spread out in fiery points
 Glowed into words, then would be savagely still. 110

"My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
 "Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
 "What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
 "I never know what you are thinking. Think."

I think we are in rats' alley
 Where the dead men lost their bones.

"What is that noise?"

The wind under the door.

"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"

Nothing again nothing. 120

"Do

"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

"Nothing?"

I remember
 Those are pearls that were his eyes.

"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"

But

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag--

It's so elegant

So intelligent 130

"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"

I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street

"With my hair down, so. What shall we do to-morrow?"

"What shall we ever do?"

The hot water at ten.

And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess,

Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said--

I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself, 140

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.

He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you

To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.

You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,

He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.

And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,

He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,

And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.

Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said. 150

Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.

Others can pick and choose if you can't.

But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.

You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.

(And her only thirty-one.)

I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,

It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.

(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.) 160

The chemist said it would be alright, but I've never been the same.

You are a proper fool, I said.

Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,

What you get married for if you don't want children?

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,

And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot--

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight. 170

Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

III. THE FIRE SERMON

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
 Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
 Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
 Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
 The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
 Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
 Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
 And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors; 180
 Departed, have left no addresses.
 By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .
 Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
 Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
 But at my back in a cold blast I hear
 The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
 Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
 While I was fishing in the dull canal
 On a winter evening round behind the gashouse 190
 Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
 And on the king my father's death before him.
 White bodies naked on the low damp ground
 And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
 Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.
 But at my back from time to time I hear
 The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
 Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
 O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
 And on her daughter 200
 They wash their feet in soda water
 Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

Twit twit twit
 Jug jug jug jug jug jug
 So rudely forc'd.
 Tereu

Unreal City
 Under the brown fog of a winter noon
 Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
 Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants 210
 C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
 Asked me in demotic French
 To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
 Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
 Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
 Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
 I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
 Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
 At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives 220
 Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
 The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
 Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
 Out of the window perilously spread
 Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
 On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
 Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
 I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
 Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest--
 I too awaited the expected guest. 230
 He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
 A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
 One of the low on whom assurance sits
 As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
 The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
 The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
 Endeavours to engage her in caresses
 Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
 Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
 Exploring hands encounter no defence; 240
 His vanity requires no response,
 And makes a welcome of indifference.
 (And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
 Enacted on this same divan or bed;
 I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
 And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
 Bestows one final patronising kiss,
 And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
 Hardly aware of her departed lover; 250
 Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
 "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."
 When lovely woman stoops to folly and
 Paces about her room again, alone,
 She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
 And puts a record on the gramophone.

"This music crept by me upon the waters"
 And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
 O City city, I can sometimes hear
 Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street, 260
 The pleasant whining of a mandoline
 And a clatter and a chatter from within

Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails 270
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.
The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs.
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

Elizabeth and Leicester 280
Beating oars
The stern was formed
A gilded shell
Red and gold
The brisk swell
Rippled both shores
Southwest wind
Carried down stream
The peal of bells
White towers
Weialala leia 290
Wallala leialala

"Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."

"My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised 'a new start'.
I made no comment. What should I resent?"
"On Margate Sands. 300
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing."
la la

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning
 O Lord Thou pluckest me out
 O Lord Thou pluckest 310

burning

IV. DEATH BY WATER

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
 Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
 And the profit and loss.

A current under sea

Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
 He passed the stages of his age and youth
 Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, 320
 Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

V. WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
 After the frosty silence in the gardens
 After the agony in stony places
 The shouting and the crying
 Prison and palace and reverberation
 Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
 He who was living is now dead
 We who were living are now dying
 With a little patience 330

Here is no water but only rock
 Rock and no water and the sandy road
 The road winding above among the mountains
 Which are mountains of rock without water
 If there were water we should stop and drink
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
 If there were only water amongst the rock
 Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
 Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit 340
 There is not even silence in the mountains
 But dry sterile thunder without rain

There is not even solitude in the mountains
 But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
 From doors of mudcracked houses
If there were water

And no rock
 If there were rock
 And also water
 And water 350
 A spring
 A pool among the rock
 If there were the sound of water only
 Not the cicada
 And dry grass singing
 But sound of water over a rock
 Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
 Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
 But there is no water

Who is the third who walks always beside you? 360
 When I count, there are only you and I together
 But when I look ahead up the white road
 There is always another one walking beside you
 Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
 I do not know whether a man or a woman
 --But who is that on the other side of you?

What is that sound high in the air
 Murmur of maternal lamentation
 Who are those hooded hordes swarming
 Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth 370
 Ringed by the flat horizon only
 What is the city over the mountains
 Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
 Falling towers
 Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
 Vienna London
 Unreal

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
 And fiddled whisper music on those strings
 And bats with baby faces in the violet light 380
 Whistled, and beat their wings
 And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
 And upside down in air were towers
 Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
 And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

In this decayed hole among the mountains
 In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
 Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel

There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
 It has no windows, and the door swings, 390
 Dry bones can harm no one.
 Only a cock stood on the roof-tree
 Co co rico co co rico
 In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
 Bringing rain

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
 Waited for rain, while the black clouds
 Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
 The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
 Then spoke the thunder 400

DA
 Datta: what have we given?
 My friend, blood shaking my heart
 The awful daring of a moment's surrender
 Which an age of prudence can never retract
 By this, and this only, we have existed
 Which is not to be found in our obituaries
 Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
 Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
 In our empty rooms 410

DA
 Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
 Turn in the door once and turn once only
 We think of the key, each in his prison
 Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
 Only at nightfall, aetherial rumours
 Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus

DA
 Damyata: The boat responded
 Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar 420
 The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
 Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
 To controlling hands

I sat upon the shore
 Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
 Shall I at least set my lands in order?
 London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
 Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
 Quando fiam ceu chelidon-- O swallow swallow
 Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie 430
 These fragments I have shored against my ruins
 Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
 Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih

ANNEX TWO

HAROLD MONRO

STRANGE MEETINGS (1915-1916)

I.

If suddenly a clod of earth should rise,
 And walk about, and breathe, and speak, and love,
 How one would tremble, and in what surprise
 Gasp : " Can you move " ?

I see men walking, and I always feel :
 " Earth ! How have you done this ? What can you be ? "
 I can't learn how to know men, or conceal
 How strange they are to me.

II.

The dark space underneath is full of bones,
 The surface filled with bodies roving men,
 And floating above the surface a foam of eyes
 Over that is Heaven. All the Gods
 Walk with cool feet, paddle among the eyes;
 Scatter them like foam-flakes on the wind
 Over the human world.

III

Rising toward the surface, we are men
 A moment, till we dive again, and then
 We take our ease of breathing : we are sent
 Unconscious to our former element,
 There being perfect, living without pain
 Till we emerge like men, and meet again.

IV.

You live there ; I live here :
 Other people everywhere
 Haunt their houses, and endure
 Days and deeds and furniture,
 Circumstances, families,
 And the stare of foreign eyes.

V.

Often we must entertain,
 Tolerantly if we can,
 Ancestors returned again
 Trying to be modern man.
 Gates of Memory are wide ;
 All of them can shuffle in,
 Join the family, and, once inside,
 Alas, what a disturbance they begin !
 Creatures of another time and mood,
 They wrangle ; they dictate ;
 Bawl their experience into brain and blood,
 Call themselves Fate.

VI.

Eyes float above the surface, trailing
 Obedient bodies, lagging feet.

Where the wind of words is wailing
 Eyes and voices part and meet.

VII.

Oh, how reluctantly some people learn
 To hold their bones together, with what toil
 Breathe and are moved, as though they would return,
 How gladly, and be crumbled into soil !

They knock their groping bodies on the stones,
 Blink at the light, and startle at all sound,
 With their white lips learn only a few moans,
 Then go back underground.

VIII.

BIRTH.

One night when I was in the House of Death,
 A shrill voice penetrated root and stone,
 And the whole earth was shaken under ground
 I woke and there was light above my head.

Before I heard that shriek I had not known
 The region of Above from Underneath,
 Alternate light and dark, silence and sound,
 Difference between the living and the dead.

IX.

It is difficult to tell,
 (Though we feel it well,)

How the surface of the land
 Budded into head and hand :
 But it is a great surprise
 How it blossomed into eyes.

X.

A flower is looking through the ground,
 Blinking at the April weather ;
 Now a child has seen the flower :
 Now they go and play together.

Now it seems the flower will speak,
 And will call the child its brotner
 But, oh strange forgetiulness !
 They don't recognise each other.

XI.

Yesterday I heard a thrush ;
 He held me with his eyes :
 I waited on my yard of earth,
 He watched me from his skies.

My whole day was penetrated
 By his wild and windy cries,
 And the glitter of his eyes.

XII.

The stars must make an awful noise
 In whirling round the sky ;
 Yet somehow I can't even hear
 Their loudest song or sigh.
 So it is wonderful to think
 One blackbird can outsing
 The voice of all the swarming stars
 On any day in spring.

XIII.

The ploughboy, he could never understand-
 While he was carried dozing in the cart,
 Or strolling with the plough across the land,
 He never knew he had a separate heart.

Had someone told him, had he understood,
 It would have been like tearing up the ground.
 He slowly moves and slowly grows like wood,
 And does not turn his head for any sound.

So they mistook him for a clod of land,

And round him, while he dreamed, they built a town.
He rubs his eyes ; he cannot understand,
But like a captive wanders up and down.

XIV.

You may not ever go to heaven ;
You had better love the earth :
You'll achieve, for all your pain,
(What you cannot understand)
Privilege to drive a flower
Through an inch of land.
All the world is in your brain :
Worship it, in human power,
With your body and your hand.

XV.

I often stood at my open gate,
Watching the passing crowd with no surprise
I don't think I had used my eyes for hate
Till they met your eyes.
I don't believe this road is meant for you,
Or, if it be,
Will no one say what I am meant to do
Now while you stare at me ?

XVI.

How did you enter that body ? Why are you here ?
At once, when I had seen your eyes appear
Over the brim of earth, they were looking for me.
How suddenly , how silently
We rose into this long-appointed place.
From what sleep have you arrived,
That your beauty has survived ?
You, the everlasting you
Known before a word was

XVII.

To-day, when you were sitting in the house,
And I was walking to you from the town,
At the far corner of the alder-wood,
I'm certain you were strolling up and down.

I thought : " She's come to meet me, and meanwhile

Is talking to the cowslips in the dew."
 Just as you saw me, and began to smile
 It was not you.

Now I'm not certain for how shall I say?
 I cannot tell, however I may stare,
 If it be you here in the house all day,
 Or whether you are wandering still out there.

XVIII.

Wipe away, please,
 That film from your eyes.
 I can't see you plainly. Are you
 The friend that I seem to remember? Are we
 The people I think we must be ?
 We have talked for an hour : it seems you are he.
 I know you, I'm sure, though your eyes are so altered.
 Oh, in what life of our lives did we meet ?
 But you smile, then you sigh, then you frown :
 Now you stare at me angrily. How can it be ?
 I know you you do not know me.

XIX.

A man who has clung to a branch and he hangs-
 Wondering when it will break.

A woman who sits by the bed of a child,
 Watching for him to wake.

People who gaze at the town-hall clock,
 Waiting to hear the hour.

Somebody walking along a path,
 Stooping to pick a flower.

Dawn ; and the reaper comes out of his home,
 Moving along to mow.

A frightened crowd in a little room,
 Waiting all day to go.

A tall man rubbing his eyes in the dusk,

Muttering " Yes " ; murmuring " No."

XX.

It is not difficult to die :

You hold your breath and go to sleep ;
Your skin turns white or grey or blue,
And some of your relations weep.

The cheerful clock without a pause
Will finish your suspended day.
That body you were building up
Will suddenly be thrown away.

You turn your fingers to the ground,
Drop all the things you had to do :
It is the first time in your life
You'll cease completely to be you.

XXI.

Memory opens ; memory closes :
Memory taught me to be a man.

It remembers everything :
It helps the little birds to sing.

It finds the honey for the bee :
It opens and closes, opens and closes.

-Proverbs for the humble wise ;
Flashes out of human eyes ;
Oracles of paradise.

ANNEX THREE**ECLOGUES: A BOOK OF POEMS
HERBERT READ (1914-1918)****THE MEDITATION OF A LOVER
AT DAYBREAK**

I CAN JUST SEE the distant trees
 And I wonder whether they will
 Or will not
 Bow their tall plumes at your passing
 In the carriage of the morning wind:

Or whether they will merely
 Tremble against the cold dawnlight,
 Shaking a yellow leaf
 to the dew-wet earth.

WOODLANDS

PINE NEEDLES cover the silent ground:
 pine trees chancel the woodland ways.

We penetrate into the dark depths
 Where only garlic and hemlock grow
 Till we meet the blue stream
 Cleaving the green
 Twilight like a rhythmic sword.

PASTURELANDS

WE SCURRY over the pastures
 chasing the windstrewn oak-leaves.

We kiss
 the fresh petals of cowslips and primroses.

We discover frog-spawn in the wet ditch.

THE POND

SHRILL GREEN WEEDS
 float on the black pond.

A rising fish
ripples the still water

And disturbs my soul.

THE ORCHARD

GROTESQUE patterns of blue-grey mould
Cling to my barren apple-trees:

But in spring
Pale blossoms burst like little flowers
Along black wavering twigs:

And soon
Rains wash the cold frail petals
Downfallinor like tremulous flakes
Even within my heart.

APRIL

TO THE FRESH WET FIELDS
and the white
froth of flowers

Came the wild errant
swallows with a scream.

THE WOODMAN

HIS RUSSET COAT and gleaming axe
Flit
In the blue glades.

The wild birds sing;
But the woodman he broods
In the blue glades.

HARVEST HOME

The waggons loom like blue caravans in the dusk:
They lumber mysteriously down the moonlit lanes.

We ride on the stacks of rust gold corn,
Filling the sky with our song.

The horses toss their heads and the harness-bells
Jingle all the way.

THE AUTUMN OF THE WORLD

AS A HOST of blood-flecked clouds
 skim the golden sky
 and melt in the vermillioned vastness
 There comes borne on a wind
 from the infinite womb of chaos
 the dank wafture of decay.

Over the eternal waters of the sea
 that weep and find no solace of their cares
 Lethargic vultures flock and swirl
 and fill the echoes with their gloomy cries.

Cold winds from arctic zones
 betray
 the transient things of earth:
 The last yellow leaves
 fall on the iridescent sward:
 The wind dies
 and the summer voices are forever quiet.

CURFEW

LIKE A FAUN my head uplifted
 In delicate mists:

 And breaking on my soul
 Tremulous waves that beat and cling
 To yellow leaves and dark green hills

 Bells in the autumn evening.

CHILDHOOD

I

THE YEARS COME with their still perspective, enveloping the past in the light of romance.

The old elm trees flock round the tiled farmstead and their silver-bellied leaves dance in the wind. Beneath their shade, and in the corner of the green, is a pond. In winter it is full of water, green with various weeds: and in Spring a lily will open in its centre.

Childhood I

The ducks waddle in the mud and sail in circles round the pond, or preen their feathers on the bank.

But in Summer the pond is dry, and its bed is glossy and baked by the sun, of a beautiful soft colour like the skins of the moles they catch and crucify on the stable doors.

On the green the fowls pick grains, or chatter and fight. Their yellows, whites and browns, the metallic lustre of their darker feathers, and the crimson splash of their combs make an everchanging pattern on the grass.

They drink with spasmodic upreaching necks by the side of the well.

Under the stones by the well live green lizards curious to our eyes.

And the path from the well leads to a garden door set in the high wall whereon grow plums and apricots. The door is deep and narrow and opens on to paths bordered with box-hedges; one path leads through the aromatic currant bushes, beneath the plum-trees, to the lawn where grows the wonder of our day-dreams, the monkey's-puzzle tree. On the other side of the

Childhood I

lawn three fir-trees rise sharply to the sky, their dark shades homing a few birds.

And beyond is the orchard, and down its avenues of mould-smitten trees the path leads to the paddocks, with their mushrooms and fairy-rings, and to the flat-lands stretching till the girding hills complete our vision.

But on a hill-top, cut clean against a sunrise, is the figure of a child, full of an impatient gesture.

CHILDHOOD

II

THE FARM is distant from the high-road
half a mile;

The child of the farm
does not realise it for several years;
He wanders through the orchard,
finds mushrooms in the paddock,
or beetles in the pond.

But one day he goes to the high-road,
sees carts and carriages pass,
and men go marketing.

A traction-engine crashes into his vision
with flame and smoke,
and makes his eager soul retreat.

He turns away:
The huntsmen are galloping over the fields,
Their red coats and the swift whimpering hounds,

ON THE HEATH

WHITE HUMOURS veining Earth,
 The lymphic winds of Spring
 Veil an early morning
 When on the hill
 Men in cool sleeves dig the soil,
 Turning the loam or acrid manure
 With gripes that clink on stones.

Silently horses speed on the sandy track.

Lithe in white sweaters
 Two runners lean against a fountain.

GARDEN PARTY

I HAVE ASSUMED a conscious sociability,
 Pressed unresponding hands,
 Sipped tea,
 And chattered aimlessly
 All afternoon,

Achieving spontaneity
 Only
 When my eyes lit at the sight
 Of a scarlet spider
 Running over the bright
 Green mould of an apple-tree.

CONCERT PARTY

THAT WHITE HAND poised
 Above the ivory keys
 Will soon descend to
 Shatter
 The equable surface of my reverie.

To what abortion
 Will the silence give birth ?

*Noon of moist heat and the moan
 Of raping bees,
 And light like a sluice of molten gold
 On the satiate, petitioning leaves.*

*In yellow fields,
 Mute agony of reapers.*

Does the metallic horizon
Give release?

Yes: higher,
 against the wider void the immaculate
 angels of lust

Lean
 on the swanbreasts of heaven.

CHAMP DE MANŒUVRES

THIS HILL INDENTS my soul
So that I soar
Like a silver mist about its flanks.

I dwell
In the golden setting of the sun,
While on the plain
The illumined mists invade
Leaf-burdened trees. . .

Champ de Manœuvres

And then
The silent tides of melting light
Assail the hill, imbue
My errant soul.

Mine empty body broods
One with the inanimate rocks . . .

The last red rays are fierce and irritant.
Then wakes my body on the lonely hill,
Gathering to its shell my startled soul.

NOCTURNE

I WILL MAKE this girl a bed of ferns
Beneath the trees,
And she shall come to me naked and shy in the
 starlight,
And when I kneel to kiss her body
Faunish I will be aware of its human scent
Mingled with the resin odours of the shrouded wood
As salt in tears.

We will be silent in the world;
And if she think good

We will go down to the green pool
 To lie with our bellies on the cool grass
 And drink together.

The flying beetles and the bats
 And the birds drowsy in the branches
 Shall be our companions.
 The sheep in the open fields
 Shall see our white bodies
 glimmering in the woodland dusk.

WINTER GRIEF

LIFE SO BRIEF . . .

 Yet I am old
 with an era of grief.

The earth unveils
 a sad nakedness
 And her hills
 droop round my sorrow.
 Into the stillness
 living things scream,
 And only the nerveless dead
 get tranquillity.

From the funereal mould
 Late asters blaspheme

PROMENADE SOLENNELLE

WE WALKED MUTELY

 over black moors
 where gray walls crawl
 Sinuously into still horizons.

I was mute
 a stickybud
 only to unfurl
 In the germination of your mood.

Promenade Solennelle

But you called gray rain
 to slake my heart:
 You called gray mist
 over the black moors.

We passed black altars of rock,
 Two mute, processional, docile Christs
 Amid the unheeding
 Bleakness.

THE SORROW OF UNICUME

I

FRESH in the flush light gleam
 the slape new furrows:
 ride the clean horizon rib
 lithe Unicume and his roan team.

Man moulded with Earth —
 like clay uprisen:
 his whistling mingles
 with the throstle's this even.

Inward from furtive woods
 the stretched light stains:
 end-toil star now broods
 deeming resthaven due.

Unyoked the roan team
 garthward he leads:
 hooves beat to harness clink;
 the swollen sun bleeds.

II

When alone, Unicume
 seeks his darkening dale.
You my white garden-rail—
 Heart's tomb within!

The Sorrow of Unicume

He lifts latch to the quiet room
 where yet it seems she breathes:
 he kneels to take her stark hands
 in caress mute with the gloom.

*"Draw the casement; let me see
 last light without"*

Ah, fierce the white, white stars to hurt,
 their beauty a wild shout.

Retch of flower scent, lush decay
among time-burdened shrubs.
And near and shallowly buried lay
love once enfleshed, now fled.

III

*Harsh my heart is,
scalded with grief:
my life a limp
worm-eaten leaf*

*White flower unfeeling
you star the mould:
evolved calmness,
my livid heart enfold.*

NIGHT

THE dark steep roofs chisel
The infinity of the sky:

But the white moonlit gables
Resemble
Still hands at prayer.

ANNEX FOUR

HERBERT READ: THE SCENE OF WAR (1919)

The Scene of War

And perhaps some outer horror,
some hideousness to stamp beauty
a mark
on our hearts.

H. D.

I. VILLAGES DÉMOLIS

The villages are strewn
in red and yellow heaps of rubble:

Here and there
interior walls
lie upturned and interrogate the skies amazedly.

Walls that once held
within their cubic confines
a soul that now lies strewn
in red and yellow
heaps of rubble.

II. THE CRUCIFIX

His body is smashed
through the belly and chest
the head hangs lopsided
from one nail'd hand.

Emblem of agony
we have smashed you!

III. FEAR

Fear is a wave
beating through the air
and on taut nerves impinging
till there it wins
vibrating chords.

All goes well
so long as you tune the instrument
to simulate composure.

(So you will become
a gallant gentleman.)

But when the strings are broken
then you will grovel on the earth
and your rabbit eyes
will fill with the fragments of your shatter'd soul.

IV. THE HAPPY WARRIOR

His wild heart beats with painful sobs,
his strain'd hands clench an ice-cold rifle,
his aching jaws grip a hot parch'd tongue,
his wide eyes search unconsciously.

He cannot shriek.

Bloody saliva
dribbles down his shapeless jacket.

I saw him stab
and stab again
a well-killed Boche.

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

V. LIEDHOLZ

When I captured Liedholz
I had a blacken'd face
like a nigger's
and my teeth like white mosaics shone.

We met in the night at half-past one
between the lines.
Liedholz shot at me
and I at him;
in the ensuing tumult he surrendered to me.

Before we reached our wire
he told me he had a wife and three children.
In the dug-out we gave him a whiskey.
Going to the Brigade with my prisoner at dawn
the early sun made the land delightful
and larks rose singing from the plain.

In broken French we discussed
Beethoven, Nietzsche and the International.

He was a professor
 Living at Spandau
 and not too intelligible.

But my black face and nigger's teeth
 Amused him.

VII. MY COMPANY

*Foule! Ton âme entière est debout
 Dans mon corps.*

JULES ROMAINS

1

You became
 in many acts and quiet observances
 a body and soul, entire.

I cannot tell
 what time your life became mine:
 perhaps when one summer night
 we halted on the roadside
 in the starlight only,
 and you sang your sad home-songs
 dirges which I standing outside you
 coldly condemned.

Perhaps, one night, descending cold,
 when rum was mighty acceptable,
 and my doling gave birth to sensual gratitude.

And then our fights: we've fought together
 compact, unanimous
 and I have felt the pride of leadership.

In many acts and quiet observances
 you absorbed me:
 Until one day I stood eminent
 and I saw you gathered round me,
 uplooking
 and about you a radiance that seemed to beat
 with variant glow and to give
 grace to our unity.

But, God! I know that I'll stand
 Someday in the loneliest wilderness,
 Someday my heart will cry
 For the soul that has been, but that now
 Is scatter'd with the winds,

Deceased and devoid.

I know that I'll wander with a cry:
 "O beautiful men, O men I loved,
 O whither are you gone, my company?"

2

My men go wearily
 With their monstrous burdens.
 They bear wooden planks
 And iron sheeting
 Through the area of death.

When a flare curves through the sky
 They rest immobile.

Then on again,
 Sweating and blaspheming—
 "Oh, bloody Christ!"

My men, my modern Christs,
 Your bloody agony confronts the world.

3

A man of mine
 lies on the wire.
 It is death to fetch his soulless corpse.

A man of mine
 lies on the wire; And he will rot
 And first his lips
 The worms will eat.

It is not thus I would have him kiss'd,
 But with the warm passionate lips
 Of his comrade here.

4

I can assume
 A giant attitude and godlike mood,
 And then detachedly regard
 All riots, conflicts and collisions.

The men I've lived with
 Lurch suddenly into a far perspective;
 They distantly gather like a dark cloud of birds
 In the autumn sky.

Urged by some unanimous
 Volition or fate,
 Clouds clash in opposition;
 The sky quivers, the dead descend;
 Earth yawns.

They are all of one species.

From my giant attitude,
 In a godlike mood,
 I laugh till space is filled
 With hellish merriment.

Then again I resume
 My human docility,
 Bow my head
 And share their doom.

VII. THE EXECUTION OF CORNELIUS VANE

*Le combat spirituel est aussi brutal que la bataille
 d'hommes; mais la vision de la justice est le plaisir
 de Dieu seul.*

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

Arraign'd before his worldly gods
 He would have said:
 'I, Cornelius Vane,
 A fly in the sticky web of life,
 Shot away my right index finger.

I was alone, on sentry, in the chill twilight after dawn,
 And the act cost me a bloody sweat.
 Otherwise the cost was trivial — they had no evidence,
 And I lied to the wooden fools who tried me.
 When I returned from hospital
 They made me a company cook:
 I peel potatoes and other men fight.'

For nearly a year Cornelius peeled potatoes
 And his life was full of serenity.
 Then the enemy broke our line
 And their hosts spread over the plains
 Like unleash'd beads.
 Every man was taken —
 Shoemakers, storemen, grooms —
 And arms were given them
 That they might stem the oncoming host.

Cornelius held out his fingerless hand
And remarked that he couldn't shoot.
" But you can stab," the sergeant said,
So he fell in with the rest, and, a little group,
They marched away towards the enemy.

After an hour they halted for a rest.
They were already in the fringe of the fight:
Desultory shells fell about them,
And past them retreating gunteams
Galloped in haste.
But they must go on.

Wounded stragglers came down the road,
Haggard and limping
Their arms and equipment tossed away.
Cornelius Vane saw them, and his heart was beating wildly,
For he must go on.

At the next halt
He went aside to piss,
And whilst away a black shell
Burst near him:
Hot metal shrieked past his face;
Bricks and earth descended like hail,
And the acrid stench of explosive filled his nostrils.

Cornelius pitched his body to the ground
And crouched in trembling fear.
Another shell came singing overhead,
Nowhere near.

But Cornelius sprang to his feet, his pale face set.
He willed nothing, saw nothing, only before him
Were the free open fields:
To the fields he ran.

He was still running when he began to perceive
The tranquillity of the fields
And the battle distant.
Away in the north-east were men marching on a road;
Behind were the smoke-puffs of shrapnel,
And in the west the sun declining
In a sky of limpid gold.

When night came finally
He had reached a wood.
In the thickness of the trees
The cold wind was excluded,

And here he slept a few hours.

In the early dawn
The chill mist and heavy dew
Pierced his bones and wakened him.
There was no sound of battle to be heard.

In the open fields again
The sun shone sickly through the mist
And the dew was icy to the feet.
So Cornelius ran about in that white night,
The sun's wan glare his only guide.

Coming to a canal
He ran up and down like a dog
Deliberating where to cross.
One way he saw a bridge
Loom vaguely, but approaching
He heard voices and turned about.
He went far the other way,
But growing tired before he found a crossing,
Plunged into the icy water and swam.
The water gripped with agony;
His clothes sucked the heavy water,
And as he ran again
Water oozed and squelched from his boots
His coat dripped and his teeth chattered.

He came to a farm.
Approaching cautiously, he found it deserted.
Within he discarded his sopping uniform, dried himself and donned
Mufti he found in a cupboard.
Dark mouldy bread and bottled cider he also found
And was refreshed.
Whilst he was eating,
Suddenly,
Machine-guns opened fire not far away,
And their harsh throbbing
Darkened his soul with fear.

The sun was more golden now,
And as he went —
Always going west —
The mist grew thin.

About noon,
As he skirted the length of a wood
The warmth had triumphed and the spring day was beautiful.
Cornelius perceived with a new joy.
Pale anemones and violets of the wood,

And wished that he might ever
Exist in the perception of these woodland flowers
And the shafts of yellow light that pierced
The green dusk.

Two days later
He entered a village and was arrested.
He was hungry, and the peace of the fields
Dissipated the terror that had been the strength of his will.

He was charged with desertion
And eventually tried by court-martial.

The evidence was heavy against him,
And he was mute in his own defence.
A dumb anger and a despair
Filled his soul.

He was found guilty.
Sentence: To suffer death by being shot.

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