

**Georgianism Then and Now –
A Recuperative Study**

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Abstract

The thesis attempts to revise our view of Georgian poetry, and thus to rescue it from the critical disregard and disdain it has suffered since the 1930s. Georgian poetry will be redefined as a strong traditional poetry contemporaneous with, and yet different from, literary Modernism. An historical overview of the critical literature from the 1920s onwards will reveal the original co-existence of those now known as 'Georgians' and 'Modernists', stress their mutual break with Edwardian conventions, and will sketch the process by which Georgianism and Modernism became oppositional. Georgianism will be re-evaluated as a brave and creditable attempt to continue the Romantic and humanistic impulse in poetry at a time when younger and ostensibly more radical writers were forsaking it for the values of Modernism. The thesis will further suggest that the Georgian poets had a rather more socially aware and progressive agenda than many of the fledgling Modernists. Georgian poetry is reread, therefore, in order to bring out, as major themes, its concern with the poor and with work, with the changing environment of the nation, with the position of women in Georgian society, and with its response to the First World War. This reappraisal will lead to the contention that Georgianism should not be viewed as a low point in British poetry, but instead as supplying the formal foundations and political sensibility which mark the achievement of Great War poetry. While the thesis is careful not to overbid its claims for reviewing the Georgians' own achievement (especially in respect of their relative lack of formal experimentation compared to the Modernists), it hopes nevertheless to persuade its readers that the poets of 'Liberal England' had a more humane and realistic vision of their world than they have hitherto been credited with.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the college.

Introduction

i. Defining Georgianism

The term 'Georgian' was used by Edward Marsh as the title of a poetry anthology that he himself edited and promoted between 1912 and 1922, and which Harold Monro published at the Poetry Bookshop. There were five *Georgian Poetry* collections, the poets within them once seeming daring and controversial, and even to represent the future of English poetry. Now, however, 'Georgian' is a derogatory term, usually used to denote uninspired and trivial rural poetry.

From the 1930s onwards, there have been many studies that have dismissed Georgian poetry as weak, derivative, bland and escapist. In *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), F.R. Leavis bewailed 'the vacuity of the Georgians'.¹ C. Day Lewis in *A Hope for Poetry* (1934) described them as 'a sadly pedestrian rabble'.² In *Modern Poetry* (1938), Louis MacNeice claimed that 'the Georgians had no world-view',³ and that they were 'rightly determined to be less "literary" than their predecessors but, dropping literature, they had not the strength to take up life'.⁴ The views of these critics were fashioned from a shared climate. Poets and critics of the 1930s were heavily influenced by T.S. Eliot, and also by Auden and his associates. Although these two influences differ politically, they are nevertheless both 'political' in outlook. In short, social engagement was considered vital for poets, and failure to address the issues of the day was damning.

But did the Georgians truly lack this engagement with social issues, and awareness of a wider society? – this is the question my thesis will centrally address.

Past studies of the Georgians have attempted to re-assess them in more general terms, but for me, this most fundamental of questions remains unanswered. It is my contention that these poets did address modernity, but mainly in the verse forms of an older poetic tradition. This prompts an inevitable question: does modern experience need to be expressed in Modernist verse forms? The achievement of poets of the 1950s, such as Larkin and Betjeman, has made this question more difficult. Philip Hobsbaum in *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* (1979) claims that John Betjeman ‘did what no Georgian ever really managed: married a modern sensibility to a Victorian verse technique’.⁵ For much of this thesis, it will be argued that what Betjeman allegedly managed was frequently the very essence of the Georgian achievement.

This reassessment of the Georgians leads back to the question of re-contextualising them. In 1973, Donald Davie famously argued that the dominant influence in British poetry was not Yeats, Eliot or Pound, but Thomas Hardy. Davie’s *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* does not examine the Georgians, but the place of these poets in the indigenously English, non-Modernist line of poetry will receive some consideration here. Hardy is occasionally considered in connection with the Georgian poets (he himself had reservations about the label these younger writers adopted), but there are several points of comparison in matters of verse form, attitudes to nature, the English regions and the English people which require further exploration. While James Reeves, in his introduction to *Georgian Poetry* (1962), described Hardy as ‘a father figure to the Georgians’,⁶ this is an avenue that has been neglected. In most of the present study’s chapters, the relevance of Hardy will be touched upon.

A number of critics have connected the fall of the Georgians to the First World War, and argued that their brand of liberalism went out of fashion with the decline of Liberal politics. This claim was made as early as 1935 in George Dangerfield’s *The Strange Death of Liberal England*. In some quarters, however, this has been the grounds

for measured re-assessment. C.K. Stead's *The New Poetic* (1964) distanced the 'group of liberal intellectuals which congregated around Eddie Marsh in 1911' from both 'Imperial poets' like Kipling and Newbolt, and the poets of the *London Mercury* like Squire and Freeman.⁷ Robert H. Ross's *The Georgian Revolt* (1965) denied that the Georgians were 'misty-eyed lark-lovers', and also contrasted the original generation with the rear-guard 'Neo-Georgians' of the *Mercury*.⁸ Even Riding and Graves's *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927), a book deeply hostile to the Georgians, admits this political dimension: 'Georgianism was an English dead movement contemporary with Imagism and politically affiliated with the then dominant Liberal party'.⁹ Similarly, Vivian de Sola Pinto's *Crisis in English Poetry* (1951), a book which is kinder to individual Georgians than to the movement itself, makes this connection: Georgian poetry, he says, 'represents that revival of English poetry which had accompanied the resurgence of Liberal England in the reign of Edward VII'.¹⁰ This point needs to be addressed more fully. Their humanitarianism – far more present in their verse than is commonly believed - has not had its due credit as a form of social criticism, and this study will seek to redress this. As John Butt was to reminisce of Lascelles Abercrombie, 'working with him was a humane and liberal education'.¹¹ A 'Humane' and 'liberal' education is what the poetry of Abercrombie and other Georgians has to offer. The early twentieth-century 'Liberal Revival' is usually thought to include the novelists Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy and Forster, socialistic writers like Carpenter, Blatchford and Masterman, and the polemical Edwardian poets Chesterton and Belloc. The Georgian poets are the forgotten participants. It will be argued here that they should indeed be identified as liberals, but also as credible poetic realists. The Georgian approach to issues such as the countryside, the city, poverty, industrial labour and the position of women in society is compassionate, but not as timid and sentimental as is commonly believed.

This socio-economic aspect of Georgianism also relates to matters of form. Many critics have argued that the main achievement of Georgianism was a certain sort of short lyric. Myron Simon's *The Georgian Poetic* (1975), for example, has the effect of bringing Georgian poetry closer in line with Imagism by drawing our attention to a Georgian concern with unadorned sensory experience – a minimalism that can allegedly be traced to the philosophies of Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore (experienced first-hand by Marsh and Brooke). In the main, the present study disagrees with this argument. It may apply to the Georgian lyric, but it underrates the importance of the narrative poem in Georgianism, and does not fully prioritise the fact that Abercrombie, Drinkwater, Bottomley and Gibson led an extensive drama initiative: not only were their plays performed, but they wrote an abundance of poems in dramatic format. This dramatic impulse has little to do with sensory minimalism of the Imagist kind, and, in the work of the Georgians, is the source of much social description. There is a wealth of interaction with broader social issues, and this is where the grounds for a recuperation of Georgianism lie.

With this in mind, there have been surprisingly few theses on Georgian poetry. In common with Simon, Katherine Cooke's 'The Georgian Poets' (1972) sees Georgianism mainly as a poetry of intentional simplicity; Jan Marsh's 'Georgian Poetry and the Land' (1973), in contrast, examines the Georgian movement in the context of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century ruralism; and G.M. Stephen's 'The development of the Georgian Sensibility in the Poetry of the First World War' (1977) considers Georgianism as a broad structure of feeling carried by a generation of young officers into the trenches. These dissertations, written in the 1970s and influenced by both Ross's *The Georgian Revolt* and the climate that produced Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973), show – in differing ways – how the Georgians can be read more constructively. But it is only recently that a relatively small critical

community has returned to these issues and explored them in any depth. The present study intends to view the Georgian poets both textually and contextually, emphasising at once their artistic competence and their political awareness.

So, the Georgians shared among themselves, and with other contemporaneous writers, a liberal impulse. As a 'school of poets', they are different in mood to both their Victorian predecessors and their Modernist successors. In a memoir of Flecker written in 1951, Basil Dean spoke of 'Edward Marsh, enthusiastic supporter of the group of young Georgian poets then giving expression to the artistic impulses of the new century'.¹² Herbert Palmer, in *Post-Victorian Poetry* (1938), remembered a time when the Georgians were considered new, interesting and even iconoclastic: 'The new accepted poet of the century was Stephen Philips, and for rather over a decade, until the Georgians pushed him completely out of the ring, he was much admired – and listened to'.¹³ Georgianism, in part, may have constituted a reaction against the Victorian sonority represented by Philips. He, in particular, was the butt of the younger, pithier writers who would become known as the Georgians. In an undated letter of 1907 to a Miss Head, James Elroy Flecker wrote: 'Poor Stephen Philips. He is an inferior poet. It would be such a pleasure to sandwich a notice of his new book between Miss Lilac Smith and Miss Dorothea Brown in the next batch of "More Verse!"'¹⁴ Similarly, Edward Thomas in *The Country* (1913) dismissed such poets, saying 'William Watson and his fellow poets prattle in rhyme', preferring instead to examine more convincing depictions of the country in Hodgson, de la Mare and Davies.¹⁵

John Press was right when he argued in *A Map of Modern English Verse* (1969) that the Georgians were once seen as innovators rather than conservatives:

In the two or three years before the outbreak of the War, the Imagists and Georgians alike were in revolt against the fag-end of Victorian rhetoric and the entrenched forces of literary conservatism led by such men as Newbolt, Alfred Noyes, Alfred Austin and William Watson.¹⁶

There is, on the other hand, the danger of claiming too much. The Georgians were not simply earlier and less adventurous Modernists, and it is not the purpose of this thesis to attempt to ally them to the Modernism of Eliot and Pound. In terms of metre and versification, the Modernists wrote poetry that was experimental and sophisticated. The formal structures of Georgian poetry, on the other hand, are traditional, low-key and non-Modernistic, but that does not necessarily mean they lack effectiveness or accomplishment. The main weakness of much Georgian verse is an attachment to archaic diction, but that is not as extensive as we might suppose, nor should it bar us from appreciating the poetry's stronger points. The social observation and participation in a broad liberal climate supplies an underrated depth and modernity to verse forms and lexes that have been considered quaint and old-fashioned - as does an underrated realism. Despite their obvious lack of formal initiative, the Georgians were in fact more socially progressive than the reactionary Modernists who became central to the twentieth-century poetic canon. Equally, similarities that arise between Georgians and Modernists as a result of shared social determinants should be acknowledged and discussed (and in later chapters they will be), but every effort will be made not to over-stress them.

It must be noted, however, that some critics – implicitly or explicitly - have connected re-examination of the Georgians with re-examination of the Modernism that sidelined it in the first instance. Kenneth Millard, who prefers the less loaded term 'Edwardian' to 'Georgian', sets out 'to suggest the outline of a kind of modern British poetry which might be distinguished from the more radical Modernism of the years subsequent to the Edwardian period and associated with the names of Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, and Woolf'.¹⁷ This argument is made tenable by its qualifications: Millard rightly speaks of 'modern British poetry' and not 'Modernist' poetry. His Edwardian poets – Newbolt, Masefield, Hardy, Housman, Thomas, Davidson and

Brooke - are not experimental in form, or in some of these cases, not even in content. Millard does, however, argue persuasively that this stage he identifies was characterised by more strength and energy than it is usually accredited with.

Gary Day, in 'Georgians, Imagists and others', arrives at the radical and contentious conclusion that 'what modernism does consciously Georgian poetry does by default'.¹⁸ He argues that there is a 'crisis of subjectivity'¹⁹ at the heart of Georgianism, and that this leads to the Georgians inadvertently displaying the fragmentation which the Modernists articulated in complex symbolic systems. This is true of a fair amount of Georgian poetry, but it is noticeable that Day mainly examines short pieces in which a speaker reflects on nature, the stars, or himself, and arrives at a marked intensity of language. In other words, Day focuses again on the lyric. As is the case with Simon, there is insufficient acknowledgement of the Georgian commitment to the narrative and dramatic forms. As my own discussion gets underway, particularly in the second chapter, it should become apparent that these latter forms were prominent in Georgianism – particularly in its early and formative years.

To establish this 'authentic' Georgian poetry, the present study will concern itself mainly with writers found in the first two *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, and later, with the soldier poets who were their heirs. The poets of the last two anthologies and of the *London Mercury* (Ross's Neo-Georgians) are not as artistically strong; nor are they as representative of the tensions of their time. While attention will be paid to Georgians who are still remembered (Masefield, de la Mare, Davies, Brooke), first-generation Georgians who are now less familiar will also be examined in depth. They include Wilfrid Gibson, Lascelles Abercrombie and John Drinkwater. Despite being the most consistent contributors to the Georgian anthology, and well-known poets in their day, these latter writers were significantly omitted from Reeves's *Georgian Poetry* (1962): the anthologist, of course, must think of marketability, and by the early 1960s, these

poets were largely unknown. However, this has led to a misrepresentative picture. Reeves's 'Georgian poetry' was not Georgian poetry as it was in the 1910s, and this thesis will seek to rectify this. Included as appendix is an 'alternative' anthology of Georgian verse, poems that – in my view – illustrate more fully the strength and richness of Georgianism at its best. Most of these poems feature in the main text of the thesis, and are cross-referenced to the appendix *passim*.

The main focus will be on the poetry of these authors, although extensive use will be made of their other writings. Far from being mere participants in one noted series of anthologies, the Georgians were prolific and diverse writers. Their *oeuvres* include not only poetry collections, but plays, biographies, essays, memoirs, literary histories, personal anthologies, and in some cases, tracts expounding their social and aesthetic views. It is this contextualisation - this extended examination of the Georgians as serious authors engaging with a distinct literary and cultural climate - that has hitherto been lacking.

The remaining two parts of this introduction will suggest that Georgian poetry constituted a genuine revival in British poetry, and it will trace the process by which this underrated movement became an object of critical derision. The present thesis will then make its claims in four main chapters. The first, 'The Dream that Failed: Problematic Romanticism and the Art of the Georgians', will examine in more detail the poetic beliefs and traits of the Georgians, and situate them as writers who were more aware of the process of literary creation than has been acknowledged. It will identify them as late Romantics, who took a different direction to the Modernists. The second, 'Georgian Poetry: Real and Imagined Englands', will consider social themes such as national identity, the country and the city, rural and urban workers, realism, and depictions of the underprivileged. In doing so, it will bring the Georgians closer to important cultural and literary traditions outlined by such critics as Raymond Williams

and Donald Davie. A study that lays much stress on a poetry's realism will recognise that women played an integral role in a 'real' England of proletarian and petit-bourgeois labour, and so the third chapter is entitled 'Representations of Women in Georgianism'. The final chapter, "'We willed it not": the war and the Georgian poets', will re-assess Georgian poetry's relationship with the events of 1914-18. It will be argued that the original Georgians' response to the war was not weak or non-existent, but that it was characterised by the compassion and insight that is to be found in their pre-war poetry. Also, it will seek to resituate the war poets within a Georgian context, and argue that, in this case, the war brought about the peak of the Georgian achievement. This will involve the re-establishment of connections and continuities between the Georgians and those we know primarily as the 'war poets': it will situate both these 'groups' as part of a liberal British twentieth-century poetry distinct from Anglo-Irish-American Modernism. The thesis as a whole will compare and contrast some common features of Georgianism and Modernism, and, while acknowledging their distinctiveness, will do so on terms less prejudicial to the Georgians.

ii. A Genuine Revival: Origins and Trajectory

When discussing the origin of Georgian poetry, the most appropriate place to start is with the editor of the *Georgian Poetry* collections, Edward Marsh. He was not a poet, but a senior civil servant who, despite a busy professional life as Winston Churchill's private secretary, was also a cultural connoisseur. A perceptive amateur, he befriended

and encouraged professional writers, often providing financial support and useful contacts. Foremost among his personal friendships was that with the young poet and socialite, Rupert Brooke. In his *Memoir* of 1915, mourning and celebrating Brooke after his early death, Marsh provides a concise summary of how 'Georgian poetry' came to be:

There was a general feeling among the younger poets that modern English poetry was very good, and sadly neglected by readers. Rupert announced one evening, sitting half-undressed on his bed, that he would write a book of poetry, and publish it as a selection from the works of twelve different writers, six men and six women, all with the most convincing pseudonyms. That, he thought, must make them sit up. It occurred to me that as we both believed there were at least twelve flesh-and-blood poets whose work, if properly thrust under the public's nose, had a good chance of producing the effect he desired, it would be simpler to use the material which was ready to hand. Next day (September 20th it was) we lunched in my rooms with Gibson and Drinkwater, and Harold Monro and Arundel del Re (editor and sub-editor of the then *Poetry Review*, since re-named *Poetry and Drama*), and started the plan of the book which was published in December under the name of *Georgian Poetry, 1911-12*.²⁰

The five *Georgian Poetry* collections were published by Harold Monro, who in 1913 founded The Poetry Bookshop, where poetry was published, readings and discussions took place between contemporary writers, and lodgings were available for struggling poets.

The poets featured in the Georgian collections tended to be those known by Marsh or Monro. Masfield, Gibson and de la Mare were the biggest 'names' to appear in the first volume. The others – for example, Abercrombie, Davies, Brooke, Drinkwater and Monro himself – were active and published poets by 1912, although they were not entrenched enough to be seen as the establishment: that position was occupied by Edwardian poets such as Kipling, Henley, Austin, Newbolt, Noyes, Watson and Philips. *Georgian Poetry I* (1912) contains notable poems by writers still remembered today: Brooke's 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester' and 'The Fish', de la Mare's 'Arabia', 'The Sleeper', and 'The Listeners', Lawrence's 'The Snapdragon', Masfield's 'Biography', and Davies's 'The Kingfisher'.

The Poetry Bookshop, at 35 Devonshire Street, Theobolds Road, was an important site in the development of Georgian poetry, but there was another: the Gloucestershire village of Dymock. In a brief time before the First World War, many of the Georgian poets and their families – Abercrombie, Gibson, Robert Frost, Edward Thomas, Brooke, Drinkwater – gathered or resided in this rural locale. There they were visited by Edward Marsh. The influence of Dymock can be seen in the individual writings of the poets, but the culmination of the gathering was the production of the journal *New Numbers*, from Abercrombie's cottage The Gallows. A neglected text in early twentieth-century poetry, all four of the journal's issues appeared in 1914, and featured just four poets: Gibson, Abercrombie, Drinkwater and Brooke. Given that, in 1914, the first three were established and even prestigious writers, and Brooke was a promising new-comer, this was not the obscure journal that it might seem to a present-day reader. *New Numbers III* (Aug 1914), for instance, contains Gibson's 'Wheels' and 'Hoops', Drinkwater's 'The Storm', Abercrombie's 'The Innocents', and Brooke's 'Tiare Tahiti', 'Retrospect', 'The Great Lover', 'Waikiki' and 'Hauntings' – all powerful Georgian poems. With 200 subscribers, and costing 2s 6d,²¹ *New Numbers* – quite literally, a cottage journal - did not have the large commercial success of *Georgian Poetry*, but shows four poets, all of whom featured prominently in Marsh's collections, engaged together in a common venture, and therefore challenges the assumption that the Georgians were a random group of writers, with few common and defining characteristics. The short-lived journal was pithy and readable, publishing poems that are generally interesting and accomplished. It is, in fact, indicative of the stronger side of Georgianism – perhaps even more so than the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies themselves. In 1955, ten years before the publication of *The Georgian Revolt*, Ross wrote to Gibson: 'I plan to use *New Numbers* as a case study, so to speak of all that was most alive and vital and best in the Georgian movement before the War'.²² 'Alive' and

‘vital’ are fitting words to describe Georgianism at its strongest. While this poetry may fall short of the achievement of Modernism, the present study will show that it was by no means lifeless and dull.

It is the primary contention of this thesis that, in its time, the Georgian movement constituted a genuine if limited poetic revival. When Edward Marsh, in his much-quoted preface to *Georgian Poetry I* (1912), wrote that ‘English poetry is now once again putting on a new strength and beauty’, he was right, and this, I hope, will be demonstrated in the following chapters. Georgian poetry was possibly the last time a poetic movement appealed to a mass readership, and the popular appeal of the genre was evident in the anthology’s sales: *Georgian Poetry I* (1912) sold 15,000 copies, and *Georgian Poetry II* (1915) reached 19,000. After this peak, there was a slight decline: the third collection (1917) sold 16,000 and the fourth 15,000 (1919). Sales of the last volume plunged to 8000 (1922).²³

However, it was this association with a popular readership that in part led to the denigration of the *Georgian Poetry* collections by the Modernist intelligentsia, who cared little for large audiences and accessible forms. The genuineness of the Georgian movement was notably questioned on 16 May 1919, when an unsigned review appeared in *The Athenaeum* entitled ‘Modern Poetry and Modern Society’. Probably written by Middleton Murry, by then the journal’s editor, it is emphatically anti-Georgian. It queries whether any poetic renaissance had taken place, suggesting that Georgianism was more a triumph of publishing than of convincing poetry:

Georgian Poetry was cheap; it was fairly comprehensive. It gave the purchaser the right to claim at least a nodding acquaintance with a dozen poets whom he had not the energy or the inclination to unearth singly. [...] In a company of a dozen ladies each could manifest the individuality of her intellectual interests with a delightfully small expenditure of intellectual effort.²⁴

This judgement misses a crucial point. It may have been true of the anthology itself, especially in its later stages, but not of ‘Georgian poetry’ as a wider movement,

particularly when we restrict that label to the earlier and more interesting poets. Georgian poetry was a significant literary achievement and the present study hopes to show – on a variety of fronts – that it was more serious, more intelligent and more skilled than Modernist-inflected critics such as Murry and Leavis had readers believe for many years.

Nevertheless, Murry's claim draws attention to the marketing of *Georgian Poetry*. With the first anthology going on sale for 3s 6d, it was not particularly cheap, but it was within the range of the genteel class that Murry indicates, and it could be argued that these collections were aimed at a wide middle-class readership. The five books are small and portable, and in terms of design, they are distinguishable from each other by colour: the first is blue, the second brown, the third green, the fourth saffron, and the fifth deep red. Each one opens with the seal of Monro's Poetry Bookshop, a dedication to a leading literary figure, and a prefatory note by Marsh. This uniformity can be interpreted as an aspiration toward selling the volumes as a series: each book is presented as the necessary addition to its predecessor. They are 'readable' and 'collectable'. Murry's suggestion might have been true up to a point, but not necessarily from the outset. On 7 February 1913, Marsh wrote to Robert Bridges, revealing that Marsh was as surprised as anyone by the initial success, and that a series was not planned in the first instance:

The sales have been prodigious! The first and second editions of 500 each were sold before they were ready, and the 3rd has made a good start. But for the damnable delays of the printer, I could have sold more already. Newbolt is going to lecture on it, and Max Beerbohm has done a caricature – so its really quite a boom!

I don't think of adding to the present volume, but I think I may very likely bring out a second series for 1913-14 if they turn out to be vintage years.²⁵

This letter also raises another key issue. Beerbohm's caricature, which became the frontispiece for *The Blue Review* of May 1913, is entitled 'A Study of Dubiety', and shows Marsh standing meekly to attention before Churchill, with the caption: 'Mr

Edward Marsh wondering whether to ask his chief's leave to include in his anthology of "Georgian Poetry" Mr George Wyndham's famous and lovely poem: "we want eight and we won't wait". This phrase refers to the 1909 naval scare, and the demand in the popular press for eight rather than four Dreadnoughts to be built to counter Germany's growing sea strength.²⁶ Beerbohm's sketch suggests that Marsh is more concerned with affairs of state in his professional capacity, than affairs of culture in his amateur one. Many of the later objections to Georgianism were that a man who was not a poet himself seemed to be playing an entrepreneurial role in the development of poetry. Marsh acknowledged this in his preface to *Georgian Poetry V* (1922) when the series was in terminal decline:

They [the critics] went on to write as if the editor of *Georgian Poetry* were a kind of public functionary, like the president of the royal academy; and they asked – again on this assumption, very properly – who was E.M. that he should bestow and withhold crowns and sceptres, and decide that this or that poet did not count.

The views taken by Beerbohm and Murry anticipate future disparagement. When poetry was becoming more esoteric under the Modernists, Georgianism, with its large sales and its association with an amateur figure, was seen as too accessible to be 'serious' poetry.

Marsh, and his influence upon the Georgians, while rightly not to be underestimated, can nevertheless be overstated. Myron Simon, for example, sees Marsh's poetic preferences as not just important, but central. I would have to question this. While his friendship and enthusiasm were invaluable to the Georgians, and his opinions respected by them, he did not 'shape' these writers. His letters, in fact, reveal a gentle and even self-effacing character, who was a perceptive if traditional critic of poetry, and who encouraged, but did not dictate. His views were not always in tune with what the poets were trying to achieve, and it is hard to see his preferences and

personality as the guiding force of the whole Georgian movement. For example, in a letter of 22 February 1912, he introduced Robert Bridges to Brooke's poetry:

I think he has such a great talent that I feel almost justified in asking you to take an interest in his work – if you have time to read it, I beg you to begin with 'Dust', 'The Fish', 'Town and Country', and 'Dining Room Tea'. My reason for making you Cicerone is that he has printed some violent and disagreeable poems which if you chanced on them first would prejudice you against him! While if you came on them after reading the good ones I hope you may look on them as the pardonable sins of youth.²⁷

The present study will later argue that 'violent and disagreeable poems' were important in Georgianism. If Marsh had any aversion to such material, he did not let it affect his work as an anthologist, since *Georgian Poetry II* contains much material that challenges received notions of good taste (this will also be considered in more detail later). Nevertheless, Marsh was clearly aware of developments and shifts within the work of the poets. Similarly, on 24 July 1913, he wrote to Bridges on Flecker's behalf:

If it comes your way, I wish you to look at a small volume by one of the 'Georgian poets' – 'The Golden Journey to Samarkand' by J.E. Flecker, published 10 days ago by one Goschen. It is far above his former work, by which I think you were a little 'interested' – I do believe it is the real thing for once. 'Georgian Poetry' is now in a 6th edition and still selling!²⁸

It was unfortunate for Marsh and the Georgian poets that in his final preface (1922), attached to a book which he knew represented the decline and fall of Georgian poetry, he chose to distance its achievement further from Modernism than necessary, making it far easier for him to be stigmatised as a reactionary in later years:

I may add one word bearing on my aim in selection. Much admired modern work seems to me, in its lack of inspiration and its disregard of form, like gravy imitating lava. Its upholders may retort that much of the work which I prefer seems to them, in its lack of inspiration, its comparative finish, like tapioca imitating pearls. Either view – possibly both – might be right.²⁹

This proclamation was an error of judgement considering the low quality of verse within *Georgian Poetry V*, and especially in comparison to the much stronger material in the first two collections, in *New Numbers*, and in the work of the emergent

Modernists. As several scholars have pointed out - most notably Robert H. Ross - the final two anthologies were peopled by less accomplished writers – Squire, Freeman, Shanks and Turner – weaker poets who by then were (unjustly) seen as representing late Georgianism. Moreover, the equivocation and defensive tone in the final sentence indicates that Marsh's confidence of judgement had been eroded since he wrote the more buoyant comments accompanying *Georgian Poetry I* (1912) ten years earlier. In respect of this, it will emerge in the course of the present study that Georgianism's status as a movement which 'declined' and was ousted by another kind of modern poetry should not obscure its initial strengths. And with this in mind, the next part of this section seeks to explore and revise the oppositional understanding of Georgianism/Modernism.

ii. Georgians and Modernists as Contemporaries

Georgianism and Modernism are often thought to have been rival movements in the early twentieth century. While this thesis maintains that they do, in fact, represent different directions in English poetry, it must be acknowledged that the dichotomy between them has not always been as pronounced as it is today. When viewed in the context of a broad pre-war revolt against Victorianism, one can identify a measure of common ground between the Georgians and their more radical contemporaries.

Harold Monro's *Some Contemporary Poets* (1920) is particularly revealing of the pre-Modernist situation. Samuel Hynes described the book as 'a stubborn defence of lost Georgian causes that places D.H. Lawrence alongside Helen Parry Eden, and devotes a chapter to Abercrombie, Bottomley, Gibson, and Ronald Ross'.³⁰ It might be argued, conversely, that Monro's book is simply true to the critical climate of its time. In 1920, Lawrence was not treated as reverently as he is now, and Abercrombie and Gibson were both well-known poets. *Some Contemporary Poets* reveals the complexity of British poetry before the critical construction of the Modernist canon. The word 'Modernism' is not to be found: Monro speaks of 'contemporary poets' and 'young moderns'. These include poets of the Edwardian years such as Bridges, Chesterton, and Doughty; most of the Georgians; and writers like Pound, Hueffer and H.D. whom we now see as early Modernists. They are all considered part of a broad new picture, part of a general revolt, and little differentiation is made as to 'school' or 'movement'.

This might have been how it was – to a degree. Monro was no reactionary, but a publisher of diverse tastes who was interested in all 'new' developments: his Poetry Bookshop produced both the *Georgian Poetry* collections and *Des Imagistes*. As the Imagist F.S. Flint remarked of Monro in 1933:

He was liberal minded and without literary prejudices. He published both the work of the Georgians in the so-called traditional forms and the poems of the Imagists in the miscalled free verse; and he found pleasure in both and reasons for rejecting neither.³¹

The Poetry Bookshop was a centre for all innovation, and it was not only Georgians such as de la Mare and Davies who gave readings on the premises: Yeats, Eliot and Pound did too. Moreover, Monro was as broad-minded a poet as he was a publisher. Not only did he appear in all five *Georgian Poetry* books, but also the *Catholic Anthology 1914-1915* (1915) where his 'Hearthstone', 'Suburb', 'Milk for the Cat' and 'The Strange Companion' appeared alongside such landmark Modernist poems as

Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', T.E. Hulme's 'Trenches: St Eloi', and Ezra Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro'.

This initial lack of division is further illustrated by the substantial part played by the Georgians in the early Modernist periodical *Rhythm/The Blue Review*. Wilfrid Gibson worked as Middleton Murry's assistant, and was a particularly prolific contributor: his poems published there include: 'The Dancing Seal' (*Rhythm IV*, 1912), 'The Crane' (*Rhythm V*, 1912), 'The Shirt' (*Rhythm VI*, 1912), 'Geraniums' (*Rhythm VII*, 1912), 'The Money' (*Rhythm VIII*, 1912), 'Mabel' (*Rhythm IX*, 1912), 'The Lodging House' (*Rhythm X*, 1912), 'Sight' (*Rhythm XI*, 1912), 'The Dreadnought' (*Rhythm XII*, 1913), and 'The Vixen' (*The Blue Review*, May 1913). He was also a rigorous reviewer for Murry, sympathetic to hard-hitting and adventurous writing - in *Rhythm IX*, for example, he praised Aleister Crowley's *Mortadello* for being 'damnably accomplished'.³² Other Georgians also contributed consistently. W.H. Davies appeared regularly: 'Young Beauty' (*Rhythm V*), 'The Two Lives' (*Rhythm VII*), 'Smiles' (*Rhythm VIII*) and 'The Beggars' Hunt' (*The Blue Review*, May, 1913). Rupert Brooke, often considered the paradigmatic Georgian, also took part in Murry's venture: 'The Night Journey' appeared in *Rhythm* No.12 (Jan 1913), and he later contributed 'Love' and 'The Busy Heart' to *The Blue Review* No.3 (July 1913). Lascelles Abercrombie published 'The Wedding Ring' in *Rhythm XII* (1913), and John Drinkwater's 'Travel Talk' appeared in *Rhythm XI* (1912). Walter de la Mare's *Rhythm* work included 'The Mocking Fairy' (*Rhythm XIV*) and 'The Song of the Mad Prince' (*The Blue Review*, May, 1913).

In *Rhythm/The Blue Review*, the work of the Georgians was featured alongside the avant-garde art of Picasso and Gaudier-Brzeska, the short fiction of Katherine Mansfield, and the aesthetic writings of Murry himself. This might seem incongruous to a present-day reader. It must be remembered, however, that in 1912, the Georgians were

young and daring poets, the 'Modernists' of their time. Eliot was not then a cultural arbiter, and Pound, while active and energetic, was seen as a comparatively minor figure ('Ezra has long been antipathetic to his betters', wrote Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley in July 1914, referring to growing hostility between Pound and Abercrombie).³³ Perhaps most revealing of the Georgians' presence at the centre of innovation is an undated letter of 1913 written by Wilfrid Gibson on Murry's *Blue Review* notepaper:

Dear de la Mare: the following is a rough statement of the affairs (present and prospective) of this magazine. 'Rhythm', (which was losing about £9 per month) has been leased, as a speculation, for nine months by Martin Secker, who will publish it, (under the name of 'The Blue Review', paying for the cost of production only, and taking the receipts during that period. After the nine months, the magazine will revert to its owners, J. Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield.³⁴

Here, one can see Gibson, a poet now dismissed as a 'Georgian', giving a prospective contributor, de la Mare, another poet so dismissed, an insider's précis of the affairs of a magazine considered important to the development of Modernism. Rupert Brooke gave even greater emphasis to the Georgians' involvement. He wrote to Gwen Raverat in January 1913:

I hope you'll contribute to *Rhythm*. It's being reorganised, you see. It has had some good things in it. It will have more. Albert is in charge of the organisation of the pictures – three or four of us of the literature – all under the editor. The staff poets are me, Gibson, Davies, de la Mare and Abercrombie, all good poets, all good men, and all Europeans.³⁵

Brooke does not see himself and the other Georgians simply as minor English poets, but as significant and acclaimed 'Europeans'. This wider recognition will be examined in more detail later, but here we might note that this is a Modernistic way of viewing poetry – Yeats, Eliot, and Pound saw themselves as participating in a wider, European tradition.

There are further instances in which Georgians and Modernists interact without invidious division. Murry's *Countries of the Mind* (1922) included an eulogistic chapter on the poetry of de la Mare, grouping him among authors who are now canonical. De la Mare himself was friend to both Murry and Katherine Mansfield. D.H. Lawrence, another friend of the Murrays, is the clearest illustration of the difficulty of rigid classifications; he appeared in *Rhythm, Des Imagistes* and four of the five *Georgian Poetry* collections. Detailed textual correspondences between Georgianism and Modernism will be considered later, but critics and poets of the 1910s, who were not initially geared toward seeing 'Georgians' and 'Modernists' as separate camps, could make observations that are now surprising. On 7 February 1913, Marsh wrote to Robert Bridges:

Dear Mr Bridges,

I am so glad to get your letter and to find that you don't think the book perfectly awful! I'm specially pleased at your liking Gibson. I think he is the most careful artist of them all. I wonder where you find the post-impressionism – I thought I had kept out all that sort of thing – but I suppose it has become so much part of the London air that one doesn't notice it.³⁶

These days the Georgians are rarely associated with 'post-impressionism', but the eclecticism of the London 'air' is indeed a likely explanation for any possible similarities. Moreover, Brooke published 'The Post-Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries' in *The Cambridge Magazine* (29 Aug 1914), an article in which he is generally critical, but nevertheless engages in detail with Bell, Fry, Picasso and Cézanne.

As the 1920s approached, relations between Modernists and Georgians became factional, and then hostile, but works making no sharp division between them and reflecting the catholic nature of the original scene continued to appear. I.A. Richards's *Poetry and Science* (1926) does not talk of Modernism, but examines Hardy, de la Mare, Yeats and Lawrence in a chapter called 'Some Modern Poets' ('modern' rather

than 'Modernist'). Charles Williams's *Poetry at Present* (1930) also makes no mention of Modernism, but offers what his title promises: 'poetry at present'. Not only does it consider Eliot, Yeats and the Sitwells, but Gibson, de la Mare and Abercrombie too. Other than Hardy, no poet is presented as being any more eminent than any other. At one point, Williams writes: 'even Mr Yeats, even Mr Abercrombie, occasionally shoots an arrow awry'.³⁷ Today, presenting Abercrombie in the same light as Yeats would be unthinkable. Williams, one of C.S. Lewis's 'Inklings', was part of a literary grouping whose values and attitudes were shaped prior to Leavisite scholarship, and this is evident in judgements that can seem eccentric to a reader of today. His appreciation of the Georgians is further indicated in that he made the selection of Gibson's verse that would become *Solway Ford and Other Poems* (1945), and was a friend of both Gibson and de la Mare.

As critics of Leavis's generation began to write of 'Modernism' and 'the Georgians', some poets and scholars of the 1930s stuck to the old broader view. Yeats's *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936) took into account the Modernists, but also gave the Georgians ample coverage, and W.J. Turner, a *London Mercury* poet, is put on a level with Pound and Eliot.³⁸ Herbert Palmer's *Post-Victorian Poetry* (1938) seeks to downplay the role of Eliot, and treats the Georgian movement as the momentous event in twentieth-century poetry: Gibson has 'taken over the mantle of Crabbe',³⁹ and Abercrombie is 'the Robert Browning of our days'.⁴⁰ Frank Swinnerton, in *The Georgian Literary Scene* (1938), uses 'Georgian' to denote both the Georgian poets and literature in general in the reign of George V. 'It would be very convenient,' he writes, 'for those fashionable since 1920 if they could appropriate the Georgian name to themselves'.⁴¹ Viewing 'Georgian' as a sought-after label might seem anachronistic: for, by 1938, 'Georgian' was generally a pejorative term in the eyes of 'those fashionable since 1920'. However, only twenty years had elapsed between Swinnerton's

date of publication and a time when the Georgians were still read without ridicule. Swinnerton, friend and admirer of Bennett and Galsworthy, was part of that liberal generation who took the Georgian poets seriously. Such books indicate that not all scholars embraced Modernism wholeheartedly and maintained some respect for what had gone before. Indeed, Eliot and Wyndham Lewis are themselves considered as part of Swinnerton's 'Georgian literary scene'.

The case should not, of course, be overstated. Even if we accept Bernard Bergonzi's provocative suggestion that 'Modernism has never completely triumphed'⁴² (from his tellingly-entitled *The Myth of Modernism*, 1986), we must acknowledge that it has sidelined its alternatives, and in some cases relegated them to obscurity. It is now time to examine that process in more detail. In 1927, Laura Riding and Robert Graves (who once contributed to the *Georgian Poetry* anthology) published *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, which considers Georgianism in a chapter entitled 'Modernist Poetry and Dead Movements'.⁴³ Theirs is not, as some believe, the earliest use of the word Modernism in a twentieth-century literary context: in *The World and the Artist* (1922), John Drinkwater wrote that 'the tendency to value too highly the ingenuity that works divorced from the profounder realities of life is by no means the gravest mistake of the indiscriminating apostle of Modernism'.⁴⁴ Riding and Graves's book, however, was one of the first truly sustained attacks on Georgianism which attempted to set in place an alternative poetry: the work of Marianne Moore is presented as the necessary antidote to that of Drinkwater, who is cited as an instance of complete ineptitude. Riding and Graves consolidated their anti-Georgian stance in *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1928), which argues that the proliferation of anthologies in the early twentieth century led to readers not discovering poets for themselves, and poets writing brief and unchallenging poems for convenient inclusion in anthologies. De la Mare's 'Arabia'

and Masfield's 'Cargoes' are condemned as easy anthology pieces. Riding and Graves go further in seeing the very act of anthologising as egotistical and stifling:

Mr de la Mare's anthology *Come Hither* is an extreme case. The poems included are so honestly Mr de la Mare's favourite poems that they seem a mere extension of the de la Mare atmosphere backwards through English poetry. A tyranny which no personality has a right to exercise over the reader.⁴⁵

In the conclusion to their book, Riding and Graves attack both the Georgian and the Imagist collections, seeing both as conducive to a general decline in creativity:

Georgian Poetry, like the *Imagist Anthology*, did little in the long run but institute a fashion in verse-writing and make it difficult for the poets included to shake off the fashion or the label. The rejection of a supplement to a corpus of poetry, the rejection in fact of the Living-Poet anthology in any disguise, seems to bring about the fate of contemporary poetry with contemporaries to a dead halt. Yet nothing could be more desirable.⁴⁶

Riding and Graves are right in observing that the Georgian poets declined with the later *Georgian Anthologies*, but this need not be the final word on the poetry itself. Riding and Graves make the same mistake as Middleton Murry. The objections to the *Georgian Poetry* collections, particularly in the later stages, are justified; but Georgianism as a poetic genre is not investigated in any depth at all.

F.R. Leavis's influential *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) was the text most instrumental in establishing the canonicity of Modernism. The book attempts to sideline Edwardian and Georgian poetry, and set in place Yeats, Pound and Eliot (with Gerard Manley Hopkins as forerunner) as the new ruling practitioners. Leavis's direction, however, was anticipated and even surpassed: he is loud in his condemnation of the Georgians, but he does at least acknowledge them. Two earlier books ignored non-Modernist poetry completely. John Sparrow's *Sense and Poetry* (1930) makes no mention of the Georgians, and concerns itself solely with Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Leavis's early criticism. Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1930) took a similar approach. 'It is not usually recognised,' wrote Wilson, 'that writers such as W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Marcel Proust and Paul Valery represent the

culmination of a self-conscious and very important literary movement'.⁴⁷ There is not a single English author in his analysis. But what Wilson saw at this time as a different angle later became the norm in giving the American and Irish Modernists the central or only focus (Wilson was writing at a time of disillusionment with British poetry. He studied at Princeton when the fiercely conservative Alfred Noyes was professor of poetry, so it is understandable that in his eyes the poetry of England itself would be equated with convention and obsolescence).

Another charge implicit in Wilson's decision to shun the Georgians is that they were stolidly insular, and increasingly irrelevant among wider developments. But while it is true that they were concerned mainly with England, and a particular conception of Englishness, they did not practice the unapologetic John Bullism of Austin and Noyes. On the contrary, they were more mindful of the international scene than is often thought. Abercrombie, in 'The Drama of John Drinkwater' (c. 1935) reflected upon the Georgian interest in dramatic poetry, and the ultimate decline of that medium:

When I was a young man, I had a great belief in the future of poetic drama. [...] There were many who thought the same, not only in England, but throughout Europe. And it seemed that our belief was not merely encouraged, but justified, by what was happening. There was Yeats in Ireland, D'Annunzio in Italy, Vertaerun in Belgium, Hauptmann in Germany, Rostand in France: a little later Gordon Bottomley in England. And there was also John Drinkwater.⁴⁸

Here, it is pointed out that what Georgians such as Bottomley, Drinkwater and Abercrombie himself were trying to revive was part of a wider international movement for innovation. It was not necessarily successful in the long run, but the Georgians should not be blamed disproportionately. That Georgian poetry was a more international phenomenon than is frequently supposed is further indicated by a letter of Abercrombie's to Robert Bridges on 12 June 1930:

A movement has been started to erect a monument to Rupert Brooke near his grave in Skyros. It seems to have begun in Greece, but it has considerable dimensions and importance, and has become international, committees having

been formed in Athens, Cairo, Paris, Geneva, Brussels, Madrid etc, and though it is primarily meant as a tribute to Rupert, it has insensibly become one to English poetry itself. [...] There is no question that the committee is a serious one; in Paris, the committee includes Paul Verlaine, Charles Villone, Duhamel, André Gide, Paul Morand; in Greece Venjelors not only backs it but subscribes.⁴⁹

This is surely appropriate when we remember that Brooke considered himself (and other Georgians) 'European'. The standard view of the Georgians as a dreary little cul-de-sac in a tired tradition of British poetry has obscured the fact that, for some years, these writers enjoyed wider fame. The reputation of Brooke, especially in the ten years or so following his death, was immense. This, however, was lost in ensuing years, as Leavis's dismissive view of 'the Georgian Weekenders'⁵⁰ became more prevalent.

The process of marginalising the Georgians was then greatly aided by Michael Roberts's *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1936). Roberts was very much a pro-Modernist writer, and his collection did much to foreground Yeats, Eliot and Pound. His other anthologies – *New Signatures* (1932) and *New Country* (1933) – also helped establish the reputations of the 1930s poets (Auden, Day-Lewis, Spender) who would follow the Modernists in setting the poetic climate. *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* is a stark contrast to Yeats's *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* of the same year. Roberts's volume simply omits the Georgians. Monro, Lawrence and Graves may make appearances, but the majority of those closely associated with Edward Marsh and the first Georgian anthology – Brooke, Gibson, Abercrombie and de la Mare – are absent. Roberts admits that his collection does not give the complete picture:

It might be argued that this collection represents the most significant poetry of this age, but the omission of Charles Sorley, Walter de la Mare, Edmund Blunden, Edwin Muir, William Plomer, all of whom seem to me to have written good poems without having been compelled to make any notable development in terms of poetic technique, is sufficient evidence that this is not intended to be a comprehensive anthology of the best poems of the age.⁵¹

This was damaging for the Georgians. The fact that Roberts made this proviso meant that future anthologists and critics would not have to – they built on the foundations he

had laid. The absence of the Georgians would soon become the norm, and it led to the Yeats-Pound-Eliot structure that was typical of twentieth-century poetry criticism from the 1940s, and which still persists today.

The Georgians were mixed in their response to this relegation. De la Mare continued to write poetry, developed themes that were present in his work from the start, and in later life received measured tributes from Eliot ('To Walter de la Mare', 1948), Day-Lewis ('Who goes there?', 1948), and Auden (*A Selection of de la Mare's Verse*, 1963). Monro saw that the scene was changing, and distanced himself from the venture he was so influential in launching: he attached the following note to the second section of his volume of poetry, *Real Property* (1922): 'some of them are tainted with slight *Georgian* affections, which no amount of polishing could successfully remove' (his emphasis).⁵² This attempt to cast off his original Georgian colours and assimilate into the new climate might be compared with that of Robert Graves, who not only launched one of the most sustained attacks against Georgianism, but actively suppressed his own first two poetry collections: *Over the Brazier* (1916) and *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1917). The poems in both collections are transparent in their debt to de la Mare, and are notably absent from his *Collected Poems* (1925).

Other Georgians were more combative and replied with their own provocations; and this undoubtedly exacerbated the antipathy of the new Modernist writers. In the aptly-titled *The Other Point of View* (1928), Drinkwater spoke of 'a young Oxford poet who dismisses most of that group known as the Georgians as pretenders or half-wits' and claims 'this, it need not be said, is mainly comic in its aspect'.⁵³ In *This Troubled World* (1933), he further attacked an unnamed critic:

A critic of some fugitive reputation in England has recently published a book in which he maintains that since Keats there had been no poet of any consequence in that country, with the exception of Gerard Hopkins, until the appearance of Mr T.S. Eliot. It is easy to dismiss this as the folly that it is.⁵⁴

Drinkwater, it might be remembered, was presented in Leavis's *New Bearings* as the epitome of poetic weakness – just as he was in Graves and Riding's *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*. Perhaps understandably, the bitterness did not leave him. In *English Poetry* (1938), published a year after his death, he condemned the 'childish misrepresentation of the Georgian material' on the part of those 'who have followed Mr T.S. Eliot'.⁵⁵ In a similar manner, Wilfrid Gibson wrote in an undated paper (probably of the early 1930s) that

Some of these clever young men, too, have been needlessly offensive in the arrogance of their adolescent swagger (an adolescence in some cases unduly prolonged) and have acted on the assumption that their own epoch-making productions have inevitably liquidated the work of their immediate predecessors.⁵⁶

The present thesis does not seek to ally the original generation of Georgians with the conservatism of J.C. Squire and the *London Mercury* during the 1920s, but there can be little doubt that the association of Squire with the Georgian name further eroded the standing of the original writers that Edward Marsh brought together in 1911.

During the late 1930s, the 1940s and the 1950s, critics mainly ignored the Georgians. When they were acknowledged, it was to claim their irrelevance to modern life. At the same time, such scholars often selected one or two Georgians, and attempted to rescue them from association with the others. Edwin Muir's *The Present Age from 1914* (1939) is dismissive of the Georgians as a whole, but 'Freeman, who was associated with this group must be partly exempted from this generalisation; he was a good minor poet with an apprehension of the pathos of life'.⁵⁷ Muir goes on: 'Lascelles Abercrombie must also be exempted by virtue of his intellectual imagination, slightly dry but at its best powerful'.⁵⁸ Philip Henderson, in *The Poet and Society* (1939), complained that 'de la Mare retired to the nursery, to his thicket of dreams; Flecker went off on his Golden Road to Samarkand; W.H. Davies, the Tramp Poet, went on staring at cows'.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, he adds that Masfield made a 'real attempt to come to

terms with the realities of the subject'.⁶⁰ David Daiches's *Poetry and the Modern World* (1940) stated: 'The Georgian anthologies took no cognisance of verse that Gibson spent most of his time writing. [...] Only a very few aspects of Gibson's work would have contributed to the Georgian retrenchment'.⁶¹ Vivian de Sola Pinto, in *Crisis in English Poetry* (1951), is likewise unsympathetic to Georgianism, but Abercrombie 'was a remarkable poet whose genius was to a large extent stifled by [his own] academic theory',⁶² and a measure of approval is also given to Masefield. This special pleading for varying individual poets strengthens the case for a re-evaluation of the Georgian movement as a whole. One can discern in much criticism of the 40s and 50s an awareness that there may have been 'good' poets consigned to critical oblivion; indeed, it is one of the main aims of the present study to investigate this possibility.

Those who have attempted a reassessment have been acknowledged in the introduction. It is more significant that many have chosen not to. The orthodoxy that keeps the Georgians away from the critical mainstream is a strong one. Whether by accident or design, even studies that trace a non-Modernist line of poetry tend to bypass the Georgians. Davie's *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* is a well-known instance. Another is John Powell Ward's 'The Solitary Note: Edward Thomas and Modernism' (1978), in which the Georgians are not only divorced from Modernism but also 'the English line' (a tradition of introspective British verse which receives fuller treatment in Ward's full-length study, *The English Line*, 1991). He stresses –

Thomas's importance in understanding 'the English line', and the place of Pound and Eliot next to it. The Georgians were not descendants of that line, certainly not in practice. Reading de la Mare, Flecker, Masefield and the rest, one notices most a near absence of interest in anything beyond poem-making itself.⁶³

Philip Hobsbaum's *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* (1979) takes a similar approach:

The chief heroes of English Modernism died sixty years ago, in the First World War. I am thinking particularly of Edward Thomas, Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg. They seem quite distinct from the Georgians, on the one hand, and the Modernists on the other.⁶⁴

The need to re-assess Thomas and Owen as 'English *Modernism*' rather than a strong traditional poetry betrays a viewpoint that has itself been conditioned by Modernism, and one that is still the norm. No scholar is immune from the ideologies that traverse his or her discipline, but there is a need to be aware of them. As long ago as 1961, C.K. Stead spoke of the critic seeing 'the Georgians through spectacles provided for him by the later, more vigorous movement led by Pound and Eliot'.⁶⁵ Critics continue to do this, but it may also be possible to re-assess Georgian poetry as a phenomenon in itself rather than merely identifying three or four 'good' Georgians and presenting them as another sort of Modernism.

That said, however, it is clear that any reassessment of Georgianism must, to some extent, depend on Modernism and its influence, since it is impossible to consider an eclipsed poetry without taking into account the values of the poetry and criticism that eclipsed it. It might be argued that new perspectives on Georgianism are tenable because Modernism itself continues to be in a state of flux. The essays in Bradbury and McFarlane's *Modernism* (1977) are still esteemed, but new viewpoints continue to appear. Stan Smith's *The Origins of Modernism* (1994) sees Modernism in terms of origins, voice, consciousness and its connection to Postmodernism. Peter Nichols, in *Modernisms* (1995), emphasises the international nature of Modernism, and that Yeats-Eliot-Pound Modernism was just one element in a wider European phenomenon. Rainer Emig's *Modernism in Poetry* (1995) examines Modernism in the light of myth, psychoanalysis, and gender relations. Modernism has always thrived through the expulsion of its own dead letters (and sometimes their return and re-evaluation). Leavis attacked the work of William Carlos Williams (likening him, in fact, to the Georgians) and brought about its neglect, only for his reputation to be revived years later. H.D., so

mercilessly savaged by Riding and Graves, is once again seen as an important poet. Edith Sitwell and the poets of *Wheels* remain neglected, but interest is starting to rekindle. It is clear that views of Modernism have not remained static, but are undergoing revision. The contention here is that in the interests of a more nuanced and complete picture of the early twentieth century, the hegemonic status of Modernism should be interrogated, as should the downgrading which that process has involved of contemporaneous writers such as the Georgians.

Notes to Introduction

- ¹ F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London: Chatto and Windus 1932; repr. London: Pelican, 1972), p.57.
- ² C. Day Lewis, *A Hope for Poetry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1934), p.2.
- ³ Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry* (London: Oxford, 1938), p.11.
- ⁴ *ibid.*, p.9.
- ⁵ Philip Hobsbaum, *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), p.304.
- ⁶ *Georgian Poetry*, ed. by James Reeves (Penguin: Middlesex, 1962), p.xvi.
- ⁷ C.K. Stead, *The New Poetic* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p.189.
- ⁸ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), pp.14-20.
- ⁹ Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1927), p.12 and p.118.
- ¹⁰ Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940* (London: Hutchinson, 1951), p.130.
- ¹¹ Brotherton Library, Abercrombie MS, B16846-16911
- ¹² James Elroy Flecker, *Hassan*, ed. by Basil Dean (London: Heinemann 1922; repr. 1970), p.xii.
- ¹³ Herbert Palmer, *Post-Victorian Poetry* (London: Dent, 1938), p.61.
- ¹⁴ Bodleian Library, Flecker MS, 120
- ¹⁵ Edward Thomas, *The Country* (London: Batsford, 1913), p.40.
- ¹⁶ John Press, *A Map of Modern English Verse* (London: Oxford, 1969), p.108.
- ¹⁷ Kenneth Millard, *Edwardian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p.11.
- ¹⁸ Gary Day, 'The Poets: Georgians, Imagists and Others', in *Literature and Culture in Modern Britain. Volume One 1900-1929*, ed. by Clive Bloom (London: Longman, 1993), pp.30-54 (p.40).
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.38.
- ²⁰ *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, ed. by Gavin Ewart, Memoir by Edward Marsh (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), p.89.
- ²¹ Keith Clark, *The Muse Colony* (Bristol: Redcliffe, 1992), p.53.
- ²² Brotherton Library, Gibson MS, 10
- ²³ *Georgian Poetry 1911-1922. The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Timothy Rogers (London: Routledge, 1977), p.17.
- ²⁴ John Middleton Murry, 'Modern Poetry and Modern Society', *The Athenaeum* 4646 (1919), 323.
- ²⁵ Bodleian Library, Bridges MS, 112
- ²⁶ Full details of this can be found in Donald Read, *Edwardian England 1801-15: Society and Politics* (London: Harrap, 1972), pp.241-2.
- ²⁷ Bodleian Library, Bridges MS, 112
- ²⁸ Bodleian Library, Bridges MS, 112
- ²⁹ *Georgian Poetry V 1920-1922*, ed. by Edward Marsh (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1922), preface page.
- ³⁰ Samuel Hynes, 'Harold Monro' in *Edwardian Occasions*, (London: Routledge, 1972), pp. 98-103 (p.99).
- ³¹ Harold Monro, *Collected Poems*, edited by Alida Monro with a biographical sketch by F.S. Flint and a critical note by T.S. Eliot (London: Cobden Sanderson 1933), pp.xi-xii.
- ³² Wilfrid Gibson, 'Aleister Crowley's Mortadello', *Rhythm*, X, (1912) 234.
- ³³ Letter of 7 July 1914, in R. George Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley* (London: Oxford 1968), p.236. The full story of the tensions between Abercrombie with Pound, and the popular but greatly exaggerated story that Pound challenged Abercrombie to a duel, is explored in Esther Safer Fisher's 'The Pound/Abercrombie Feud' in *Four Decades of Poetry 1890-1930*, 1, (1976) 66-69.
- ³⁴ Bodleian Library, MS de la Mare, 176
- ³⁵ *The Letters of Rupert Brooke*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes (London: Faber, 1968), p.419.
- ³⁶ Bodleian Library, MS Bridges, 112
- ³⁷ Charles Williams, *Poetry at Present* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p.41.
- ³⁸ *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, ed. by W.B. Yeats (London: Oxford University Press, 1936, repr. 1966), p.xviii.
- ³⁹ Herbert Palmer, *Post-Victorian Poetry* (London: Dent, 1938), p.137.
- ⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.76.
- ⁴¹ Frank Swinnerton, *The Georgian Literary Scene* (London: Dent, 1938), pp.3-4.
- ⁴² Bernard Bergonzi, *The Myth of Modernism* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), p.xvi.
- ⁴³ Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1927), pp.102-112.

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- ⁴⁴ John Drinkwater, *The World and the Artist* (London: The Bookman's Journal, 1922), p.16.
- ⁴⁵ Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (London: Cape, 1927), p.35.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.192.
- ⁴⁷ Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931; repr. 1959), p.1.
- ⁴⁸ Lascelles Abercrombie, 'The Drama of John Drinkwater', *Four Decades of Poetry 1890-1930*, 4 (1977), 271-281 (p.271).
- ⁴⁹ Bodleian Library, MS. Bridges, 106
- ⁵⁰ F.R. Leavis, *Revaluation* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936; repr. 1959), p.119.
- ⁵¹ *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*, ed. by Michael Roberts, 2nd edn, rev. by Peter Porter (London: Faber 1936; repr. 1982), p.21.
- ⁵² Harold Monro, *Real Property* (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1922), p.50.
- ⁵³ John Drinkwater, *The Other Point of View* (London: London University Press, 1928), p.23.
- ⁵⁴ John Drinkwater, *This Troubled World* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1933), p.18.
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- ⁵⁶ Cheltenham and Gloucester Dymock Poets Archive, Gibson MS, N.D.
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- ⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.98.
- ⁵⁹ Philip Henderson, *The Poet and Society* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1939), p.83.
- ⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.83.
- ⁶¹ David Daiches, *Poetry and the Modern World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1940), p.48.
- ⁶² Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940* (London: Hutchinson, 1951), p.125.
- ⁶³ J.P. Ward, 'The Solitary Note: Edward Thomas and Modernism', in *The Art of Edward Thomas*, ed. by Jonathan Barker (Glamorgan: Poetry Wales Press, 1987) pp.49-60 (p.51).
- ⁶⁴ Philip Hobsbaum, *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p.298.
- ⁶⁵ C.K. Stead, *The New Poetic*, p.81.

The Dream That Failed: Problematic Romanticism and the Art of the Georgians

Commenting upon the poetry of de la Mare in 1928, Forrest Reid remarked: 'Everywhere, from the hills and the streams and the woods, voices call; but they may be mocking voices, and are never the clear assuring voices Wordsworth heard in Nature'.¹ This is true of many Georgian poets. Reid's comment raises the matter of Georgianism's debt to Romanticism, and yet suggests that the traditional Wordsworthian perspective – in particular the bond with nature - has become troubled and subdued. One of the primary intents of this chapter is to examine the symptoms of this change.

Over the years, critics have shown sporadic awareness of the connection between Romanticism and the Georgians. In *The Trend of Modern Poetry* (1934), for example, Geoffrey Bullough made the suggestion that 'Georgian poetry was an Indian summer of Romanticism; but it cannot be dismissed as an ineffectual anachronism'.² He is right on both counts. In recent times, it is Georgianism's status as a dissipated and weakened Romanticism that has led some contemporary critics to reassess it. Kenneth Millard argues that Georgianism (or 'Edwardian Poetry', as he prefers) 'is characterised by its annihilation of the traditional romantic self of poetry, and it expresses a corresponding lack of faith in the process of writing, and occasionally in the faculty of imagination in whatever form it takes' (1991).³ Along similar lines, Gary Day suggests that

Georgian poetry briefly galvanises a dying ideology, one which produces an individualist subjectivity which understands events as natural rather than historical and one which endeavours to reconcile contradictions in society by displacing them onto the individual's relationship with nature.⁴

In other words, Georgian poetry is symptomatic of modern society outgrowing the perspective of the 'Romantic Artist'. Here, I will argue that the romantic self is indeed put under pressure in Georgianism, and sometimes to a disquieting extent, but it is not always annihilated: it will be shown that while these poets demonstrate some doubt about the Romantic-humanist view of literary creation, there is also an element of affirmation, and it is this faith in older principles that separates them from the Modernists. The process is more accurately one of destabilisation of the romantic ego than obliteration, and this will be demonstrated by examination of a range of figures and tropes.

Both Millard and Day suggest that the main value of Georgianism is what it achieves, or rather betrays, inadvertently, and I wish to argue that Georgian poetry has more conscious direction behind it than is commonly believed. For too long, the Georgians have been seen as naïve rhymesters with little awareness of their aims as writers, and here this view will be challenged - there will be some investigation of their aesthetic ideas and the formal qualities of their poetry. Harold Monro, in *Some Contemporary Poets* (1928), claimed: 'the Georgian movement was uncharacterised by evidence of design, that is, it did not, like other schools, preach or practice a special dogma of poetic art. It was fortuitous and informal'.⁵ Many of the Georgians did, however, indicate their literary views in prose works, mainly written retrospectively in the 1920s and '30s when the movement was in decline. There is much common ground in these writings, many of which shed light on what the Georgians were trying to achieve before public attention left them. While Georgianism did indeed have its own identity as a movement, there is the matter of influence. In seeking to muster a sensitive response to modernity in a traditional prosody, the Georgians were not Modernists in any formal sense; rather, they can be situated closer to important non-Modernist poets

such as Hardy and (to a lesser extent) Robert Bridges, both of whom were dedicatees of Georgian anthologies, and both of whom exhibited the troubled Romanticism that is also prominent in Georgianism.

Hardy expressed measured approval of these younger writers by calling them 'promising', although he had reservations about the Georgian name:

'Georgian Poets' – It is a pity that these promising young writers adopted such a title. The use of it lacks the modesty of true genius, as it confuses the chronology, and implies that the hitherto recognised Georgians – Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron etc are negligible; or at any rate that they do not care whether it implies so or no.⁶

These sentiments have the effect of linking the Georgians with Hardy, but also of linking both Hardy and the Georgians with the Romantics. This will be considered in more detail later, but it should be noted at this stage that the Georgian debt to the Romantic poets is central, and can be seen not only in their poetry, but also their critical works and letters. Examples include Edward Thomas's *Keats* (1916), his appreciation of *Charles Algernon Swinburne* (1912), a deeply Romantic Victorian poet, and *A Literary Pilgrim in England* (1917), with its emphasis upon Blake, Wordsworth, Lamb and Shelley. Such authors were also of primary interest to Abercrombie, as witnessed by his critical study *Romanticism* (1925) and *The Art of Wordsworth* (1935). On 28 March 1927, Gordon Bottomley wrote to Paul Nash: 'You seem to despise me for being an ornate Romantic: but I am really always that – and if there is any virtue at all in my friend Abercrombie's brilliant book *Romanticism*, you are an even bigger Romantic than I am'.⁷ This remark brings to the fore several important issues. First, in the eyes of those influenced by Modernism, 'Romantic' was becoming a disreputable and problematic term by the late 1920s. Second, it suggests that the Georgians' espousal of Romantic values was more thinking and conscious than is remembered. The book to which Bottomley refers, Abercrombie's *Romanticism*, suggests that Romanticism is a timeless quality, and not necessarily confined to an era.⁸ Abercrombie and other

Georgians believed – to some degree - that the strengths of the Romantics could be replenished and continued in English verse, and they made a brave attempt to do this.

The influence of Romanticism in Georgian poetry was sometimes direct, and sometimes circuitous. Thomas Hardy, himself owing some debt to the Romantic impulse in literature, was arguably the dominant influence on the Georgians, but it will emerge in the course of this chapter that they esteemed him for, and resembled him in, quite ‘Romantic’ qualities. They certainly admired him greatly. Drinkwater spoke of his ‘world fame in the realm of intellect and imagination’,⁹ and dedicated *From an Unknown Isle* (1925) to him. In addition, on 8 September 1926, he produced a dramatisation of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* at the Barnes Theatre.¹⁰ Abercrombie published *Thomas Hardy* (1912), expressing his belief ‘that Thomas Hardy’s books are among the greatest things in our modern literature’.¹¹ De la Mare shared this view, warmly praising Hardy in his articles, ‘The Dynasts’ (1910) and ‘Thomas Hardy’s Lyrics’ (1919). At the same time, there will also be discussion of the common ground that exists between the Georgians and the more radically experimental Modernists, but chiefly, this section will aim to define the Georgians as poets who took a consciously different direction to Modernism.

i. Experience

The writings of the Georgians themselves on poetic creativity clearly reflect a broadly Romantic outlook. An important part of Wordsworthian Romanticism – exemplified in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) – was a readiness to engage with the emotions and experiences of ordinary people: shepherds, peasants, beggars. Despite the versification that they

inherited from the past, the Georgians were convinced that they could capture life in a fresh and convincing way, and they valued 'experience'. In *The Poet and Communication* (1922), Drinkwater argued that 'complete understanding of our experience is the most satisfying condition to which we can attain'.¹² Similarly, Abercrombie, in *The Idea of Great Poetry* (1925), spoke of 'the momentary, unconsidered rapture of pure experience'.¹³ This 'purity' of experience should not be confused with the Imagists' direct sensory apprehension of 'a thing'. The Georgians had little in common with them, and Edward Thomas even dismissed them as 'imbeciles'.¹⁴ 'Pure Experience' to the Georgians was not a form of radical minimalism, but a retreat from the public themes of Edwardian imperial verse, and a focus upon the struggles, thoughts and emotions of ordinary people. This new connection with experiential realities was recognised by Stead in *The New Poetic* (1964):

In the work of the Georgians 'poetry' and 'life' begin to merge again: art is not for them something fragile, magical and remote from ordinary living, as it was for the aesthetes; nor is life equated with politics, public affairs and large conservative generalisations as it was for the Imperialists. Life for them was what they experienced.¹⁵

Although Stead underestimates the Georgians' social and political involvement, this is generally true. This Wordsworthian direction came to the Georgians mainly through the novels and poems of Thomas Hardy, which were seen by the Georgians as exemplifying a new, relevant and modern idiom in literature. Drinkwater made this clear in *The World and the Artist* (1922), in which he praised Hardy's characters, who were not

people of world-wide power or eminence, nor people greatly abreast of the imperial idea and mechanical progress, but folk moving narrowly in the orbit of simple and uncelebrated lives; narrowly, but with tremendous vibration and vivid realisation always of the fact of their daily experience.¹⁶

'Beside them', he continues, 'all transcendental and imperial and ocean-going generalisations are but empty pretensions'.¹⁷ Lascelles Abercrombie endorsed Hardy for the same quality, writing of his poetry:

The poems are thoroughly modern, too; their persons do not belong to romance or story, but to the recognisable, everyday species of the present; and the turn of the psychology, though comment and moralising are avoided, frequently implies some typical modern questioning of received notions.¹⁸

Most of the Georgians shared this aspiration towards a more rigorous treatment of the everyday and the contemporary, and it accounts for the credible, ordinary people who feature in their poetry: Gibson's miners, shopkeepers and clerks, Abercrombie's rustics, de la Mare's old maids and children, Davies's vagrants, Masfield's sailors and navvies. Many Georgian poems attempt to extract emotional intensity from situations involving normal, unglamorous people. Elroy Flecker in *The Grecians* (1912), taking a similar line to Drinkwater and Abercrombie, suggested that

only Hardy and Meredith among our so delightful English writers can ever impress the awakening mind so deeply with the tragic realities of existence as do *Pere Goiot*, *Charles Bovary* [sic], *Une Vie*, and *Pierre et Jean*, books in which the ugliness of life is faced and the psychology of passion analysed ...¹⁹

Both in their own right, and as a result of Hardy's influence, the Georgians clearly attempt to make poetry deeper and stronger at an experiential level. Gibson's 'Solway Ford' (*Thoroughfares*, 1914) is about a man whose mind is damaged when nearly drowned, and the poem attempts to capture his inner oblivion (see Anthology, p.52):

Life cannot touch the quiet of his heart
To joy or sorrow as, with easy breath
And smiling lips, upon his back he lies
And never speaks or rises from his bed,
Gazing through those green glooms with happy eyes
While gold and sapphire fish swim overhead.²⁰

There is not the same depth of inward experience that we may find in the work of Joyce and Woolf, but it is fair to claim that the Georgians wrote with a dawning awareness of these intensities.

ii. Imagination, Dream and Psyche

In Georgian Romanticism, the imagination and its virtues are also stressed. Thomas saw the imagination as vital. In *Richard Jefferies* (1908), he wrote:

Imagination is not an artistic quality, but a quality pertaining to intensity of life, to reality, and it is possessed by the ploughman, sailor, or mechanic as commonly as by the artist, and by it they live, or, more accurately, by their possession they prove that they live, and do not endure the life in death of the unimaginative.²¹

De la Mare expounded the importance of the imaginative faculty in *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, bringing into play such Wordsworthian stages of spiritual development as ‘childhood’ and ‘boyhood’.²² Introducing his anthology *Early One Morning* (1935) he claimed that ‘in the realm of the imagination all things excepting the unimaginable are possible’.²³ Likewise, Masfield, in his poem ‘Imagination’ (1910), sees imaginative life as a great power: ‘the blinding, quick intense, / Lightning of the soul’s spring from the sense’.²⁴ Drinkwater, in *The Poet and Communication* (1922), emphasises ‘the exaltation of clean-cut imaginative fulfilment’,²⁵ and in *William Morris* (1917), he speaks of ‘the purifying influence of imaginative faculty’²⁶ and ‘the god-like thing which we call imagination’.²⁷ Abercrombie, in *The Theory of Poetry* (1924), also emphasised the primacy of the imagination in literary creation. He expressed the need for an ‘infinite variety of imagination’,²⁸ and suggested that poetry ‘urges us to live for a period of time in a particular style of imagination – the style of the poet’s imagination: but it is our own imagination that really does the business of poetry’.²⁹

It is from such a Romantic view of the imagination that the Georgians’ interest in the exotic and supernatural evolved: Flecker’s orient, de la Mare’s faerie and magical lands, Masfield’s piracy and Spanish islands. As Basil Dean rightly noted in 1951, ‘Flecker was not a modernist; he was a romantic’.³⁰ Poems that the Georgians thought imaginative and forceful can seem clichéd to a present-day reader. It must be

remembered, however, that the imagination itself had fallen into neglect as Newbolt and Noyes wrote poems celebrating battles and public figures, and the gnomes of de la Mare and the sheikhs of Flecker may be read as a corrective for this lack of imaginative fancy. The Georgians rightly saw that power and spontaneity were lacking in the imperial poets, and that it was one of the qualities they were capable of restoring. They frequently show a Romantic imagination in its more macabre and morbid guises, as in Abercrombie's *The Sale of St Thomas* (1911, *Georgian Poetry I*, 1912):

Another stranger,
 Who swore he knew of better gods than ours,
 Seemed to the king to be troubled with fleas, and slaves
 Were told to groom him smartly, which they did
 Thoroughly with steel combs, until at last
 They carried the living flesh from his bones
 And stript his face of gristle, till he was
 Skull and half skeleton and yet alive.³¹

While such content challenges the assumption that Georgian poetry is tame and cosy, one might question the extent to which such subject matter is appropriate at a time so close to the real violence of the Great War and to Eliot's ensuing portrayal of modernity in *The Waste Land* (1922). The Georgians, in using a revived Romanticism to relieve poetry from the banality into which it had fallen - and for a short while succeeding - could not outguess history. They were defeated by events over which they had no control, and insufficient allowance has been made for this. It was indeed 'a dream that failed', but not for unworthy reasons.

The Georgians were by no means ingenuous in their use of imaginative extravagance and they show some awareness that their position is problematic in the modern world. There is a clear suspicion about unrestrained indulgence of fancy. Bottomley's 'A Hymn of Imagination' (*Chambers of Imagery, Second Series*, 1912) shows awe at the potential power of the imagination (see Anthology, p.24):

Imagination's towers appear,
 And every tower is steep prolonging

Of the earth's radius dark and sheer.

* * *

Imagination's measureless towerings
 Bear down upon the beds of reality,
 Accede to gravity for inmost law
 Where the earth's radius for inmost law
 Where the earth's radius and their cores agree
 To raise extremes of awe.³²

After this assertion, the mood of the piece changes, and the imagination is shown to be no panacea: 'Imagination does not devise / Wilful and rootless miracles'.³³ Even when connection is achieved, the rewards can be moderate: 'To look upon the things that must be borne / Has, by imagination, no less pain'.³⁴ The power of the imagination is shadowed by its fragility:

Legend, faery, enchantments of each weaver
 Of glimmering romance (escapes
 From blinding customary sights),
 Of shadows that forecast
 Man's implication with the earth ...³⁵

The poem is entitled a 'hymn' to the imagination, but a 'defence' or a 'vindication' would be more accurate. There are no certainties here. In de la Mare's 'The Imagination's Pride' (*The Veil*, 1921), the imagination is again shown to be volatile and even dangerous:

Be not too wildly amorous of the far,
 Nor lure thy fantasy to its utmost scope,

* * *

Nectarous those flowers, yet with venom sweet.
 Thick-juiced with poison hang those fruits that shine
 Where sick phantasmal moonbeams brood and beat
 And dark imaginations ripe the vine.³⁶

De la Mare realised that there were hells as well as heavens within the human mind, and that imagination can lead to nightmare as well as reverie. The poet is alienated from his own vision.

What these poets fear – and with good reason – is the failure of poetic vision. They lack confidence in the durability of the Romantic imagination in the midst of modernity. This is apparent in the primacy of ‘dream’, which is recurrent in Georgian poetry as both concept and word. The significance of this terminology is twofold. First, it reflects the heightened interest in the mysteries of subjectivity that the Georgians exhibited, and would also be an important feature of the Modernists. Second, it points to an increasing sense of unease and futility about the poetic act itself. The Georgian poet rarely escapes to ‘dream’ with any degree of conviction, and the insistent repetition of the word is defensive. Rather, Georgianism is more concerned with the poet’s ultimate inability to dream. ‘Dream’, ‘dreaming’ and ‘dreamed’ take on a nebulous and incantatory quality as they recur in poem after poem, with the representational value of these words being dissipated through repetition. This is symptomatic of the post-Romantic Georgian poets’ incapacity to fully exploit the experience and imagination that they cherished, and to contain these qualities within the language at their disposal. The slippage is evident in Brooke’s ‘The Fish’ (*Georgian Poetry I*, 1912) with its implied analogy between the state of dream and the movement of a fish in water. Phrases such as ‘dream to unknown dream in sleep’, ‘dream / fantastic down the eternal stream’, ‘closes his memory / glooms his dream’³⁷ are flat spots in the text where the poet’s language has been seriously weakened, and is unable to capture satisfactorily the scene he envisages. De la Mare’s ‘Remembrance’ (*Poems*, 1906) also involves this fading of meaning:

A rumour of the sea
Rose in profundity and sank
Into infinity.

Lofty and few the elms, the stars
 In the vast boughs most bright;
 I stood a dreamer in a dream
 In the unstirring night.³⁸

The scene is initially depicted with some precision, but 'a dreamer in a dream' indicates a dead end. It is a movement from meaning to pure language which is enacted more explicitly in 'Incantation' (*Memory*, 1938):

Vervain ... basil ... orison –
 Whisper their syllabings till all meaning is gone,
 And sound all vestige loses of mere word ...
 'Tis then as if, in some far childhood heard,
 A wild heart languished at the call of a bird,
 Crying through ruinous windows, high and fair,
 A secret incantation on the air:
 A language, lost; which, when its accents cease,
 Breathes, voiceless, of a pre-Edenic peace.³⁹

The verbal and rhythmic issues raised by this poem will be analysed in more detail later, but here one might note that language - in the representational sense - is shown to cease, but its verbal forms and the emotions and moods of its rhythms persist. In this sense, language takes on a primal quality which de la Mare describes as 'voiceless' and 'pre-Edenic'. The word 'dream' is not present in the above lines, but the poet is describing the lapse in signification that this word often signals in Georgian poetry. Georgianism, in this respect, constituted the end of a certain innocence in the use of language, and consequently, might be seen as a form of proto-Modernism.

So, the poets are aware that dream or fantasy is fragile, and acknowledge its insufficiency in contemporary life. At the same time, the poet as dreamer is identified as part of a vanished age. This awareness may go some way towards refuting charges of Georgian escapism. For instance, in Masfield's 'Spanish Waters' (*Ballads and Poems*, 1910), the insubstantiality of the fantasy is never in doubt: the speaking persona is stricken with 'weary thoughts' and 'telling tales', from 'the grey forgotten years'.⁴⁰

Solitude and obsolescence are then pondered with regard to the figure of the poet:

I'm the last alive that knows it. All the rest have gone their ways
 Killed or died, or come to anchor in the old Mulatis Cays,
 And I go singing, fiddling, old and starved and in despair,
 And I know where all that gold is hid, if only I were there.⁴¹

De la Mare's poetry shows a similar awareness. Epiphanies and dreams are frustrated, and there is a 'chaos of vacancy', as he calls it in 'The Ghost' (*Motley*, 1918).⁴² Of the king in 'Never-to-Be' (from *The Listeners*, 1912), 'all his realm is foam and rain / Whispering of what not comes again'.⁴³ 'The Dwelling Place' (1912) is haunted by 'the faint reiterated call of those that came no more'.⁴⁴ The negative and the absent permeates his poetic vision to an obsessive extent. In 'Arabia' (1912), the poet in the midst of these vacancies is revealed as lonely, frustrated and misunderstood:

Still eyes look coldly upon me,
 Cold voices whisper and say –
 'He is crazed with the spell of far Arabia,
 They have stolen his wits away.'⁴⁵

Hardy was also writing with these ideas and terms. The word 'dream' is frequent in his poetry, and the tellingly-entitled 'The Dream-Follower' (*Poems of the Past and Present*, 1902) shows a similar mood and outcome to Masfield's 'Spanish Waters' and de la Mare's 'Arabia':

A Dream of mine flew over the mead
 To the halls where my old Love reigns;
 And it drew me on to follow its lead:
 And I stood at her window-panes;

 And I saw but a thing of flesh and bone
 Speeding on to its cleft in the clay;
 And my dream was scared, and expired on a moan,
 And I whitely hastened away.⁴⁶

In each of the poems quoted above, there seems to be a lack of confidence in the poet's role, and the collapse of dreams, the persistence of sadness and even 'vacancy', can be read as commentary on a new century where technology rules and the magic of legend has vanished.

Resulting from this crisis, however, was an increased awareness of the imagination, faltering or otherwise, and of human subjectivity in general, and a consequent psychological complexity that has been much underrated. An important aspect of Modernism is an awareness of the unconscious mind. This is also present, in a more tentative form, in Georgianism. Nevertheless, it is a consciousness that can produce striking images. In Abercrombie's 'The Fool's Adventure' (*Interludes and Poems*, 1908), the Seeker is told: 'Your journeying must be through regions of mind / Rather than lands and tongue'.⁴⁷ The poem's geographical journey to 'the edge of place, the verge of things'⁴⁸ mirrors the mental journey towards revelation. A view of the human psyche as unexplored territory also surfaces in Edward Thomas's *The South Country* (1909), which tells of 'the roads and footpaths that suggest the great permanent thoughts and lesser thoughts and dreams of the brain'.⁴⁹ Gibson's 'Chambers' (*Neighbours*, 1920) draws a comparison between the rooms within an edifice, and the structures of the mind:

The labyrinthine corridors of my mind
 Between dead, lightless many-chambered walls
 In endless maze of confusion wind;
 And now and then a live ray falls
 Touching the secret spring of some hid door
 With magic, and flings open some unknown
 Chamber of light wherein there dwells alone
 Beauty and terror never glimpsed before.⁵⁰

The 'chamber of light' is the unconscious, and the 'beauty and terror never glimpsed before' is the raw material of literary creation, the poetry that is still to come. Of all these poets, de la Mare achieved the most sustained sense of the subjective interior with poems in which buildings and rooms suggest the complexity of the mind. One such poem is 'The Dark Chateau' (1912):

Would that I could steal in! –
 Into each secret room;
 Would that my sleep-bright eyes could win
 To the inner gloom,
 Gaze from its high windows,

Far down its mouldering walls,
Where amber-clear still Lethe flows,
And foaming falls.⁵¹

As in Gibson's 'Chambers', the internal features of the structure – windows, walls, waters – signify the Byzantine complexity of the mind, and the poet is expressing his wish for more intimacy with its secrets.

This emphasis prompted such early critics as R.L. Megroz and Forrest Reid to take a psychoanalytical approach to de la Mare's work, and in later years, the poet showed that his engagement with the cerebral did not ignore modern theories. In 'My mind to me' (1938), he considered mental processes such as dreaming and writing:

The travelling mind moves, like that which gave it being, in a mysterious way. Its caprices are unpredictable, its rapidity is Ariel's, its geography chaotic. It cannot be said to mock at time, since of time, for the time being, it is unconscious; and almost ceases to be.⁵²

This is a view of consciousness that goes way beyond a simplistic belief in a stable ego. His anthology, *Behold this Dreamer* (1939), not only contains famous dream poems, many by Romantic poets, such as Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', but also extracts from thinkers such as Bergson, Freud and Havelock Ellis. In his introduction, he puts forward the view that 'poetry is a remote province of psychology and may enshrine a profound knowledge of psyche'⁵³, a view that is substantiated by the Georgian poets of his generation.

The Georgians' interest in dream, then, was informed by a genuine if necessarily limited awareness of psychology. This is further reflected in their convincing rendering of inward sensations. George Walter, in 'Loose Women and Lonely Lambs: the Rise and Fall of Georgian Poetry' (1995), argued that the Georgians 'sought to make their verse an entirely subjective utterance, a personal and private communication between writer and reader', and that this results in 'their interest in emotional states in particular'.⁵⁴ There is an element of both overstatement and simplification here (as I

have argued in the introduction, as a result of their dramatic and narrative experiments, lyrical intensity was not the only priority of the Georgians); but it is true that Georgians poetry can probe deeply into thoughts, feelings and impressions, with the effect of capturing them 'as they are', often without explanation: hence the sudden fear of the little girl on finding her mother asleep in de la Mare's 'The Sleeper' (1912):

Even her hands upon her lap
 Seemed saturate with sleep.
 And as Ann peeped a cloudlike dread
 Stole over her, and then,
 On stealthy, mouselike feet she trod,
 And tiptoed out again.⁵⁵

In W.H. Davies's 'The Fog' (*Foliage*, 1913), the speaker is seized by an anxiety that is in excess of the circumstances (see Anthology, p.30):

It clutched my throat, I coughed;
 Nothing was in my head
 Except two heavy eyes
 Like balls of burning lead.

And when it grew so black
 That I could know no place
 I lost all judgement then,
 Of distance and space.⁵⁶

Brooke's 'The Hill' (1910), with its depiction of two lovers, captures a sudden switch from euphoria to sadness (see Anthology, p.27):

Proud we
 were,
 And laughed, that had such things to say.
 - And then you suddenly cried, and turned away.⁵⁷

Another striking example of visitations of fear and sadness at odd moments occurs in Flecker's 'Oxford Canal' (*Forty-Two Poems*, 1911):

But nothing makes me so afraid as the clear water of
 This idle canal on a summer's noon.
 Do you see the great telephone poles down in the
 Water, how every wire is distinct?
 If a body fell into the canal it would rest entangled

In those wires forever, between earth and air.⁵⁸ (see Anthology, p.49)

In some Georgian poems, there is a latent anxiety that emerges to great effect, and this challenges the common assumption that such poetry is vacuously cheerful and unaware of the complexities of human emotion.

This anxiety is related to an awareness, present but seldom conscious, that creation does not result merely from will, and that the self is not a stable ego. Andrew Motion, in *The Poetry of Edward Thomas* (1980), argued that ‘the discrepancy between Thomas’s achievements and his ideals led to fear about the division of personality itself. And in the most extreme form these prompted him to describe encounters with his double’.⁵⁹ There are several examples, but the most powerful is the tellingly-titled ‘The Other’ (see Anthology, p.77):

And upon the road I sought my man
 Till once amid a tap room’s din
 Loudly he asked for me, began
 To speak, as if it had been a sin
 Of how I thought and dreamed and ran
 After him thus, day after day:
 He lived as one under ban
 For this: what had I to say?
 I said nothing: I slipped away.⁶⁰

There is thus a divide between the poet’s self and his creative self. In Thomas’s poem, the poet, quite literally, loses his voice, and there is a crisis in signification itself: ‘what had I to say?’, ‘I said nothing’. Despite this anticlimax, there is no surrender, the writer continues to write, and there is an affirmation of tense unity: He goes on: ‘I follow: no release / Until he ceases. Then I shall also cease’.⁶¹ The poet and his poetry come together, but it is an uneasy alliance.

Motion’s argument about Thomas is one that can be applied to several Georgian poets. Harold Monroe’s ‘The Strange Companion’ (*Children of Love*, 1914) shows the tension that can exist between the poet and his creative drive (see Anthology, p.69):

When he threw a glass of wine in my face

One night, I hit him and we parted;
 But in a short space
 We came back to each other melancholy hearted,
 Told our pain,
 Swore we would not part again.

* * *

I wish for every man he find
 A strange companion so
 Completely to his own mind
 With whom he everywhere may go.⁶²

Despite this discord, the poet is an artist, and must seek this other self in order to create. As with Thomas's 'Other', meetings with Monro's 'Strange Companion' are painful, but the real crisis is when poet and creative voice are truly cut off from each other. This is particularly evident in de la Mare's 'The Familiar' (*The Veil*, 1921), where the voice also seeks the speaker:

'Are you far away?'
 'Yea, I am far – far;
 Where the green wave shelves to the sand,
 And the rainbows are;
 And from an ageless sun beats fierce
 From an empty sky:
 There, O shadow forlorn,
 Is the wraith of thee, I.'

* * *

'Cease thy shrill mockery, Voice,
 Nor answer again.'
 'O Master, thick cloud shuts thee out
 And cold tempests of rain.'⁶³

In each of these poems, a promise of continuity accompanies an abrupt ending, which indicates the turbulent creation that is still to come, the poems that are still to be written. The conflict reaches a greater level of intensity in Abercrombie's 'The Escape' (*Interludes and Poems*, 1908) which ends with the death of a poet. The images of the split self are jarring and violent:

I am not one being, but caged enmity:
 There are two kinds, shut up with some slight, although

More jarring when they meet in fire and water,
To fight like spider and scorpion in my mind.

And so twy-spirited is my flesh. Now where
These souls began I know not, but there's one,
I know, that has been in Eternity
Before 'twas snared into this crafty body.⁶⁴

This doubleness might be compared to the more complex and sustained forms of self-fragmentation in Modernism (e.g. Yeats's anti-self, Conrad's 'secret sharer'). It is not so deliberate in Georgianism, but it is certainly present, lending credibility to the theory that the Georgians shared in a modern consciousness, but expressed it with less formal originality.

iii. Nature and Epiphany

Just as 'double' depictions of the self in Georgianism reflect an unsettled subjectivity, so do depictions of nature. This manifests itself in a natural world that is heavily pregnant with human consciousness, often resulting in a merging of the speaker's self with external nature. This is, in effect, a destabilisation of 'the pathetic fallacy', the condition by which nature is credited with human emotions. Coined by Ruskin, the notion is often associated with the Romantic poets, many of whom venerated the natural world. In the Georgians, this relationship with nature is neither so powerful nor so rapturous. In Davies's 'Thunderstorms' (*Foliage*, 1913), the condition is shown to be painful, and yet integral to the creative act (see Anthology, p.31):

My mind has thunderstorms,
That brood for heavy hours:
Until they rain me words,
My thoughts are drooping flowers,
And sulking silent birds.⁶⁵

Edward Thomas, even more so than Davies, pondered the possibility of a conscious nature. This is evident in *The Heart of England* (1909), when he looks upon the clouds, and cannot accept their being inanimate:

They dissolve, they cannot die. Up there, do they think, or do they watch, or do they simply act? And is it simply pleasant to act? Have all the sunsets and dawns and thunderstorms done nothing for them?⁶⁶

Here, the author is literally interrogating nature, and attempting to grasp its being and examine its substance. There is, however, a certain desperation in this striving, as if the Romantic nature sensibility must be reiterated in the face of possible discredit. In *The Ickneid Way* (1913), the desire is so acute that it results in the absorption of the speaker's self into the natural world:

The truth is that the rain falls forever and I am melting into it. Black and monotonously sounding is midnight and the solitude of the rain. In a little while or an age – for it is all one – I shall know the full truth of the words I used to love, I know not why, in my days of nature in the days before the rain, ‘blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon’.⁶⁷

One is struck by the unprecedented extent to which the writer's emotions are entangled with nature. But the bond is not a happy one at the time of writing: he refers to ‘my days of nature before the rain’, indicating that his appreciation of that nature is now informed with woe rather than cheer, although it remains as intense as ever. The changing relationship with nature will be examined in more detail in the chapter on Georgian poetry and the war, but it is clear that the Georgians of the pre-war years knew that nature could be mournful and oppressive as well as joyful. The focus upon it can, nevertheless, be obsessive and this is no more apparent than in Thomas's early *The Woodland Life* (1897). The level of detail is intense and meticulous. The following sentence is typical:

Mellow limes contrast with sea-green chestnuts, now flaming with pinnacles of waxen bloom; the reddened foliage of the oaks seems to burn in the fierce light, while the pale tasselled birches are all a-quiver; and at the margin frail poplars

change from grey to silver-whitening as their leaves turn, with undersides uppermost, in the wind.⁶⁸

The writing is dense, packed, and with every sentence bringing to life a world with ‘blue burly beetles in crowds upon the hills’,⁶⁹ and where ‘the grass fairly ripples with the sweet small life of creatures in shining mail – flies and beetles’.⁷⁰ Yet it is never quite convincing. Rather, the impression is one of a bond with nature that is unhinged, and which energetic hyperbole cannot quite restore. The ebbing quality of this Romantic impulse in Thomas has been critically recognised. Michael Kirkham in *The Imagination of Edward Thomas* (1986) admits that ‘even when his declaration of the Romantic faith seems most confident and challenging, a note of uncertainty is frequently to be heard’, and sees Thomas’s work as an instance ‘when scepticism and Romantic yearning achieve simultaneous expression’.⁷¹ It is important, though, to acknowledge that this condition is not peculiar to Thomas (although it is particularly powerful in his hands) but typifies other poets of his Georgian generation.

Brooke is not often considered in the light of his description of nature, and yet it is an important part of his poetry. His poems depict elements and vegetation that seem living and conscious, and reflect a wide range of human feelings. In ‘The Charm’ (1909), nature is quietly benevolent, and yet also claustrophobic and even voyeuristic: ‘Night benedictions hover; and winds of night / Move gently round the room, and watch you there’.⁷² ‘Finding’ (1909) shows another complex mixture of emotions. Nature is shown to reflect a mood that is lugubrious, and yet also darkly amorous (see Anthology, p.28):

And trees bent their heads to me,
 Mysteriously crying;
 And dead voices wept around me;
 And dead soft fingers thrilled;
 And the little gods whispered ...
 But ever
 Desperately I willed;
 Till all grew soft and far

And silent ... ⁷³

There is power and sensuousness here, but it is also clear that the poet has to work very hard to maintain this mood - and to contain it. It results from a concentration so intense that it borders upon the neurotic. This provokes the question of why so much labour is required. Is it because the Georgian poets' conception of nature is not so confident as that of a Romantic poet a hundred years earlier?

De la Mare's poetry shows this subjective gaze upon nature to be likewise unsettled – to an even greater degree. 'The Empty House' (*Motley*, 1918) presents a scenario in which the human subject itself has seemingly been eclipsed:

'Secrets,' sighs the night-wind,
 'Vacancy is all I find;
 Every keyhole I have made
 Wails a summons, faint and sad,
 No voice ever answers me,
 Only vacancy'.
 'Once, once ...' the cricket shrills,
 And far and near the quiet fills
 With its tiny voice, and then
 Hush falls again.⁷⁴

The poem is marked by the absence of humanity, but traces of human personality are invested in nature, with the consequent effect that there is a feeling of watchfulness in a scene in which there are no watchers. The same effect is even more apparent in 'Gold' (*The Veil*, 1921):

Sighed the wind to the wheat: -
 'The Queen who is slumbering there,
 Once bewildered the rose;
 Scorned, "Thou unfair!"
 Once, from that bird-whirring court,
 Ascended the ruinous stair.
 Aloft, on the weed-hung turret, suns
 Smote on her hair –
 Of a gold by Archiac sought,
 Of a gold sea-hid,
 Of a gold that from a core of quartz
 No flame shall bid
 Pour into the light of the air
 For god's Jews to see.'

Mocked the wheat to the wind: -
 'Kiss me! Kiss me!'⁷⁵

The dispersal of consciousness into the inanimate leads to the poem seeming, paradoxically, both exhausted and animated, allowing nature to appear both familiar and estranging. Edward Thomas showed some awareness of this effect in de la Mare's poetry in *The Country* (1913):

De la Mare's birds and flowers are most beautiful, but his book is not natural history. The 'owl and newt and nightjar, leveret, bat and mole' are seen though a great gulf of time. [...] His hawthorn has a deadly smell'. His snow frightens the starlings with its pale glare.⁷⁶

Edwin Muir, in *The Present Age from 1914* (1939), also suggested that de la Mare's work is characterised by a sense of changed perspective:

One of the most curious effects of his poetry is a sense of displacement and rearrangement, where the smallest and most trifling object, a snowdrop or a shadow of a weed on a stone, assumes an altered relation to the other objects which together make up the world, altering them too.⁷⁷

Modernism is often examined in terms of voice and dispersal of presence, and it seems that Georgianism also involves a measure of this displacement where it is the poet's relation to nature that has changed. If Georgian poetry represents the last efflorescence of the nineteenth-century Romantic impulse in British poetry, it is clear that the bond with nature traditionally associated with the Romantic ego, has been weakened and destabilised. At the same time, this dissolution entails a certain power – it is the brightness of decay.

The dissolution of Romanticism that I contend is so central in Georgianism is further illustrated in the use of the poet's epiphany in their poetry. In Modernism, the epiphany is distinguished by its magnitude, intensity and the authorial emphasis upon it. In contrast, the Georgian equivalent is generally quieter, low-key and less self-conscious. In de la Mare's poetry, it is promised but never quite materialises: it is in his

words, 'the sweet cheat gone' ('The Ghost', *Motley*, 1918).⁷⁸ In the work of other Georgians, it is perceptible, but, in comparison to the Modernists, lacks substance.

The Georgian epiphany was sought after in nature, which was in fact a source of uncertainty, turbulence and disenchantment, and as a result, moments of fulfilment were weak and fleeting. Hodgson's 'The Song of Honour' (*Georgian Poetry I*, 1912) is a classic example of the poet striving throughout for an authentically Romantic connection with nature. There are the characteristic terms of this feeling – 'lowly to sublime!', 'multitudinous sons of light', 'Harmonious hymn of being', 'chapel of my soul'⁷⁹ – but the final stanza leads to an experience that is not altogether satisfactory:

I stood, I knew not why,
Without a wish, without a will,
I stood upon that silent hill
And stared into that sky until
My eyes were blind with stars and
still
I stared into the sky.⁸⁰

Although these lines could be read to suggest a speaker who has found the joys of nature overwhelming and ineffable, an alternative interpretation would be that the blank repetition that comprises the final lines – 'stared into the sky', 'I stared into the sky' - suggests rather that he is cut off from the emotions for which he is striving, and is simply left with the sky which he is observing.

There are many such examples. In Abercrombie's 'Rhyton Firs', communion with nature leads to the assertions: 'we have golden minds', 'the spring makes golden ways', and 'we were dancing on the golden hour'.⁸¹ But 'gold' and 'golden', used hyperbolically, are too frequent in Abercrombie, and are consequently devalued: they give the impression of a pretence of epiphany, or a desire for it, rather than the experience itself. This is also the case in Masfield's 'Biography' (1912) where the poet announces: 'I have known golden instants and bright days', 'All those gleams were golden', 'the golden hour of bliss', and 'there seems a world, beyond our earthly things,

/ Gated by golden moments'.⁸² As in Abercrombie's poem, the effect of this reiteration is a verbal devaluation. The next section of this chapter will reveal that this weakness was by no means the case with all Georgian poems, but it was certainly present. It is not 'decadent' in the same spirit as the poets of the Rhymers' Club (Georgianism's robust 'experience' was in part a reaction against, in Riding and Graves's words, the 'sad, wicked, café table themes'⁸³ of aestheticism), but there is some stylistic similarity. One might argue that 1890s Decadence and early twentieth-century Georgianism are symptomatic of a final forced flowering of nineteenth-century Romanticism.

iv. 'The Magic of Words'

Despite inheriting a problematic relation to nature, language and poetic voice, the Georgians were keen to establish a style and voice of their own, and this included a degree of formal experimentation. In comparison to the *vers libre* of Eliot and Pound, their innovations were modest, although this did not seem the case at the time. Let me return to their prioritising of 'experience'. The experiences described by the Georgians were often unpleasant, sometimes even macabre, and the rhythms and images used to convey them can be appropriately plain and discordant. Brooke, in an article on Browning in the German journal, *Internationale Monat-schrift fur wissenschaft kunst und Technik* (Feb 1913), admired 'the cragginess and complexity of his style and the subtlety of his psychology', and his ability to find the 'romance' in everyday situations.⁸⁴ 'He did this,' wrote Brooke, 'in no artificial brocaded "poet's" language, but with all the colloquialisms of ordinary life enriched by a thousand rarities and grotesqueries of his own collecting'.⁸⁵ In *The Theory of Poetry* (1924), Abercrombie also admired Browning for challenging received notions of beauty and poetry, and

expressed similar views to Brooke with regard to Browning's 'cacophony'.⁸⁶ Other Georgian poets found a pleasing roughness and hardness in Hardy. In 'Thomas Hardy's Lyrics' (1919), de la Mare admired him for his avoidance of the felicitous:

Difficulty, seeming impossibility, is the breath of Mr Hardy's nostrils as craftsman. He makes our English so much his own that a single quoted line, lifted at random, betrays his workmanship. He forces, hammers, poetry into his words; not like many poets, charms it out of them.⁸⁷

An innovative roughness was an important part of Georgian poetry itself, and this is most apparent in *Georgian Poetry II* (1915), the poems of which frequently avoid a facile 'beauty'. Ralph Hodgson's 'The Bull' achieves a stony plainness through simple diction and concise metrics:

Even now the swarm of flies
Blackening his bloodshot eyes
Bursts and blusters round the lake,
Scattered from the feast half-fed,
By great shadows overhead.⁸⁸

Abercrombie's *The Sale of St. Thomas* (*Georgian Poetry I*, 1912) is not just pithy and plain, but experiments with abruptness and ugliness in both image and rhythm:

And flies! A land of flies! Where the hot soil
Foul with ceaseless decay streams into flies!
So thick they pile themselves in the air above
Their meal of filth, they seem like breathing heaps
Of formless life moulded upon the earth.⁸⁹

To their contemporary readership, such diction and rhythms had the effect of locating these poets nearer to those we now consider 'Modernists'. *The Athenaeum* (26 Aug 1911), features a joint review of Ezra Pound and Abercrombie. In both their cases, there is praise from the unsigned and conservative reviewer, but it is qualified. Pound is praised for his 'startling bursts of modernity', 'elaborate and well-ordered rhyme schemes', but 'if Mr Pound is going to do what is expected of him, he must steer clear of the affectations common in the beginner, but hardly to be justified in mature work'.⁹⁰ Abercrombie is also seen as a talented young writer with an alternative but questionable

technique, which he must temper in the interests of maturity. However, the reviewer misunderstands him when he writes: 'There is still the same studied roughness - or wilful angularity - in the verse, both blank and rhymed, which must needs make for affectation'.⁹¹ On the contrary, 'studied roughness' and 'wilful angularity', both of which are certainly present in Abercrombie, are not affectation, but part of an overall direction in much Georgian poetry. The reviewer, however, does not see this, but instead interprets it as an idiosyncrasy, and asserts that Abercrombie must - like Pound - strive against his natural inclinations:

In 'Mary and the Bramble', which has been out some time, the rhymed couplets and lyrical passages display Mr Abercrombie's superfluous ruggedness even more notably than does his blank verse. This, however, is a vice of style which may well disappear with time, and need not obscure the poetical promise, welcome and unmistakable which underlies it.⁹²

Similarly, in 'The New Poetry', published in the *Quarterly Review* (October 1916), Arthur Waugh reviewed both *Georgian Poetry II* (1915) and the *Catholic Anthology* (1915). The piece is critical, with Waugh complaining of the 'incoherent violence'⁹³ of Abercrombie and the 'sheer ugliness'⁹⁴ of Davies, while also dismissing the mainly American poets of the *Catholic Anthology* as 'these literary Cubists',⁹⁵ and asserting of both collections:

Cleverness is, indeed, the pitfall of the New Poetry. There is no question about the ingenuity with which its varying moods are exploited, its elaborate symbolism evolved, and its sudden, disconcerting effect exploded upon the imagination. Swift brilliant images break into the field of vision, scatter like rockets, and leave a trail of flying fire behind. But the general impression is momentary; there are moods and emotions, but no steady current of ideas behind them.⁹⁶

'The New Poetry' and 'Georgians' are his blanket terms throughout for any poetry remotely experimental. The point here is that while we may see Modernism and Georgianism as stylistically different from each other, they were lumped together formally by those more attuned to Edwardian conventions. This is apparent when we

look at Waugh's terminology - 'elaborate symbolism', 'sudden disconcerting effect', 'swift brilliant images, 'trail of flying fire'. In the article, this applies as much to the Georgians as those in the *Catholic Anthology*, and Waugh's comments on Gibson are typical:

The very vividness of his insight tempts him to multiply impressions, until they overcrowd the picture and obliterate its purpose. This is one of the most insidious dangers of realism; and there are occasions when an even more perilous boundary gets crossed, in the poet's effort to be original and arresting at any cost.⁹⁷

The use of the word 'realism' is telling: some traditional readers saw it as something new, ugly and undesirable, and in their time, the Georgians deserved this appellation. But in the eyes of the revisionist scholar, Waugh is paying them an unintentional compliment. 'Original and arresting at any cost' is not how the Georgians are seen now. While the present study acknowledges that Modernism and Georgianism are distinct – it should by now be clear why – to an Edwardian literary conservative, Abercrombie, Brooke and Gibson seemed more akin to Eliot and Pound than different from them.

The description of the camel in Wilfrid Gibson's 'Hoops' (*Georgian Poetry II*) is discordant, and a degree of reflexivity is achieved when the camel keeper, Gentleman John, compares the ugliness he sees everyday to that seen by the unsuccessful poet:

And he had form – form that's too big
 To be called beauty. Once, long since, I thought
 To be a poet and shape words and mould
 A poem like an elephant, huge, sublime
 To front oblivion; and because I failed,
 And all my rhymes were gawky shambling camels
 Or else obscene blue-buttocked apes, I'm doomed
 To fetch and carry for the things I've made.⁹⁸

These lines surely betray a lack of confidence in the act of writing poetry, and an aversion to the finished result. There is awareness on Gibson's part that his poems do not, in his terms, 'front oblivion'. It is an interesting possibility that some of the Georgians were able to take a sceptical view of the materials available to them. They

could realise that poetry had moved beyond considerations of beauty, and ponder whether they were capable of new experimentation. In 'The Long Small Room', Edward Thomas's image of his writing hand, 'Crawling crab-like over the clean white page', and the painful process of creation that this implies, seems an apt summary of many Georgian poems.⁹⁹

The Georgian quest for experience was related to their poetic language. Plain speech will be further considered in the chapter on Georgianism and the war, but now I wish to focus in more detail on the rhythmic properties of language. The Georgians saw language as having a latent richness and fullness that is unlocked by poetic rhythm. In *Maurice Maeterlinck* (1911), Edward Thomas suggested that 'words will all but support one another, and, if the writing is good, the result of this support is that each word is living its intense life'.¹⁰⁰ He goes on to celebrate 'the music of words, and nothing but words – words in all their barbaric and unintellectual purity'.¹⁰¹ These ideas find fullest explication in his *Algernon Charles Swinburne* (1912), where first Thomas examines Swinburne's lack of easy harmony:

Swinburne has almost no magical felicity of words. He can astonish and melt but seldom thrill, and when he does it is not by any felicity as it were God-given inevitable words. He has to depend on sound and an atmosphere of words which is now and then concentrated and crystallised into an intensity of effect which is almost magical, perhaps never quite magical.¹⁰²

What Thomas saw in Swinburne is an important part of the Georgian approach, where skill and awkwardness seem to blend, and the reader can be impressed without being truly satisfied. In *The Art of Wordsworth* (1931), Abercrombie was also aware of the mobile properties of language in poetry: 'we necessarily take poetry in by moments. A single phrase, a single word, perhaps, is enough to make us aware of it'.¹⁰³ There is thus a matter of rhythm as well as lexis, and the Georgians seem to have been conscious writers in the employment of both. A belief in the energy of successive words led to an

incantatory tendency in some poems. De la Mare's 'The Sunken Garden' (in *Motley*, 1918) is one among several:

Here bloweth thyme and bergamot;

Softly on the evening hour,
 Secret herbs that spices shower.
 Dark-spiked rosemary and myrrh,
 Lean-stalked purple lavender;
 Hides within her bosom, too,
 All her sorrows, bitter rue.¹⁰⁴

These lines have a cumulative property, resulting from a careful rationing of words, and keen sensory evocation. Each word is indeed 'living its intense life'. This acute consciousness of language is present in 'Incantation' (*Memory*, 1938) where the verbal power of the poem is connected to a lapse in referential meaning: '*Vervain ... basil ... orison* - / Whisper their syllablings till all meaning is gone, / And sound all vestige loses of mere word'.¹⁰⁵

The 'neo-Georgians' of the 1920s and 30s lost this receptiveness to complex rhythm and subtle diction, and wrote poems that were little more than lengthy and tedious lists of nouns: examples would include Squire's 'The Birds' (*Georgian Poetry IV*, 1919) which reads like a wildlife register, and Freeman's 'Stone Trees' (*Georgian Poetry III*, 1917). It must be stressed that this carelessness was not the case with many of the original Georgians. Edward Thomas's 'Old Man', for example, dwells upon the resonance of words – especially as they accumulate:

Old Man, or Lad's-love, - in the name there's nothing,
 To one that knows not Lad's-love or Old Man ...

Even to one who knows it well, the names
 Half decorate, half-perplex the thing it is:
 At least, what that is clings not to the names
 In spite of time. And yet I like the names.¹⁰⁶

Here, language is reflected upon with impressive depth, and the results are haunting and unsettling: the words, as Thomas, like de la Mare, suggests, might be evacuated of meaning, but they retain a strange power.

The Georgians respected language, but while they were aware of its inconsistencies and changing properties, they could not see it with quite the same clinical scepticism as T.S. Eliot was later to do in 'Burnt Norton':

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.¹⁰⁷

Rather, in Georgianism, the concern is with the strength of the words, and the life within them. In *Feminine Influences on the Poets* (1910), Thomas examined the volatility of language, but also its fullness:

Words never consent to correspond exactly to any object unless, like scientific terms, they are first killed. Hence the curious life of words in the hands of those who love all life so well that they do not kill even the slender words but let them play on; and such are poets. The magic of words is due to their living freely among things, and no man knows how they came together in just that order when a beautiful thing is made like 'full fathom five'.¹⁰⁸

'The magic of words', as Thomas puts it, is an apt phrase for what the Georgians were trying to bring out. He pleaded in 'Words' (see Anthology, p.83):

Choose me,
You English words?

I know you:
You are light as dreams
Tough as oak,
Precious as gold,
As poppies and corn
Or an old cloak.¹⁰⁹

In these lines, there is consciousness of the contradictory qualities that reside within this magic of words, and this is brought out by the proximity of the juxtapositions here:

‘light as dreams’ as opposed to ‘tough as oak’, and ‘gold’, in contrast to ‘an old cloak’. The poet is revelling in the potentialities of the medium with which he works.

Reviewing Hardy’s *The Dynasts* in 1910, de la Mare wrote: ‘as for Mr Hardy’s words, they are wraiths of reality, a kind of phantom presentiment of things themselves in all their most peculiar significance’.¹¹⁰ Few critics would put the Georgians on a par with Hardy, but it does seem that they were aiming for a similar blend of strength and simplicity in the use of words. Rather than seeing them merely as weak contemporaries of Modernism, I would argue that they may be located nearer to Hardy in what they were trying to achieve: verbal substance and modernity, albeit in older metrical forms.

Edward Thomas’s ‘English words’ have a greater significance still. Language for the Georgians was not only the working material of the poet, but also a source of identity in a national sense, and of continuity in a historical one. The larger implications of history and memory will be discussed later, but here it must be noted that these had a bearing on the Georgians’ vocabulary and rhythms. For today’s reader, a use of archaic diction seems one of the principal weaknesses of the Georgians, but would the poets themselves have seen it as a fault, especially if they believed that such language was saturated with history and tradition? Hardy frequently used archaisms, with the effect of making his verse seem historically rooted. It is possible that the Georgians were aiming at a similar effect, in which ‘twixt’, ‘twill’, ‘thee’ and ‘wert’ supplied a link with the past from which they felt cruelly separated. Wilfrid Gibson, in ‘Trees’ (*Friends*, 1916), reflected on ‘old words moving in new harmony’, which represents an apt summary of what the Georgians were attempting to achieve.¹¹¹ Edward Thomas was particularly insistent on the historical properties of language. His *Walter Pater* (1913) criticises the preciousness of that writer, and effectively outlines Georgian poetry’s withdrawal from the rarefaction of 1890’s aestheticism:

Pater was, in fact, forced against his judgement to use words as bricks, as tin

soldiers, instead of flesh and blood and genius. Inability to survey the whole history of every word must force the perfectly self-conscious writer into that position. [...] No man can decree the value of a word, unless it is his own invention; the value which it will have in his hands has been decreed by his own past, by the past of his race.¹¹²

Language here is seen as not only deeply historical, but also racial and regional.

Thomas, for instance, was sympathetic to the Welsh tongue, seeing it as an older and purer language. In 'Exiles at Play' (*Horae Solitaire*, 1902), the narrator proclaims:

'We expected words like diamonds or fine gold from our host; but he answered in Welsh, which was a second best'.¹¹³ The connection between language and social/historical identity is further explored in *The South Country* (1909), where the enjoyment of place-names becomes significant. Commenting on the associative possibilities of ancient nouns, Thomas wrote that 'places names must be learnedly, but bravely and humanly used, so that the historian who has not the extensive sympathy and imagination of a great novelist will have no chance of success'.¹¹⁴

Drinkwater, in *William Morris* (1917), defended Morris's use of archaic diction:

As to expression, Morris's free use of words such as 'certes', 'fair sir', 'I trow', and so forth [...] Morris uses these words not for their especial value, but as simply and naturally as he does the common parts of speech. The words themselves are perfectly fit for use in poetry, and the discredit into which they may have fallen is entirely due to inferior writers who have sought to make them in themselves substitutes for poetry.¹¹⁵

In Drinkwater's late essay 'Reading Poetry' (1938), published a year after his death, he likewise differentiates between the power of 'poetic diction' and the limitations of 'bad poetic diction'.¹¹⁶ The Georgians in fact used a mixture of plain English and old English, and saw this as natural rather than creating tension. Abercrombie's *The Theory of Poetry* (1924) sees words as deriving strength from being both current and ancient:

It follows that the words in common use will be the really poetic words; for constant use in connection with perpetually varying action keeps them electric, charged with plenty of secondary meanings. This is the reason why Saxon and Norman words do better in English poetry than later imported Latinisms and Greekisms. It is not simply that the Saxon and Norman words are older, but they

have been made rich in suggestive power by their use in the common needs of life.¹¹⁷

Although he is not talking about archaisms in the sense that Drinkwater was, it is clear that the two poets exhibit a similar sensibility. Here, the colloquial is seen as harmonious with the literary, and power and dynamism are connected with the old rather than the comparatively new.

The concern with language and its historical properties found further expression when some Georgians participated in the Society for Pure English in the years following the war. The society, greatly influenced by Robert Bridges, felt that modern usage was beset by linguistic poverty, that the purity of English was being corrupted, and it sought to tackle this by way of spelling and pronunciation reforms. The society was generally sympathetic to older forms of dialect that it saw as authentically English. Bridges' own relationship to the Georgians is ambiguous, involving both similarities and differences. Robert Frost, a friend of the Georgians, accused him of treating English as 'a language that was dead' (1914),¹¹⁸ which, if true, is at odds with the Georgians' desire for living words. However, Yeats's comments on Bridges' prosody are in some respects cognate with what the Georgians themselves were saying about rhythms and verbal energies: 'words often commonplace made unforgettable by some trick of speeding or slowing, [...] Every metaphor, every thought a commonplace, emptiness everywhere, the whole magnificent'.¹¹⁹ Bridges, certainly, may be situated with the Georgians in a grouping of British poets, forward-looking but not radical, who attempted to restore some substance and virility to poetry in the years before Modernism by writing within the tradition of the nineteenth-century Romantics.

Abercrombie became an active member of the S.P.E., and his admiration for Bridges was expressed as early as May 1913:

Dear Mr Bridges

It was kind of you to send me a copy of your 'English Pronunciation'; very many thanks for it. [...] I was delighted to read it again. Rather appalled though, at the urgency of the case, and to realise how ignoble but how formidable are the forces which anyone who understands the book must set himself against. [...] I personally care enough for English to be profoundly grateful.¹²⁰

By Jan 12, 1930, he had become a full subscriber, and had even recruited his son:

Dear Dr Bridges,
I have had several talks with my son during the vacation about a tract for the S.P.E., and found him very keen to do something. Exactly what, we did not decide, though it would be in the phonetic line; unless we made it a composite affair – possibly something about colloquialism – he taking a phonetic line and I a semantic line.¹²¹

Abercrombie rebuts any notion of a Georgian poet being ingenuous about language or linguistically complacent.

One of Bridges' most enthusiastic admirers was Gordon Bottomley, another *Georgian Poetry* contributor. In a letter dated 20 March 1922, he joined the S.P.E:

Dear Sir,
I have only lately seen the notice at the end of the S.P.E. Tract viii, and I take my first opportunity to send you a P.O. for my subscription in accordance with the terms.
I cannot neglect the occasion which it gives me to thank you for the delight I have had from your poems, and the illumination and vision of new kingdoms for English poetry to explore which your discoveries in metre and your imaginative consideration of words have shown me.¹²²

This letter reveals opinions and expressions that are characteristically Georgian - the emphasis is on '*English* poetry', and faith in the 'imaginative consideration of words'. It suggests that these poets, leaving Modernism aside, felt that English poetry was going in new and fascinating directions. Bottomley elaborated on these opinions in a letter dated 27 March 1922:

Dear Mr Bridges,
[...] It is good of you to ask me to write for the S.P.E. and I should like to do so, but I feel too much of a learner: these sudden side-lights on the nature of words stir me to sympathy and not to criticisms: moments come when they enable one to feel and use words as if they were newly made and being used for the first time, and then one realises that the beginnings of our race must have

had similar sensations from the invention of a word to those that come now from the making of a poem.¹²³

The subtlety and deliberation in the use of language – implied here by the phrase ‘sudden side-lights on the nature of words’ – is one of the strong points of Georgian poetry. Moreover, Bottomley’s desire to get closer to the ‘new’ and ‘pure English’ of ‘our race’ is reminiscent of de la Mare, who admired Hardy for his use of ‘our English’,¹²⁴ and William Barnes for his ‘truly virgin English’.¹²⁵ In ‘The Poetry of Barnes’ (1909), de la Mare goes on to declare: ‘it comes upon the ear like the distant lowing of oxen, the cawing of rooks’.¹²⁶ Later, in his article ‘Pure English’ (1923), he again expounded an interest in words that were contemporary, and yet imbued with history and national identity:

Pure English [...] is English truly characteristic of the language, however derived, whether only of yesterday’s standing or hoar with the centuries – an English unpedantic, exact, unifying, and so of its nature, racy, musical, idiomatic; a decoy to the imagination, a standfast to the reason.¹²⁷

Another example of this enjoyment of the racial and regional properties of language is Abercrombie’s *Thomas Hardy* (1912), where he praises ‘that splendid language, charged with strength and fire, which Hardy contrived of the west-country dialect’.¹²⁸

This passion for ‘pure English’ might suggest that Georgianism was a reaction against the cosmopolitan forces implicit in Modernism. It is evident that – in the main – the Georgians were not trying to introduce new forms and matter into poetry; rather, they were trying to restore a power, range and substance that they felt had been lost.

v. Humanism and Memory

The Georgians, in trying to bring poetry to bear upon modern society, had to justify the position of the Romantic artist and they used several analogies with which to debate the

value and station of poetry, and more broadly, art. The painter in Masefield's *Dauber* (1913) overcomes the hostility of his shipmates, and it might be argued that his creative energy is fulfilled in his success as a sailor. However, the paintings themselves do not materialise, and this raises the issue of his failure as an artist. The titular philosopher in Abercrombie's 'Peregrinus' (1908) stays true to his Pagan aims and faces death amidst the flames, but doubt is unavoidably cast on his philosophical writings: none have survived. Another such analogy is the poet as mason, and Drinkwater's 'The Carver in Stone' (from *Georgian Poetry II*, 1915) may serve as an example (see Anthology, p.39). The poem is about a sculptor who attempts to return inspiration to an artisanal society that has lost it. The citizens can achieve craftsmanship but not art:

The pard and the owl, dead figures on the wall,
 Figures of habit driven on the stone
 By chisels governed by no heat of the brain
 But drudges of hands moved to no easy rule.
 Proudly recorded mood was none, no thought
 Plucked from the dark battalions of the mind
 And throned in everlasting sight.¹²⁹

The power of the carver is the antidote to this deficiency: 'A glory blazed, his vision manifest, / His wonder captive'.¹³⁰ True art is thus restored to a culturally depleted society. Nevertheless, on the reader's part, the suspicion remains that this is the poet's own wishful thinking, and that the lifeless carvings of the laymen are more true to life than the unlikely feats of the carver.

This may be compared to Gibson's 'The Stone' (*Fires*, 1912), in which a mason carves a stone for a dead man under the eye of his dying widow, and then, after she too perishes, sets about carving another. This poem, like Drinkwater's, involves the action of inscribing upon stone, and therefore exhibits the same sense of process: the poet writes, impressing ink upon paper, the mason carves, impressing chisel upon stone. His poem is concerned with the power of the carver, but Gibson's is more concerned with his limitation. Gibson's artisan is all too aware of mortality, and sees his craft as allied

to the processes of nature. Death is inevitable, and the human craft and consequent act of commemoration are of scant significance. The mason, in fact, sees the progress of his work as parallel with the woman's death:

And every stroke my chisel cut,
 Death cut still deeper in her heart –
 The two of us were chiselling
 Together, I and death.¹³¹

Both Drinkwater's and Gibson's poems might also be compared to Hardy's on a similar theme. His 'The Abbey Mason' (1912, in *Satires of Circumstance*, 1914) reveals a belief in the artist, troubled but intact. As in 'The Carver in Stone', there is the same fear of the uninspired:

Chalked phantasies in vain begot
 To knife the architectural knot –

 In front of them he dully stood
 Regarding them with hopeless mood.¹³²

The mason is persuaded that human agency is negligible, and that the origins of creation are divine. However, years later, when he has vanished from all records (see later discussion of Masefield's 'Biography' and Bottomley's 'Atlantis'), his status as the creator is asserted by later generations. The abbot states that 'things fail to spring from naught at all / And art-beginnings most of all'¹³³, and, with regard to the mason being forgotten, suggests that we

muse that some minds so modest be
 As to renounce fame's fairest fee,
 Like him who crystallised on this spot
 His visionings, but lies forgot ...¹³⁴

Despite the doubts and frustrations in the poems above, in each case creation is shown to result from an individual. In their artistic principles, both the Georgians and Hardy were humanists, if problematically so. This humanism was essentially a Romantic position, one that the Georgians would defend, and the Modernists attack. In

'W.H. Davies' (1916), de la Mare spoke of 'the very Self in every man', claiming that Davies 'can at times not only be that naked self but can also express it'.¹³⁵ Creativity is thus grounded firmly in the individual. Similarly, this view of poetry is expressed in Drinkwater's *The Poet and Communication* (1923):

Before a work of art, we are in the presence of a mind that has in some measure mastered its own experience, and we come away from the presence with our own mind braced towards the understanding of its own experience in turn.¹³⁶

By the time of writing, this was a large claim to make – even with qualification. Can modern experience be 'in some measure mastered' by an individual consciousness? Is it not too vast and complex for this containment? It is these questions that led to the fragmentation and multiple voices of Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), published – ironically - just a year before Drinkwater's book. It is at this time that the differences between Modernism and Georgianism were becoming more pronounced.

Abercrombie took a similar line to Drinkwater in his views on literary creation: in *The Theory of Poetry* (1924), his theories are broadly humanist: 'it is, once more, the essential thing in poetry, that imagination should thereby escape from the self-consciousness of the poet and become the property of the whole world'.¹³⁷ It was along these lines that he later criticised the work of James Joyce in 'Colloquial Language in Literature' (1931): 'Mr Joyce's language not only frustrates itself as language: he is frustrated as an artist. For art which fails to communicate its inspiration has failed to come into existence'.¹³⁸ Such views conflict directly with those of the Modernists. Pound is most clear in his doubts about humanistic creation in the Romantic sense, which he conveys for example, in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), with its attack on the eponymous dilettante:

For three years, out of key with his time,
He strove to resuscitate the dead art
Of poetry; to maintain 'the sublime'
In the old sense. Wrong from the start.¹³⁹

Here, Pound is expressing what he sees as the limits of Romantic humanism – that is, impassioned creation from the self of an artist. T.S. Eliot adopted a similar view in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ where he claimed ‘poetry is not the turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality’.¹⁴⁰ This common stance of Pound and Eliot has its roots in their appreciation of T.E. Hulme, whose influential writings, later assembled from notebooks and published posthumously as *Speculations* (1924), exemplify the anti-humanist and anti-romantic perspective, and form a precursor to much Modernist thought. This is evident in his essay, ‘Humanism’:

We place *Perfection* where it should not be – on this human plane [...], [and] this is the essence of all Romanticism. [...] The fundamental error is that of placing Perfection in *humanity*, thus giving rise to that bastard thing Personality, and all the bunkum that follows from it.¹⁴¹

In contrast, the Georgians never renounced the humanistic view of poetic production, even when their work ponders its problems, or shows inadvertently that it may be inadequate.

The potential inadequacy of the humanist viewpoint is perhaps most evident in the Georgians’ Romantic preoccupation with memory, which, at times, bordered on obsession. It will also become clear, however, that the Georgians were aware that this concern provoked further questions rather than answers. Doubts about the Romantic imagination and the relevance of the Romantic Artist to society, noted earlier, led to a preoccupation with ephemerality where Georgians showed scepticism about the power of poetry. Hardy shared in this doubt. His ‘The To-be-Forgotten’ (from *Poems of the Past and the Present*, 1902) is typical:

But what has been will be –
First memory, then oblivion’s swallowing sea;
Like men foregone, shall we merge into those
Whose story no one knows.¹⁴²

Memory is here a temporary state, granting only temporary immortality: the existence of those who have fallen from history cannot be proved, and as that fate is inevitable for most, the poet feels his own declining significance. A similar awareness led Masfield to admit in 'Biography' (1912):

When I am buried, all my thoughts and acts
Will be reduced to lists and dates and facts,
And long before this wandering flesh is rotten
The dates themselves will be forgotten.¹⁴³

Here, we are witnessing the dismantling of the Romantic self - the individual human life and its artistic achievements breaking down under advancing time. This sense of reduction reveals an important doubt at the core of Georgian Romanticism. Gordon Bottomley demonstrated similar anxieties in 'Atlantis' (*Georgian Poetry III*, 1917):

What poets sang in Atlantis? Who can tell
The epics of Atlantis or their names?

* * *

And, when mankind is dead and the world cold,
Poetry's immortality will pass.¹⁴⁴

Likewise, Hodgson saw the transience of mankind in his 'Babylon', also from *Georgian Poetry III* (see Anthology, p.64):

If you could bring her glories back!
You gentle sirs who sift in the dust
And burrow in the mould and must
Of Babylon for bric-a-brac,
Who catalogue and pigeon-hole
The faded splendours of her soul
And put her greatness under the glass –
If you could bring her past to pass!¹⁴⁵

A common awareness has emerged: the hopelessness of the 'gentle sirs' who attempt to 'catalogue' the past, represented here by Babylon, is similar to the futility of the 'dates

and facts' in Masefield's 'Biography' (later in that piece, Masefield makes reference to 'dead museums') and the lost poets and poems in Bottomley's 'Atlantis'. One might also adduce Brooke's 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester', with its satirical references to 'clever modern men' who 'have seen / A faun a-peeping through the green, / And felt the classics were not dead'.¹⁴⁶ It is clear that the Georgians were by no means complacent in the way they viewed history and its relation to humanity. In fact, they regarded it with intelligent humility. They were deeply haunted by change, and the loss of what had gone before. Their doubts as to any possibility of immortality led them to view the past not so much with nostalgia, as many have assumed, but rather with a measure of awe, a sense of its strangeness, and its paradoxical tendency to be both present and absent. Time and its complexities are thus examined with some sophistication. Edward Thomas felt compelled to admit: 'The Past is a strange land, most strange' ('Parting').¹⁴⁷ And Masefield felt the same: 'an old man's past's a strange thing, for it never leaves his / mind' ('Spanish Waters').¹⁴⁸

Doubts about the power of poetry to endure led both Hardy and the Georgians to see memory as a possible corrective to this incompleteness, and in the case of the latter, the theme became still more prominent in the 1920s, '30s and '40s when they were peripheral to the main direction of English verse – as if their own fall from critical favour had impressed upon them awareness of transience to an even deeper degree. An earlier fascination with memory can be found in Hardy's 'Memory and I' (*Poems of the Past and Present*, 1902), where he appeals constantly to this faculty, but has to accept that it gives little away:

O Memory, where is now my youth,
Who used to say that life was truth?

I saw him in a crumbled cot
Beneath a tottering tree;
That he as phantom lingers there
Is only known to me.¹⁴⁹

Monro's 'Prayer to Memory' (*Real Property*, 1922) sees it as a possible source of wholeness:

Memory, mother of thought,
 Help me!
 I am a child of the past;
 Heir to the future: you hold
 Both of these in your brain.¹⁵⁰

The poet here cannot command, but only implore. However, despite memory's inconsistency, it is all the poet has, and should be prioritised, as Monro acknowledged in 'Strange Meeting' (*Strange Meeting*, 1917): 'Memory opens; memory closes: Memory taught me to be a man'.¹⁵¹ De la Mare, in the title piece of *Memory* (1938), also insisted upon the primacy of this function, while realising that the poet's appeals could be useless:

Ah, Memory – that strange deceiver!
 Who can trust her? How believe her –
 While she hoards up with equal care
 The poor and trivial, rich and rare;
 Yet flings away, as wantonly,
 Grave fact and loveliest fantasy.¹⁵²

In the broader narrative of history, past events become immaterial and have the same epistemological substance as the purely fictitious. Masefield shows comparable awareness in 'Wonderings' (1943):

Out of a dateless darkness pictures gleam,
 But are they memories or only dream?¹⁵³

Time, memory and change are central themes in Georgianism, as they are in Modernism. It is here, however, that the two poetics also differ. In their approach to history, Yeats, Eliot and Pound used complex structures of myth to reflect upon and bring order to the chaos of modernity. The Georgians, on the other hand, remained within an established humanistic tradition, based clearly on the nineteenth-century Romantic imagination. Despite the formal and ideological limitations that this

allegiance ultimately entailed, Georgian poetry was more penetrating and accomplished than it is usually credited with being. It was not, in Samuel Hynes's words, 'the exhausted fag-end' of Romanticism.¹⁵⁴ There was destabilisation of Romantic impulses, certainly, but at the same time thoughtful and intelligent reflection upon this complex condition.

Notes to Chapter One

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- ²³ Walter de la Mare, *Early One Morning in the Spring* (London: Faber, 1935), p.214.
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- ²⁵ John Drinkwater, *The Poet and Communication* (London: Watts, 1923), p.19.
- ²⁶ Drinkwater, *William Morris* (London: Secker, 1917), p.184.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*, p.51.
- ²⁸ Lascelles Abercrombie, *The Theory of Poetry* (London: Secker, 1924), p.83.
- ²⁹ *ibid.*, p.101.
- ³⁰ James Elroy Flecker, *Hassan*, ed. by Basil Dean (London: Heinemann, 1970), p.xix.
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- ³³ *ibid.*, p.9.
- ³⁴ *ibid.*, p.12.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, p.11.
- ³⁶ *The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare*, pp.243-4.
- ³⁷ *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, pp.214-16.
- ³⁸ *The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare*, pp.65-66.
- ³⁹ *ibid.*, p.368.
- ⁴⁰ John Masefield, *Collected Poems*, p.54.
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.55.
- ⁴² *The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare*, p.197.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, p.123.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.125.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.121.
- ⁴⁶ *The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by James Gibson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), p.143.
- ⁴⁷ *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie*, p.60.
- ⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.70
- ⁴⁹ Edward Thomas, *The South Country* (London: Dent, 1909), p.147.
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- ⁵³ Walter de la Mare, *Behold this Dreamer* (London: Faber, 1939) p.5.
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- ⁷¹ Michael Kirkham, *The Imagination of Edward Thomas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p.120.
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- ⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.251.
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Georgian Poetry: Real and Imagined Englands

Georgian poetry transformed itself from a poetry of a mythic idyllic England, and arrived at a sometimes successful poetic realism, the result of this transition being a sympathetic depiction of early twentieth-century England. Georgianism is usually seen as having been a celebration of the nation. In his introduction to the anthology *Georgian Poetry* (1962), for example, James Reeves wrote:

The celebration of England, whether at peace or war, became a principal aim of Georgian poetry. The English countryside, English crafts, and English sports offered suitable subject matter. Poems about country cottages, old furniture, moss-covered barns, rose-scented lanes, apple and cherry orchards, village inns, and village cricket expressed the nostalgia of the soldier on active service and the threat to country life which educated readers feared from the growth of urbanism.¹

National idealisation was a prominent element in the literary climate from which Georgianism evolved – there was a concern with England, the regions, and ‘Englishness’. Hardy staged his work in the imaginary region of Wessex; Housman, who was from Bromsgrove, brought to life a partly real and partly mythologised Shropshire; and the Roman Catholic G.K. Chesterton was interested in a pre-Protestant Saxon England. These three Edwardian poets demonstrated a shared interest in the common man, the ‘old’ agricultural England, and the changing modern England that appeared to be supplanting it. In contrast, ‘bardic’ imperialist poets like Kipling, Henley, Newbolt, Austin and Noyes saw Englishness in terms of heroic deeds and an imperial destiny. The Georgians thus underwent their formative years in a climate where national awareness was keen, and definitions and redefinitions of England were central. A consciousness of nationhood was intensified by the continuing decline in

agrarian England: through increasing urbanisation, the 'old' agricultural England seemed to be fading further into the past, and the Georgians were caught between the need to commemorate the past (or perceived past), and to explore the present. This tension is continually present in their verse.

Although sensitivity to natural beauty and pastoral nostalgia were important elements, Reeves's above comment implies that the Georgians were gentler in tone than they actually were, and it ignores the currents of social comment that were present and at times prominent in their work. It will emerge in the course of this chapter that these writers were more socially aware, and more critical of their time, than is usually supposed. They did not always eulogise England and they frequently condemned its poverty and injustice. It might also be argued that the Georgians were more humanistic - more sympathetic to workers and the poor - than, for example, the fledgling Modernists who replaced them as the dominant poets of the early twentieth century. That is not to say that Masfield or de la Mare should be held in the same esteem as, say, T.S. Eliot: Georgian verse lacks the formal experimentation of Modernism and suffers in comparison. Nevertheless, in Georgianism, traditional forms are simplified, roughened, and sometimes imbued with the colloquial qualities of the speaking voice, the result being a worthy 'popular' poetry in which nineteenth-century versification sits alongside content that is not as vapid and outdated as is commonly thought.

i. Masefield, Davies, de la Mare and Flecker

These four poets represent a slightly earlier generation of poets whose poetry is characterised by an ambivalence comprising elements of extravagant fancy and attempts at realism. On one hand, they demonstrate what John Lucas has termed ‘the clerk’s dream of poetry’ (1986): a process by which certain poets turned away from social reality and embraced instead an ideal of England that is rooted in myth rather than history.² On the other, they show the foundations of what – in marginally later Georgian poets, such as Thomas, Bottomley, Abercrombie, Drinkwater and Gibson – would become a contribution to the ‘culture and society’ tradition which will be discussed in more detail later.³

John Masefield’s early collections, *Salt Water Ballads* (1902) and *Ballads and Poems* (1910), contain a private world of myth. There is the pastoralism of ‘Tewkesbury Road’ (1902) and ‘London Town’ (1910), but there is also a world based on Spanish islands, tropical waters and piracy. This is apparent in ‘Port of Holy Peter’ (1910):

There’s sand-bagging and throat-slitting,
And quiet graves in the sea slime,
Stabbing, of course, and rum-hitting,
Dirt, and drink, and stink, and crime,
In Spanish port,
Fever port,
Port of Holy Peter.⁴

This is fantasy, but not of the sort that is usually connected with the Georgians, their imagined worlds often being violent and exotic, far from the dull rusticity with which they are usually associated. The deeper implications of England and the exotic will be dealt with later when de la Mare is discussed, but at this stage one might say that these imaginative retreats were frequently escapes to excitement rather than to peace, and this goes some way to refuting charges of Georgian timidity.

Poems such as 'Port of Holy Peter' make colourful reading, but there were other, more important developments in the work of Masfield. It should not be assumed that Georgianism is only of interest as a result of, in Raymond Williams's words, 'forms of fancy, which in the end, indeed, are more historically significant' (1973) – i.e. that Georgian poetry offers a case-study in early twentieth-century escapism.⁵ On the contrary, there was a current of poetic realism in Masfield's work, which, to a present-day reader, rescues it from banality. He was determined to give voice to sailors and workers. In 'A Consecration', which serves as a prologue to *Salt Water Ballads*, he announces:

Others may sing of the wine and the wealth and the mirth,
The portly presence of potentates goodly in girth; -
Mine be the dirt and the dross, the dust and scum of the
Earth!⁶

This promise in the above lines is generally fulfilled, and Masfield was among the first to sing of 'the dust and scum of the Earth' in poetry. In 'Fever Chills', for example, there is the welcome presence of plain speech (which will be considered in more detail in Chapter 3), and a sharp class awareness:

On wi' your rags o' duds, my son, 'n' aft, 'n' down the
Hole,
The best cure known for fever chills is shovelling bloody
Coal,
It's hard my son, for us poor sailor-
Men.⁷

This interest in the common man and sympathy for the English underdog became a characteristic aspect of the Edwardian/Georgian literary environment. Major studies that focused specifically upon hardship and poverty included Seebohm Rowntree's *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (1901), Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1903) and Philip Snowden's *The Living Wage* (1912). Other works such as Blatchford's *Britain for the British* (1902) and *Not Guilty: A Defence of the Bottom Dog*

(1905), together with Chesterton's 'The Secret People' (1915), set a climate in which patriotism and social conscience combined. Even Kipling, himself an imperialist, contributed to the interest in proletarian Englishness with *Soldiers Three* (1890), about privates instead of officers, and *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892). In particular, Blatchford's Britain is one in which appeal to nationhood is seen as consanguineous with appeal for economic equity. *Britain for the British* (1908) opens:

This book is intended for any person who does not understand, or has, so far, refused to accept the principles of *socialism*.
But it is especially addressed, as my previous book, *Merrie England*, was addressed, to John Smith, a typical British working man, not yet converted to socialism.⁸

In *Not Guilty*, he included a preface that captures a similar spirit to Masfield's 'Prologue':

This is not a stiff and learned work, written by a professor for professors, but a human book, written in humanity's behalf, by a man, for men and women.

*

A plain dealing man, speaking frankly and simply to honest plain-dealing readers, I shall trust to common sense, and common knowledge, and common English to make my meaning clear.⁹

When the poetry of 'liberal England' is set in context beside the significant political discourses of its time, particularly the more progressive ones, it seems more intellectually substantial than is usually thought.

In Masfield's work, the lives of ordinary sailors are not sanitised, and there are also flashes of shocking violence. Such an instance is 'Evening, Regatta Day' (1902):

Your nose is a red jelly, your mouth's a toothless wreck,
And I'm atop of you, banging your head upon the dirty
Deck,
And both your eyes are bunged and blind like those of a
Mewling pup,
For you're the juggins who caught the crab and lost the
Ship the cup.¹⁰

The poem differs from 'Port of Holy Peter' inasmuch as the violence is not romanticised, and as is so often the case with Georgian poetry, the verse and metrics may appear unsophisticated – but that surely makes them appropriate to the poem's raucous subject matter. Such writing was radical in its time, and this becomes more apparent when we contrast it with the sonorous patriotic verse of Edwardian 'bardic' poets like Watson and Austin – a poetry that the Georgians superseded, just as they would later be overtaken by the Modernists.

Masefield, having been sailor, bartender and boxing enthusiast, had a taste for the gritty side of life, and this is evident in both his romantic and his realist work. The realism would continue and become stronger in his long narrative poems, *The Everlasting Mercy* (1910) and *The Widow in the Bye Street* (1912) – both of which will be examined in a later chapter. Spain and piratical romance are absent, replaced by the slums of England, where the settings are noisy pubs, stagnant harbours and squalid tenements. Throughout these poems, words such as 'bloody', 'bastard', 'blazing' and 'whore' recur with provocative frequency, and the events described are as rumbustious as the language: violent brawls, illegitimate births, and mean frauds. This part of Masefield's work may represent the somewhat belated entry of realism/naturalism in the manner of Gissing, Moore and Bennett into poetry, a movement which met resistance in both fiction and verse: Moore was to fight a prolonged battle against censorship, and the second Georgian anthology was widely condemned for what was seen as ugly and abrasive content.

The title of W.H. Davies's 1910 volume, *Farewell to Poesy*, would seem to announce a new concentration on the 'unpoetic' side of life in the manner of Masefield's 'A Consecration', but while this is true of some of the poems, the collection also includes Davies's mythology of a cleaner, fairer and pre-industrial England. It is exemplified in 'In the Country' with its echoes of Blake:

This life is sweetest; in this wood
 I hear no children cry for food;
 I see no woman, white with care;
 No man, with muscles wasting here.¹¹

This is not the contemporary rural England of C.F.G. Masterman and Seebohm Rowntree, and Davies's countryside emerges only as an ideal of social equity. Throughout his poetry, this mythological land is presented alongside a city which, in one poem, is termed 'the soul's destroyer': it is real in so far as it is dirty, overcrowded and uncaring but it becomes symbolic in that it represents all evils.¹² Davies's attachment to his rural myth may seem naïve, and he was never fully able to relinquish his belief in the country as a moral haven. However, his verse is saved from sentimentality by a recurring strain of realism. *Songs of Joy* (1911) includes 'The Heap of Rags' (see Anthology, p.32):

One night when I went down
 Thames' side, in London town,
 A heap of rags saw I,
 And sat me down close by.
 That thing could not shout and bawl,
 But showed no face at all ...

*

I left it in that place –
 The thing that showed no face,
 Was it a man that had
 Suffered till he went mad?
 So many showers and not
 One rainbow in the lot;
 Too many bitter fears
 To make a pearl from tears?¹³

The force of this striking piece of social documentation results from the metonymic reduction of the vagrant to *being* his – or rather 'its' - tattered clothing. This is an example of utter dehumanisation: it is 'that thing' rather than a person. In the last four lines, the poem also brings into play some of Davies's gifts as a craftsman. He was adept at taking a common image or poetic cliché and presenting it in a fresh way, with

simplicity and colloquialism, so that it takes on an aphoristic quality. In the 1930s and '40s, he was remembered as an appealingly naïve poet, and this is the case in some poems; but a present-day reading of them reveals subtlety and terse understatement rather than unproblematic simplicity.

Davies's knowledge of the England of slums and doss-houses is particularly evident in his depiction of people. Many of these characters are given surnames, resulting in a sense of reportage. In 'The Bird of Paradise' (1914), there is 'Kate Summers who, for gold / Takes any man to bed'.¹⁴ The eponymous protagonist in 'Nell Barnes' (1914) 'led a wicked life', and courting men in front of her husband, would 'meet her husband's frown / With her malicious smile'.¹⁵ 'The Rev. Ebenezer Paul' is a loathsome 'gospel monger' who 'begs from rich men for the poor / And robs the poor of Christmas dinners' (1914)¹⁶. There are also more sympathetic portraits. 'The Blind Boxer' tells us of a washed-up prizefighter who was once 'a god to drunken men', but now sells nuts for a subsistence living.¹⁷ 'Australian Bill' (*Nature Poems*, 1908) is a drunkard with a bad conscience who 'either sits in an alehouse / or stands outside a school', being both bibulous and mawkish.¹⁸ Richard Stonesifer in *W.H. Davies* (1963) describes him as 'the humanitarian poet', and this seems a fitting title.¹⁹

Davies also demonstrates that same close correspondence between his poetry and his prose that Stan Smith and Andrew Motion have both discerned in Edward Thomas. This is important in that it undermines the assumption that the Georgians were merely writers of brief, throwaway anthology lyrics. *New Poems* (1907) included the poem 'Scotty Bill', about a man whose living as a fly-catcher was ruined by new sanitation laws. This character appears again in his prose work *Beggars* (1909), in which Davies reflects on a range of vagrants, including 'Manchester Jack', 'Gentleman Bill', 'Rags', and most strikingly, 'Old Scotty Bill, the fly catcher'. These characters seem the products of experience: Davies was himself a vagrant, and recorded this period

of his life most notably in *Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* (1908). The book includes a foreword by the Fabian socialist George Bernard Shaw, who, impressed with its sympathy for the poor and its unpretentious language, wrote: ‘These prudent pages are unstained with the frightful language, the debased dialect, of the fictitious proletarians of Mr Rudyard Kipling and other genteel writing’.²⁰ Parts of the book capture the tone of socialistic writing of the time: like Blatchford, Davies chooses to situate himself as a plain man relating plain experience:

These have been my experiences; [...] However much people of a higher standing may doubt the veracity of certain matters, I have the consolation to know that many a poor man, who is without talent or means to make his experiences public, knows what I have written to be the truth. It is a poor consolation, for such a one is the sufferer, and not the supporter, and he is powerless at the hands of a stronger body.²¹

There are several experiences that Davies deemed important enough to explore in both his poetry and prose, but perhaps the most powerful is that of the doss-house. In *Beggars*, Davies gave the following account:

It is a pathetic sight to see men dying in a lodging-house, fighting against death, day after day. The few healthy men that are present are quite indifferent to life, [...] These men fight against going to the hospital and sit dying day after day, making no complaint, until the lodging house keeper is surprised some morning to find them lying in bed, without the strength to rise.²²

This material surfaced again in one of Davies’s most powerful poems, ‘The Den’ (from *The Bird of Paradise*, 1914):

They sleep together in one den,
Ten in a row – ten beds, ten men;
Three dying men are in that room,
Whose coughs at night will soon become
Death’s rattle: drunkards in bed
Sound as worried things half-dead.

Jim Lasker dreamt, when in that den,
He saw ten beds that had ten men;
One sleeper in a sack was sown,
With nothing of his feature shown:
Jim felt that face he could not see –
‘This face is mine, I’m dead,’ said he.²³ (see Anthology, p.33)

The poem derives its power from the inevitability of the death it predicts, and the haunting quality that results. The arrangement of beds in the doss-house is shown to resemble the arrangement of sacks in a mortuary. There is a disturbing sense of quiet about it – the repetition of ‘ten beds’ and ‘ten men’ – ‘fixes’ it, and establishes a stationary quality, as if one is watching the men as they sleep in their rows. The peace is communal, and so is the rather more sinister reason behind it: they will all die there. As is the case with many of Davies’s poems, much of the impact of ‘The Den’ results from simplicity and verbal economy: there are no more words than is necessary, and the reader leaves the page with a distinct visual impression of the scene described.

Davies is often most impressive when he depicts the violence that is prevalent in the netherworld he describes. In *Beggars*, for example, he considers the threat posed to tramps, publicans and policemen by juvenile gangs:

What makes full-grown men so much afraid of these half boys and half men is their recklessness. They will use knife, poker, fork, or anything else that is near their hands. One day I saw one of these young bullies deliberately poke out an old man’s eye.

Equally graphic material is present in his poetry. ‘Saturday Night in the Slums’ (*New Poems*, 1907) portrays a particularly unpleasant kind of violence, symptomatic of squalor and misery (see *Anthology*, p.34):

For an old woman passed, and she
 Would hide her face when I did stare,
 But when she turns that face from me,
 There’s clotted blood in her grey hair.

Aye, here was hell last night to play,
 The scream of children, murder cries;
 When I came forth at early day,
 I saw old age with blackened eyes.

Once more, we might remark the strong visual quality that results from its brevity and simplicity. The poem leaves us with the painful image of red blood in grey hair.

Moreover, 'I saw old age with blackened eyes' reveals Davies's deftness and subtlety. The phrase refers to both the face of the battered old lady on a literal level, and, figuratively, to the poet's gloomy view of his own encroaching age.

He did not merely sympathise with the labouring poor, but suggested that they should have a class mission. This is apparent in 'To a Working Man' (*Songs of Joy*, 1911):

You working man, of what avail
 Are the wise teachings of the great
 To raise you to a better state;
 When you forget in pots of ale
 That slavery's not your common fate.

You victim to all fraud and greed,
 Shun now that mind-destroying state:
 Go, meet your masters in debate:
 Go home from work and think and read –
 To make our laws is your true fate.²⁴

In a technical sense, this is not one of his more remarkable poems. However, it does show a now undervalued Georgian poet sharing in what was an important political sensibility in the early twentieth century. He is clearly aiming at the social awareness and common man's oratory that is central to the work of Blatchford and others.

Like Davies, Walter de la Mare cherished a mythic England, which appears in many of his poems, and as with Masfield, there is also the presence of more exotic fancies. One such poem is 'Arabia' (*The Listeners*, 1912):

Sweet is the music of Arabia,
 In my heart, when out of dreams
 I still in the thin clear mirk of dawn
 Descry her gliding streams;
 Hear her strange lutes on the green banks
 Ring loud with the grief and delight
 Of the dim-silked, dark haired musicians
 In the brooding silence of night.²⁵

De la Mare's Arabia is not a convincing depiction of that region, but a romanticisation of it; the very act of naming Arabia as the exotic other shows an inescapable

Englishness of outlook - a perspective that also involves much romanticisation of England itself, as in the poem 'England' (*Poems*, 1906): 'No lovelier hills than thine have laid my tired thoughts to rest'.²⁶ There are many such instances in Georgian poetry, and examples include Masefield's 'The Golden City of St. Mary' (1902), Sturge Moore's 'A Sicilian Idyll' (1912), and Flecker's 'The Golden Journey to Samarkand' (1913). Particularly in the case of de la Mare, critics have often attacked this romantic tendency. Both Leavis (1932) and Geoffrey Bullough (1934) compare him unfavourably to Yeats: with some justification, they felt that although the poets' uses of fairy myth were similar, Yeats had the necessary grasp of social realities to make his mythology harder-edged and more convincing. While this may be true, we should not assume that de la Mare was incapable of addressing the social reality around him. There is not much realism (in the socially descriptive sense) in his work, but when it appears it is striking. *The Veil* (1921) contains several such poems, including 'In the Dock' (see Anthology, p. 35):

Pallid, mis-shapen he stands. The world's grimed thumb,
 Now hooked securely in his matted hair,
 Has hauled him struggling from his poisonous slum
 And flung him, mute as a fish, netted there.

His bloodless hands entalon that iron rail.
 He gloats in beastlike trance. His setting eyes
 From staring face to face rove on – and quail.
 Justice for carrion pants: and there the flies ...²⁷

The condemned criminal is portrayed as sub-human, but there is a sharp irony: an exploitative society shows revulsion for an object of its own making. The convict is degraded by the use of images such as talons, matted hair, muteness, and howls, but the reader/society is charged with complicity in his degradation. In the last line of the second stanza, the jury and public gallery are portrayed as flies around an already dead carcass. There is a horrible finality in the way the criminal's tortured mind envisages his own gallows:

Voice after voice in smooth impartial drone
 Erects horrific in his darkening brain
 A timber framework.²⁸

The final lines are a powerful culmination, and depict a poignant collapse of human dignity: 'Suddenly like a wolf he cries; and sweats to see / When howls a man's soul, it howls inaudibly'.²⁹ Unlike Masfield, W.H. Davies, and Wilfrid Gibson, de la Mare had no first-hand experience of the 'poisonous slum', but he was aware of how the petit-bourgeois hypocrisies of his own class perpetuated the slum's existence.

De la Mare's poetry is largely about ghostly presences, sadness, vacancy, and ephemerality. However, the question of what sort of poet he might have become if he had been prepared to address social matters rather than the poet's own creative difficulties is an interesting one. It is raised by a handful of poems from among his many volumes. 'The Slum Child' (*The Fleeting*, 1933) continues in directions set by 'In the Dock':

O mystery of mysteries!
 Between my hands I take that face,
 Bloodless and bleak, unchildlike wise –
 Epitome of man's disgrace,

I search its restless eyes,
 And, from those woe-flecked depths, at me
 Looks back through all misery
 A self beyond surmise.³⁰

The poet is unequivocal in seeing the humanity of the poor. As the slum child is actually the speaker of the poem, looking back upon an earlier self, both distant and yet recognisable, the reader is asked to acknowledge that the slum child could have been anyone. In this sense, we are all haunted by the slum child we could have been, and the message is that such children are everyone's responsibility.

James Elroy Flecker had much in common with de la Mare. His poetry never truly emerged from the myth and legend of the orient, and an idyllic vision of England, although there were some poems in which social reality began to materialise. 'The

Ballad of Camden Town' (*Forty-Two Poems*, 1911) touches on poverty and prostitution:

When I was ill and she was pale
 And empty stood our store,
 She left the latchkey on its nail,
 And saw me nevermore.

* * *

What came of her? The bitter nights
 Destroy the rose and lily,
 And souls are lost among the lights
 Of painted Piccadilly.³¹

'Oxford Canal' (1911) is another poem in which contemporary England is addressed. It attempts – quite successfully – to capture the rush and clamour of a suburb (see Anthology, p.49):

A savage woman screamed at me from a barge: little
 Children began to cry;
 The untidy landscape rose to life: a sawmill started;
 A cart rattled down the wharf, and workmen clanged
 Over the iron footbridge ...

* * *

O strange motion in the suburb of a county town: slow
 Regular movement of the dance of death.³²

What is particularly revealing in Flecker's case are the conflicting intentions behind his poetry. In his introduction to *The Golden Journey of Samarkand* (1913), he displayed views that clash with the general spirit of Georgianism, and hark back to the aestheticism that is also an important influence on his work:

It is not his [the poet's] business to make wise reflections about the social and moral problems of the day, but, whether inspired by a slum widow in Camden Town or an old volume picked up from a soldo in the streets of Florence, to make beautiful the tragedy and tragic the beauty of a man's life.³³

But this was tempered and even contradicted by the actively political outlook in his prose work *The Grecians* (1910), which is about educational reform. The book is

written in a liberal spirit, with impatience for the traditional ruling class. As its protagonist says to his companions:

If I do not hold your belief in the British aristocracy of today it is because I find most of them, except those who are actively engaged in state service, both vacuous and vulgar. You may know them better than I do, but, as far as I can judge, their views on art and life are as vulgar as their taste in amusement and their attitudes in motor cars.³⁴

The Grecians tackles the problem of social stagnation, and suggests that the solution lies in fashioning schools to produce a new, highly cultured, and yet highly pragmatic, breed of person: 'a Grecian', and a new society: 'La Giocosa'. There is impatience with the idea that education should be bought with money, and by those that are wealthy: 'We have no sympathy with Cecil Rhodes, nor with his cheerful, popular, and chiefly ignorant crowds who come to Oxford under his fantastic testament'.³⁵ The remedy for society's ills, spoken through the normative voice of the visionary young schoolmaster, Harold, is a new and energetic political credo:

We will re-found La Giocosa, and build it anew in England beside the sea that typifies our race. And if I have made no direct reference to patriotism, let me say this now. Patriotism is not taught by bad poetry and bad literature, by rifle clubs, or Union Jacks, or essays on Tariff Reform [...] And in training Grecians La Giocosa has fulfilled her duty to England. Ours shall be no ideal school for ideal youth, but a place where hard work is done, and where boys are toilfully prepared for the difficulties of a modern world.³⁶

This is a liberal viewpoint. Flecker made his political and social stances further apparent in his shorter prose piece 'Liberalism and Youth' (undated, but probably 1911-12). It exemplifies the fervour with which young intellectuals of the time embraced their liberalism and the social conscience that resulted:

For humanitarian we are, we young liberals and not ashamed of that name or its glorious history. But we are followers of an old tradition; we have no truck with the faddist and the crank. Children of the great humanists of the Italian renaissance, our ideal is to think deeply, and act swiftly.³⁷

Carlyle and the great old novelists – many of the great new ones such as John Galsworthy – conscious or unconsciously – think with us and inspire us. And

though the problems before us are dark and menacing, good work has been done, and will be.³⁸

These quotations form a convenient point of departure into the next section, which examines poets who were more directly political in their approach. What is important here is Flecker's clear sense of partaking in a tradition of social comment. In the following pages, it will be argued that the Georgians were doing precisely that: rather than seeing the nineteenth century as something to be left behind, they saw themselves as its heirs. Masfield, Davies, de la Mare, and Flecker - while by no means overtly radical (politically or poetically), complicate the standard view of the Georgian movement, which, to this day, is usually seen to have been purely an escape from the actuality of modern England, and the celebration of a sentimental ideal.

ii. Gibson, Abercrombie, Bottomley, Drinkwater, Thomas

These poets seem to constitute another stage in the development of Georgian poetry. They are not chronologically distinct from those hitherto discussed, but they represent a different current in the movement. The pastoral myth of a fair and just rural England is not present in their work to the same extent, nor are the exotic alternative worlds of legend and fairy-tale. Consequently, the emergent strain of realism is more sustained and more convincing.³⁹

Furthermore, their concerns can be placed more firmly within an important literary tradition: they exhibit what Raymond Williams called 'a sense of a tradition of writing about culture and society' (1987).⁴⁰ While he criticised the Georgians in

The Country and the City (1973) for 'a specific conjunction of the homely with a kind of weak-willed fantasy',⁴¹ it might be argued that they represent an unacknowledged stage of a lineage that he identified in *Culture and Society* (1958). The book argues that notions of 'culture' developed as a response to the industrial revolution, and goes on to analyse changing perceptions of labour, democracy and industry. Culture is seen as a social and historical phenomenon, and ultimately a political one. Also considered is the lot of the worker in this transition, and various aspects of regimentation and impersonality. This process is charted in a 'nineteenth-century tradition' of interrelated social and cultural concern that evolved from the writings of Romantics such as Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron, continued into the writings of Mallock, Gissing and Shaw, and in the twentieth century with Lawrence and Orwell. Emphasising this tradition, it might be noted, has the effect of further identifying the Georgians as late Romantics. The Romantic poets, shown earlier to be influential to Georgianism, could (among others) also be the foundation of their political sensibility. A closer examination of the Georgians, taking into account poems that are not so commonly anthologised and their long-forgotten prose writings, will reveal that these poets made a creditable effort to bring into play the kinds of social analyses that they are commonly considered to have shunned. As a result of this misconception, socially-aware critics have missed much of interest in the Georgians, and some amendment for this will be attempted here.

These poets did not merely indicate social themes in their poems, but explored them in some depth in prose works which rebut the claim that the Georgians were oblivious to social issues and only absorbed in a pastoral idyll. Lascelles Abercrombie's political manifesto, *Speculative Dialogue* (1913), reveals political views that go beyond liberalism and approach socialism. The dialogue between 'Famine and Pestilence' reveals a radical stance on a variety of issues:

Are men much aware of the beauty of an English town? Look inside their factories, inside their homes. True, there is one form of beauty still left to them –

beer; but it is a perilous form of men who have no other, and even that seems likely to be taken from them.⁴²

This is not a celebration of conservative England, but an angry criticism. The whole modern way of life is condemned: 'their mad triumph, insanely exulting in their achievements, furiously swinking under roofs, scribbling in offices, or shovelling round furnaces'.⁴³ It becomes clear that Abercrombie was not merely the writer of short rural poems, but engaged energetically with the concerns of his time. In 'Minos and a Ghost', for instance, he considers the equivocating man who is 'hesitating between Socialism and Anarchy, or between Polygamy and Eugenics, or between overhead and underhead connections for tram ways'.⁴⁴ This comment underlines the extent to which twentieth-century thought is becoming subject to technology, and to Abercrombie's credit, he sees it as an international phenomenon. In the dialogue between Famine and Pestilence, it is clear that his social awareness extends beyond the national to the colonial:

The European grasp will slacken from the world, and these nations will shrink together and dwindle. We have seen the white race eat, like a leprosy, upon the other races, and do them more harm than we ever did together, establishing factories where there were temples, work where dances were, clothing where there was nakedness. In the coming time, when we have withdrawn to our mother's side, we shall watch the tide shift, and mark the coloured nations not only recovering their own lands, but flowing in to possess the lands of the lazar white nations.⁴⁵

This awareness of issues has the effect of situating Abercrombie (and some other Georgians) closer to the combative and socially informed debate of Chesterton, Wells and Shaw, those better-known writers who are thought to comprise the so-called 'liberal revival' in the early twentieth century. John D. Coates examines this marked politicisation of English letters in *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (1984), but makes no mention of the Georgians, although, in fact, these poets had their formative years in the arena of social debate that Coates analyses so closely.

John Drinkwater joined Abercrombie in this clear hostility to an exploitative and depersonalised society. In *The World and the Artist* (1922), he repeatedly condemns what he calls ‘the age of mechanical civilisation’,⁴⁶ and capitalism is seen as a self-perpetuating evil: ‘It is a vicious extravagance that permeates our society. [...] They make money with a single zeal for making more money’.⁴⁷ *This Troubled World* (1933) serves as Drinkwater’s social and philosophical treatise in much the same way as Abercrombie’s *Speculative Dialogue*. The ‘Man and Machine’ section of Drinkwater’s book continues with his distrust of ‘the mechanical age’, and he singles out various innovations and institutions for censure:

Our mechanical age is bewitched by a barren virtuosity. A striking example may be found in the work of the cinema studios. Here is a great industry almost entirely enslaved by the machine that should be its servant.⁴⁸

He is aware that reification has taken place: the dehumanisation of people by products invented for their convenience. This distrust of machinery and the capital behind it was an ongoing intellectual tradition, which Williams traces back to Carlyle and Arnold. Drinkwater, very much in the tradition of those nineteenth-century thinkers, sees it as connected to a more general spiritual starvation:

In politics, in finance, in commerce, we have lost our grip on the reality that is conscious of the lessons of the past, the necessities of the present, and the claims of the future. [...] Our modern body politic has lost itself in a fog of self-interest that for long has been illuminated by no light from beyond.⁴⁹

Edward Thomas, like Abercrombie and Drinkwater, was a substantial prose writer, and used this medium to voice humane social views. Like other Georgians, he objected to the relentless mechanisation of life and its dehumanising effect on human beings. Describing electric trams in *Rest and Unrest* (1910), he wrote:

They were polished, compact, efficient, without limbs. Like the machinery in the factories they must be the best material and bright and oiled. They were tended like idols with hate and fear that resembled love in its extremity. Men and women might be decrepit, pale, starved, rotten, but the wheels, the brakes, the

brass work, the advertisements, and the glass windows must be continually inspected and without spot.⁵⁰

Thomas's sentiments prompt the question of the extent to which the social conscience clearly fostered by these writers enters their often dismissed poetry. It will emerge in the course of this section that much Georgian poetry is actually rich in its range of social comment, and that, in the light of the cultural and political context outlined above, Georgian poetry was not, in David Daiches's phrase, 'the poetry of retrenchment',⁵¹ but a creditable attempt to depict and critique early twentieth-century Britain.

The most sustained exploration of poverty and injustice may be found in the work of Wilfrid Gibson. After his death in 1962, *The Guardian* (28-5-62) described him as the 'People's Poet',⁵² and *The Times* (28-5-62) as the 'Trenchant Poet of the Poor'.⁵³ This was certainly the case, but it was not so apparent in his early years: of all the Georgians, Gibson demonstrated the most drastic change in subject matter and manner. The ornate style and medieval content of volumes such as *Uryln the Harper* (1902), *The Golden Helm* (1903) and *The Nets of Love* (1905) were dropped, and replaced by the plainer, more realistic approach of *Stonefolds* (1907) and *Daily Bread* (1910). In short, he substituted present-day reality for medieval fantasy. As was the case with Masefield who showed a similar change in content, this realism would nevertheless be conveyed in largely conventional verse forms: the poems in *Daily Bread* are in dramatic form, and *Fires* (1912) consists mainly of narrative poems.

The following lines were included as an afterword to *Daily Bread*, and serve a similar purpose to 'A Consecration' in Masefield's *Salt Water Ballads*:

All life moving to one measure –
 Daily bread, daily bread
 Bread of life and bread of labour,
 Bread of bitterness and sorrow,
 Hand-to-mouth and no tomorrow,
 Death for housemate, death for neighbour ...⁵⁴

They tell us that the hardships of working people have now begun to be charted in poetry. There is an emphasis throughout on the misery of proletarian life. 'The House of Candles' portrays the death of a woman suspected of murdering 'her bastard brat', and the mixed sympathy and bitterness of her neighbours. 'Agatha Steel' is about a wife estranged from her brutal husband returning to her mother, only to find the mother has married a wastrel. 'The First Born' depicts a young couple grieving for a dead son. Bereavement, whether of children, fathers, mothers, wives or husbands, is an experience that recurs throughout the collection. It fulfils the prediction in the above epilogue about 'death for housemate, death for neighbour', and this constant invoking of death emphasises the plight of British workers and their dependants.

Daily Bread is also about the subordination of working-class existence to ubiquitous market forces. 'The Furnace' is a good example (see Anthology, p.55):

The big red gaping mouth ...
 It gapes
 And licks its lips,
 And roars and roars for food,
 I cannot breathe ...
 Its hot breath stifles me,
 And tries to suck me in –
 Into that roaring hell.
 It gapes ... it gapes ...
 I cannot feed it fast enough ...⁵⁵

The furnace may be read as metaphor for the voraciousness of laissez-faire economics: industry incinerates the lives of workers, just as the furnace burns fuel. Many of Gibson's poems show the effects of industry on human consciousness, and his verse contains a variety of symbols that convey the extent of working-class drudgery and the dehumanisation that results. These symbols arise in various forms: furnaces, wheels, factory machines, ovens, cranes. In 'Wheels' (1914), the injured policeman's mind is 'a never-ending train of postal vans'.⁵⁶ Another such poem is 'The Machine' (1912), which captures the inner tumult of a printing machine-operator. He has been 'tending that unsatisfied machine', and 'the green and blue and red, / Went jiggling through his

head'.⁵⁷ Once more, reification has taken place: machines have been allowed to make 'things' of their human minds. Both the printing machine and the furnace have to be 'tended' or 'fed': they take on a parasitic-creature-like quality. Such imagery implies that social exploitation is rife and thriving. The market economy and modern systems are also shown to be cruelly invasive, and much effect is gained through depicting their encroachment on domesticity and private moments. In 'The Shirt' (1910), the regular 'clanking' of the trains is shown to disrupt the peace in which a man's mother and fiancée mend his shirt, even as, unknown to them, he has just died at work. In 'The Call' (1910), the alarm sounds as a fireman is being informed of his wife's death in childbirth. This subject matter, and Gibson's treatment of it, led some to believe that his place in literature would be greater than it has been. Charles Williams in *Poetry at Present* (1930) wrote:

It will probably take two or three more generations to decide Mr Gibson's permanence in this kind. We ourselves are too aware of the thing about which he writes; we run too easily to read poems about our machine-controlled age. We can see the crowd pouring through the factory gates or round the mine head, in the streets and the shops and the tenement houses. We can see their talk and their thoughts modulated into verse. But whether it can be modulated and enlarged into that expansion of experience called poetry is another matter. But the omens are good.⁵⁸

This comment reinforces several important points: that readers were aware of their 'machine-controlled age', and that it was only fairly recently that poetry had had the contemporary 'feel' that Gibson in his own time captured. In 1910, Abercrombie praised Gibson, seeing *Daily Bread* as a true experiment in both poetry and drama, incorporating modern life in a way where realism and symbolism are married with some success: 'To Mr Wilfrid Gibson, the author of that remarkable series of dramatic poems called *Daily Bread*, life itself, the apparently ordinary workaday mode of existence of apparently ordinary men and women, is the one unalterably significant symbol in the world'.⁵⁹

In other dramatic pieces, and also his narrative poems, Gibson showed he was capable of a less personal and more panoramic focus. 'The Garrett' (1910) includes powerful depiction of the city itself:

Oh if you'd seen the faces round the stall
 The hungry faces in the flame of naphtha –
 Eyes glaring from the shadows greedily,
 And cold blue lips drinking the very steam
 Of the coffee with a relish as I passed by.⁶⁰

Such vivid scenes are common in Gibson's work. For a short time, he was a social worker in London's East End, and these descriptions, like those of W.H. Davies, are rooted in first-hand experience. 'The Ovens' (*Fires*, 1912) achieves a similar effect, and the result is a convincing evocation of city squalor:

He wandered through the midnight street
 And heard those ever-pacing feet,
 Of young girls, children yet in years,
 With gawdy ribbons in their hair,
 And shameless fevered eyes astare,
 And slack lips set in brazen leers,
 Who walked the pavement of despair,
 Beneath the fair full summer moon,
 Shadowed by worn-out wizened hags,
 With claw-hands clutching filthy rags
 About old bosoms shrunk and thin,
 And mouths aleer without a tooth,
 Who dogged them, cursing their sleek youth
 That filched their custom and their bread ...⁶¹

As in the lines from 'The Garrett', there is a strong visual quality, and the scene seems nightmarish and phantasmagoric. This is achieved by use of a wandering protagonist/speaker, who is able to register these images of misery in succession, as if he is dreaming them. The naturalistic material – child prostitutes vying with their elderly counterparts – was new to poetry at the time, and is a stark contrast to the patriotic themes of Austin and Newbolt.

Lascelles Abercrombie's realism was most evident in his verse dramas, which usually examine social issues. In 'Ham and Eggs' (1913), he portrays prostitution and

anti-Semitism; 'The Adder' (1913) deals with temperance, Methodism, and repressed sexual obsession; 'The Staircase' (1914) with illegitimate birth, vagrancy and domestic violence. The loudmouthed, brothel-haunting, Jew-hating youth in 'Ham and Eggs' is a powerful example of Abercrombie's brand of realism:

THE WENCH. Are any Jews in the shop?
 THE YOUTH. Ay, there's one.
 I'm down on Jews; I owe them something bitter.
 This one cuts wood-blocks at a circular saw;
 A dirty Jew ...
 He did yelp once;
 For I was strolling by, and right in the nick
 Nudged the beast's elbow, and his hand just grazed
 The screaming teeth. O, Mister Jew screamed then;
 It sheared his thumb clean off, clean as you could wish.⁶²

A characteristic of Abercrombie's work is its relish of 'low' things – often the seedy interludes that lie beside 'big' events. In this way, the emphasis is diverted from the grand and the abstract, and returns with force to the low and the human. The action here is set in a teashop that is really a brothel: the waitress is a prostitute, and the pianist the madam. The above passage also shows Abercrombie's interest in the violent and the macabre. There are several notable examples: the burning alive of the hero in 'Peregrinus', the severed heads in 'Mary' (1912), the boxed snake in 'The Adder', the bloated flies in 'The Sale of St. Thomas' (*Georgian Poetry I*, 1912), and the crushed frogs in 'The End of the World' (*New Numbers II*, 1914 and *Georgian Poetry II*, 1915). The effectiveness of these poetic dramas should certainly not be overstated, but at the time they seemed radical in the extreme.

The most revealing comments were made by Wilfrid Gibson, in the foreword to *Lyrics and Unfinished Poems* (1940):

The work of our most acclaimed realist poets of today pales into mere literary conventionality when confronted by the uncompromising actuality, often almost unbearably sinister and horrifying, of much of Abercrombie's verse – his very realism, even when laced by a sardonic humour, might prove too astringent a stimulant for the palate of a squeamish audience.⁶³

Published two years after Abercrombie's death, by which time Georgian prestige had vanished, they provide a significant insight into how the Georgians saw themselves. Gibson is insistent throughout the remainder of this piece about the 'realism' of Abercrombie, and his comments suggest a feeling that Georgian realism had not received due acknowledgement. Writing to de la Mare on 18 May 1919, Gibson supplies further evidence of what Georgian intention had been:

Dear Jack [de la Mare's nickname],

I believe I left that book on realism at your house. I wonder if you would be so good as to post it to Abercrombie who is most anxious to see it. [...] He hasn't lost his old stroke, nor his amazing powers of imagery.⁶⁴

Was Abercrombie the epitome of this new realism, as Gibson suggests?

Abercrombie proved himself just as trenchant a poet of the poor as Gibson, but in a rather different way. For all his realism, Gibson invested his poor and his workers with strength, nobility and even heroism: from the young labourer who resolves to stay by his growing family ('On the Road', *Daily Bread*) to the shopkeeper who gives bread and tea to an unkempt child ('The Shop', *Fires*), this decency and resolve is a regular feature of his portrayal of proletarian life. Abercrombie, on the other hand, showed the human spirit in all its degradation, and this produces much of the force of his work. His short story, 'The Wedding Ring', (*Rhythm XII*, 1913), is about a feisty elderly couple who have pawned their dead daughter-in-law's wedding ring as she lies in her coffin, and cheerfully hum in the room below. This is a standard example of Abercrombian lowliness. The pugnacity, vulgarity and meanness of the villagers in *The End of the World* is particularly noteworthy, in that it avoids completely the sentimentality and the limp rurality of which the Georgians are so often accused.

Abercrombie's poetry (as opposed to his verse drama) also engages with a variety of wider issues, and explores many of those that also arise in his prose.

His receptiveness to general social matters is evident in 'Indignation: an Ode' (*Interludes and Poems*, 1908) which sees the geography of industry as an artificial ugliness superimposed on natural beauty: 'The forced defilement of humanity, / The foundries and the furnaces / That straddle over the human place' (see Anthology, p.1).⁶⁵ Furthermore, it is clear that Abercrombie, like Gibson, feared and hated the process by which products are allowed to de-humanise their human producers:

Where the dam'd wisdom of the wheels
Fearfully fascinates men's wit and steals,
With privy embezzlement that never stops,
The worker's conscience into their spinning roar, -
 Until men are the dead stuff there,
 And the engines are aware?⁶⁶

These lines are particularly effective in that the heavy alliteration, assonance and jagged 's' and 'z' sounds suggest the mechanical quality of a machine. The theme of man's overthrow by instruments he created recurs again in 'Zagreus' (1913), where a deposed god condemns the mess that humankind has made of the earth (see Anthology, p.5):

Man who has made Machines, he is my dream
Of the power I have lost – my impotent dream,
Man who has made himself a misery
With his machines, and still the more must be,
The more his power, the idiot of his fate.⁶⁷

In this context, one might also consider the work of Gordon Bottomley, which has much in common with Abercrombie's. 'To Iron Founders and Others' (1908, included in *Chambers of Imagery II*, 1912) is similar in spirit to Abercrombie's 'Indignation' and 'Zagreus' (see Anthology, p.19):

Your worship is your furnaces,
Which, like old idols, lost obscenes,
Have molten bowels; your vision is
Machines for making more machines. ⁶⁸

Bottomley shared in the aversion to mechanisation that is prominent in Abercrombie, Gibson, Drinkwater and Thomas, and which is part of Georgian poetry's inheritance

from the nineteenth century. He is also characteristically Georgian in seeing industry as a violence done to nature:

You force the birds to wing too high
 Where your unnatural vapours creep:
 Surely the living rocks shall die
 When birds no rightful distance keep.⁶⁹

The power of Bottomley's poetry is enhanced by bold strains of biblical imagery. In 'Babel: the Gate of God' (1907, *Chambers of Imagery II*, 1912), he examines the destructive pride of the Babylonians in trying to reach God through human industry, and, given the context of 'To Iron Founders' and other Georgian poems, perhaps intends this to stand as analogy for the industry of the twentieth century. The engines and building works of Babel have brought about a nightmarish landscape (see Anthology, p.21):

Space – the old source of time – should be undone,
 Eternity defined, by men who trusted
 Another tier would equal them with god.
 A city of grimy kilns and monstrous vats
 Of walled-in metal where thick bitumen
 Boiled to make grout and mortar and exhaled
 Itself in sooty vapour, squat truncations,
 Hunched like spread toads ...⁷⁰

Much of the power of the poem lies in the final stanza, where the price paid for violence against nature, and for pride in the face of the infinite, is vividly described:

Man with his bricks was building yet, building yet,
 Where dawn and midnight mingled and woke no
 Birds,
 In the last courses, building up past his knowledge
 A wall that swung – for towers can have no tops,
 No chord can mete the universal segment,
 Earth has not basis. Yet the yielding sky,
 Invincible vacancy, was there discovered –
 Though piled-up bricks should pulp the sappy
 Balks,
 Weight generate a secrecy of heat.
 Cankorous charring, crevices' fronds of flame.⁷¹

The verbal and rhythmic properties of Georgian poetry will be considered in a later chapter, but it is clear that the impact here is heightened by a mixture of verbal precision and rhythmic contortion, the latter reflecting the ugliness of the scene described. There is also masterful suspense – the catastrophe that befalls the people is signalled only by the absence of bird song, a haunting and telling sign of ecological damage, and the piece carries a strong sense of a despoiled environment. It is significant that after the Babylonians have perished, what remains – active but unmanned – are their fiery machines.

Social indignation is also present in John Drinkwater's poetry. While much of his work shows the conventional ruralism for which the Georgians are so often condemned, he too was capable of protest. 'Lady Street' (*Poems 1908-1914*) demonstrates a viewpoint and style similar to Gibson's (see Anthology, p.46):

All day long
 In Lady Street the traffic goes
 By dingy houses, desolate rows
 Of shops that stare like hopeless eyes,
 Day long the sellers cry their cries,
 The fortune tellers tell no wrong
 Of lives that know not any right ...⁷²

These lines connect the dilapidation of the buildings to the hopelessness of the human lives within by way of the striking simile in the fourth line. In the speaker's vision, the inanimate objects ('the hopeless eyes' of the shops) and the human objects ('the hopeless eyes' of the inhabitants) merge into each other. And as is so often the case with Gibson too, the quiet mood and steady pace is suited to the compassion of the poem. The final two lines of this quotation are perhaps most revealing of the dreariness of the scene: the fortune-tellers are the only source of perception and promise of something better, and, though charlatans, they too are subject to a precarious and limited livelihood.

Drinkwater could also bring into play simple, effective, balladic rhythms, such as those in 'Elizabeth Ann' (from *Tides*, 1917):

This is the tale of Elizabeth Ann,
Who went away with her fancy man.

* * *

All day long from seven to six
Ann was polishing candlesticks,

For Bishops and crapulous Millionaires
To buy for altars and bed-chambers.

And youth in a year and a year will pass
But there's never an end to polishing brass.⁷³ (see Anthology, p.48)

Here, formal simplicity proves an effective vehicle for liberal and progressive thought. The poem, with the name of the female protagonist as title, and its account of a girl or woman who threatens received notions of morality, is reminiscent of Hardy, and might be compared to 'To Lisbie Brown' (from *Poems of the Past and Present*, 1902) and 'Julie Jane' (from *Time's Laughingstocks*, 1909).

Although Drinkwater's poetry is appreciative of natural beauty (he had no liking for 'the city of broken hands'),⁷⁴ he was not a naïve ruralist. In *The World and the Artist* (1922), he objected to the 'unconsidered cry of "back to the land", raised by dilettantes who suppose the country to be the most suitable environment for their natural idleness'⁷⁵, and in the posthumous *English Poetry* (1938), he referred dismissively to 'the cows and haystacks of the neo-Georgians'.⁷⁶ He saw nature as connected to political sincerity, and a genuine moral retreat from town life. In 'Politics' (*Tides*, 1917) the speaker addresses a politician in the second person:

You must devise
Your myriad policies,
For we are little wise,
And must be led and marshalled, lest we keep
Too fast a sleep
Far from the world's realities.

* * *

But still
A voice calls from the hill –
I must away –
I cannot hear your argument today.⁷⁷

While the charge of sheltering behind pastoralism cannot entirely be refuted (particularly in Drinkwater's case, and also that of Bottomley), one can, I think, see the retreat to nature as a kind of political statement rather than mere complacency. Drinkwater was a great admirer of the socialist William Morris, who also held a belief in ruralism, and, in 'William Morris and the State' (1917), he wrote that Morris was 'the greatest and most splendid fighter of his generation ... tomorrow his message will be heard'.⁷⁸ Raymond Williams saw Morris as the central figure in continuing the nineteenth-century culture and society tradition into the twentieth century.⁷⁹ Drinkwater's interest in Morris received fuller expression in his full-length critical study, *William Morris* (1917), where he connected Morris's poetic principles firmly with his social mission:

When active socialism became part of his work, his sole purpose was, in his own words, to make socialists, which meant, for Morris, to bring men to a sense of the possibility of the life of large simplicity that he had created as a poet.⁸⁰

The important fact is that Morris's indictment of our contemporary social system is perfectly logical at every point, and that the new life that he creates is complete in its humanity and not that of a misty world of dreams.⁸¹

In other words, Morris's rural utopianism is curative rather than escapist: he hopes to create a moral renaissance by portraying a moral society. Drinkwater is aware of the sanctity that Morris invested in the earth, and the bitter irony that farm-workers – those closest to that earth – were poor and treated with scant respect. In accordance with the culture and society tradition, sympathy and understanding is perceptively given to alienated workers. Moreover, like Abercrombie and (as will become apparent) Edward

Thomas, Drinkwater demonstrates a robust anti-imperialism. Commenting upon the people imagined in Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1893), he wrote:

They are the clearly wrought ideal of our race, but they have left in them nothing of those products of our race who consistently confuse expediency with ethical fitness, sentimentalism with passion, and celebrate the planting of the British flag in all sorts of places where it is not in the least wanted by calling themselves God's Englishmen.⁸²

Peter Childs argues that 'the Georgians were concerned with England in terms of nature and the countryside but, unlike Newbolt, William Watson or Alfred Noyes, not with England in terms of nation or a "race"'.⁸³ This is not entirely the case (there are several extracts of poetry and prose throughout this thesis which *do* speak of nation or race), but Childs is correct in implying that there is a movement way from aggressive or martial definition of nation or race.

Edward Thomas might be considered the apotheosis of this tradition in which Morris is so integral. Like Drinkwater, he paid tribute to Morris, and for largely the same reasons. In a review of *The Collected Works of William Morris* that appeared in *The Bookman* (1911), he commented upon Morris's commitments to both art and social causes, seeing them not as tensional, but as interrelated:

In his lecture on 'Art and its Producers' he betrays a feeling that troubling about arts and crafts might seem 'petty and unheroic' to those who have been brought face to face with 'the reckless hideousness and squalor of a great manufacturing district'. He cared for both, for the arts and crafts and for the 'shabby hell' of the city and he did not think or find the two cares incompatible, but rather insisted that they were one, though he found one crowded life, busy, never hurried, and of no unusual length, too small for its purpose.⁸⁴

Thomas himself can be read as a writer of the left. John Lucas, in 'Edward Thomas, Ivor Gurney and English Socialism', has seen a socialist consciousness in Thomas's use of the word 'merry' in 'The Manor Farm' on the grounds that the word was frequently used in socialist pamphlets in the 1890s and early twentieth century, e.g. Blatchford's *Merrie England* (1893).⁸⁵ Blatchford, he observes, like Thomas, was a keen reader of

Morris. This, certainly, offers a new context in which Thomas (and, in my view, other Georgians) can be read. In his prose works, especially, Thomas was capable of perceptive social comment. *Beautiful Wales* (1905) objects to the intrusively vulgar landscape produced by capitalism: 'The streets, named after factory magnates, had been made in long blocks. [...] Middle-aged men of fifteen and aged men of thirty were in keeping with their ludicrous senility'.⁸⁶ In *Rest and Unrest* (1910), he described a mining town with a vivid sense of its ugliness – and an anger and condemnation reminiscent of D.H. Lawrence:

Orange and scarlet furnaces that seemed to have eaten large squares out of the streets. Beyond, based in fire, the brown hill and the green hill rose indistinguishably dark into the midst of the stars. The pit was sounding with clanking and humming noises that recorded the activity of a demon, not men, for not a whisper was heard of footsteps, voices, blows, caresses, of the love, anger, fear, anxiety, thought, argument, confusion of men and women. [...] The demon was humanity, a demon not born of woman, [...] It is cruel in ignorance, it is pitiful and it forgets.⁸⁷

Humans are shown to be degraded by industrial conditions, by which they are turned from individuals to a collective unthinking swarm. Lawrence was the major writer to portray this abasement, and fittingly, he is given a prominent place in Williams's culture and society tradition, a lineage that might also be claimed for Georgians such as Thomas.

Thomas's hostility to technology was connected to hostility towards the trappings of bourgeois and aristocratic wealth. In *The Ickneid Way* (1913), he shows his dislike for 'the touch of arrogance in the voice of the motor', and laments that 'at Kentford motor-cars tyrannically owned the road', so that 'a nightingale was singing in oblivion'.⁸⁸ Such observations often caused Thomas to debate the nature of England, and the implications of being English. In *The South Country* (1909), for example, he examines identity in the light of region, country and empire. A conversation with a local farmer prompts him to the following conclusion:

For a moment or less as he goes under the porch I seem to see that England, that swan's nest, that island which a man's heart was not too big to love utterly. But now with great Britain, the British Empire, Britons, and the English speaking world, the choice offered to whomsoever would be patriotic is embarrassing and he is fortunate who can find an ideal England of the past, the present and the future to worship, and embody it in his native fields and waters or his garden, as in a graven image.⁸⁹

This notion of benevolent 'pure' patriotism as opposed to noisy nationalism is important to Thomas, and a central ingredient of his liberal attitude. In *Algernon Charles Swinburne* (1912), he sees that poet as possessing a similar independent stance, and a similar attachment to natural beauty rather than martial power: 'he was a passionate lover of England, of her fields and waters', and one who exhibited 'a kind of mingled stateliness and excitement, conservatism and revolutionism'.⁹⁰

While Thomas sometimes featured prominent people in his prose, in his poetry the emphasis is upon the ordinary and the poor. His verse considers the hardships, dignity and endurance of working people, but rather than simply depicting them, situates them throughout history. The elusive rustic in 'Lob', for instance, stands for every English commoner through the ages: 'although he was seen dying at Waterloo, / Hastings, Agincourt, and Sedgemoor too, / Lives yet'.⁹¹ In *The South Country* (1909), there is a similar concern to celebrate the resolve of workers through the centuries. Finding the tombstone of one Robert Page, Thomas speculates: 'He scared the crows, ploughed the clay, fought at Waterloo and lost an arm there, was well-pleased with George the Fourth, and hoed the corn until he was dead'.⁹² The countryside of the past is seen as a working countryside, and its processes are firmly connected to the people who populate it. 'The Mill Water' for example, lies 'Changelessly calling, / Where once men had a work-place and a home'.⁹³

Stan Smith has written of Thomas:

On the one hand he is cut off from the suburban world that bred him. On the other he is forever seeking reconciliation and reunion with the ruined Edens of a lost England which he believes are his true home. He is thus in actuality always

on the road, his beginnings and ends in immortal darkness, caught in perpetual vagrancy, the transient margins of dawn and twilight, become universal symbols of that interface zone which is the true, historical site of being for the suburban superfluous man.⁹⁴

The nomination of a suburban aspect to Thomas is important. In his writings, many of the places where he makes his observations are not strictly cities and villages, but suburban towns that combine characteristics of both. The poet is not simply a pastoralist, but a dweller amidst a modern and increasingly uniform nation. This constitutes a development from the work of other Georgians such as Masefield and Davies, who tended to view the nation simply in terms of the rural and the urban. Furthermore, Smith's comment introduces the matter of the author's position in the midst of a changing country. This chapter has thus far considered the situation of the labouring classes in, as Drinkwater puts it, the age of mechanical civilisation, but what of the poet himself? In Georgian poetry, it seems that the 'suburban superfluous man' is indeed 'always on the road'. This is evident in the considerable number of Georgian poems that are written during travel, when the incompleteness of being between destinations is keenly felt. Sometimes the speaker or protagonist is walking, as in Masefield's 'Vagabond' (1902), 'Roadways' and 'The Emigrant' (1910), Thomas's 'Home' and 'The Other' (1914), and four of the poems from Gibson's *Fires* (1912) – 'The Ovens', 'The Lodestar', 'The Slag' and 'The Hare'. Frequently, the journeying is by train: Brooke's 'Dawn' (1911) and 'The Night Journey' (1913), Thomas's 'Adlestrop', and Monro's 'Suburb' (1914), 'Journey' (1917), and 'Week-end' (1917). This constant movement between places indicates the writer's separation from their original communities. This rootlessness is epitomised in the state of being suburban, neither rural, nor urban, but a satellite of the latter, and deriving no real sense of identity from either. A sense of not belonging is perhaps what leads to the obsession with the regions in Thomas's work, and is most apparent in *A Literary Pilgrim in England*

(1917) which attempts to situate great writers in various locales – i.e. Keats as a Cockney, Tennyson as a Lincolnshire writer, Wordsworth and Emily Brontë as bound up with the north. He is reaching for traditional regional identities that are in fact under threat.

Roads, often used symbolically, figure prominently in Georgian poetry, and further reflect this lack of rootedness.⁹⁵ At the same time, they are seen to suggest continuity and connection, and conjure moods that range from wistfulness to elation. Edward Thomas's 'Roads' (see Anthology, p.83), perhaps the finest poem of this kind, appreciates the paradoxes that lie at the heart of the road and what it symbolises:

Roads go on
While we forget, and are
Forgotten like a star
That shoots and is gone.

On this earth 'tis sure,
We men have not made
Anything that doth fade
So soon, so long endure.⁹⁶

Similarly, in *The Ickneid Way* (1913) Thomas sees in roads, with their suggestions of both permanence and process, a marked contrast to the changing nature of humanity:

We may go or stay, but the road will go up over the mountains to Llandovery, and then up again over to Tregaron. It is a silent companion always ready for us, whether it is night and day, wet or fine, whether we are calm or desperate, well or sick. It is always going: it has never gone right away, and no man is too late.⁹⁷

Masefield's 'Roadways' (*Ballads and Poems*, 1910) finds satisfaction in the fact that roads lead everywhere:

One road leads to London,
One road runs to Wales,
My road leads me seawards
To the white dipping sails.

* * *

My road calls me, lures me
West, east, south, and north;

Most roads lead men homewards,
My road leads me forth.⁹⁸

As an object with no figurative connotations, the road is impersonal in the extreme ('One road leads to Wales...'), but when it is treated symbolically, as the trajectory of one's life, it becomes intensely personal ('My road'). The above lines demonstrate subtle modulations from the general to the individual, and this reflects the increasing complexity of social identity in the early twentieth century. Ivor Gurney, both Georgian and war poet, showed an impressive awareness of these ambivalences and nuances in 'Roads – those Roads':

Roads are sometimes the true symbolical
Representations of movement in the fate of man.
One goes from Severn of tales and sees Wales
A wall against England since time began.

* * *

Roads are home-coming and a hope of desire reached,
(There is the orange window at the curve of the dark way),
Whether by winter white frozen or by summer bleached,
Roads are the right pride of man and his anxiety.⁹⁹

There is a strong awareness of the janiform nature of the road as symbol, and Gurney's statements encapsulate neatly feelings held by most of the poets dealt with here, and also by Hardy. In the previous chapter, it was pointed out the extent to which the latter influenced the Georgians, but it was also the case that, in some respects, he was contemporaneous with them. For example, 'By Henstridge Cross at the Year's End' (1919, included in *Late Lyrics*, 1922), like the poems thus far discussed, uses a road image to explore his own feelings of lost community and cultural dispossession:

Why go the east road now? ...
That way a youth went on the morrow
After mirth, and he brought back sorrow
Painted upon his brow:
Why go the east road now?

Why go the north road now?

Torn, leaf-strewed, as if scoured by foemen,
 Once edging fiefs of my forefolk yoemen,
 Fallows fat to the plough:
 Why go the north road now?¹⁰⁰

The first stanza has a personal significance: the road symbolises his own years as they vanish with advancing age. The second stanza sees his sense of loss in more social and historical terms: in better times, his ancestors trod the road at which he now hesitates. But they are gone, as are the times in which they lived, and he feels, in Thomas's and Smith's word, 'superfluous'.

The lack of community and identity in much Georgian poetry leads to a recurrent longing for home – a home that is unreachable because it is located in the past at a time of change. Masefield felt this yearning upon arriving at an inn in 'Personal' (1902):

And it brought a bitter thought of the days that now
 Were dead to me,
 The merry days in the old home before I went to sea –
 Days that were dead to me indeed. I bowed my head
 To the rain,
 And I passed by the lonely roads again.¹⁰¹

The background against which this grief is played out – rain, inns, roads, - is characteristically Georgian in mood. Present in most of these poets, it is particularly prominent in Thomas, who lived and relived such experiences many times. It is particularly strong in 'The Sign Post', in which the post impresses upon the wandering speaker his own aimlessness:

I read the sign. Which way shall I go?
 A voice says: 'You would not have doubted so
 At twenty. Another voice gentle with scorn
 Says: At twenty you wished you had never been born.'¹⁰²

Nothing is resolved, and the questions remain, leading the poet to posit this condition as one that afflicts all men:

The sun and the frost, the land and the sea,
 Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring, -
 With a poor man of any sort, down to a king,
 Standing upright out in the air
 Wondering where he shall journey, O where?¹⁰³

A yearning for community is further expressed in the number of Thomas's poems and prose pieces that describe the speaker's or protagonist's meeting and ensuing conversation with a local character. His poems of this kind include 'Women He Liked', with its affectionate depiction of 'shovel-bearded Bob, / Old Farmer Hayward of the Heath'¹⁰⁴, and 'The Huxter', with 'a hump like an ape on his back' and 'of money a plentiful lack'¹⁰⁵. The rich particularity with which he describes and names these characters is reminiscent of W.H. Davies, who, we might remember, also imbued a range of characters with convincing life through careful detail. In 'Lob', however, Thomas goes a stage further, and considers the individuality of these characters, alongside their typicality, their persistence alongside the threat of their disappearance:

'Tis old Bottlesford
 He means, Bill.' But another said: 'Of course,
 It was Jack Button up the White Horse.
 He's dead, sir, these three years.' This lasted till
 A girl proposed Walker of Walker's Hill,
 'Old Adam Walker. Adam's Point you'll see
 Marked on the maps.'¹⁰⁶

This tableaux of a wandering narrator being spiritually enriched by a meeting with an older, poorer, more regional figure harks back to the Wordsworthian legacy that is so integral to Georgianism, a quality discussed in the previous chapter.

Raymond Williams said of D.H. Lawrence: 'What he is writing more powerfully than any English novelist of the century is the experience of loss: a loss of what, in writing, he had himself found – the experience of community' (1970).¹⁰⁷ I would argue that this recognition of loss, and the purposeful exploration of it, is also one of Georgian poetry's central achievements. This priority is further apparent in that moments of

warmth and contentment in Georgian poetry occur when the elusive quality of community is temporarily re-discovered. Thomas's 'Home' considers the tenuous quality of the links between people in communal situations. There is happiness – 'Fair was the morning, fair our tempers' – but also an understanding of the temporary nature of this connection:

The word 'home' raised a smile in us all three,
 And one repeated it, smiling just so
 That all knew what he meant and none would say.
 Between three countries far apart that lay
 We were divided and looked strangely each
 At the other, and we knew we were not friends,
 But fellows in a union that ends
 With the necessity for it, as it ought.¹⁰⁸

Much of the pathos of Georgian poetry results from a wistful desire for communal feeling, coupled with an awareness that modern social conditions prevent this from materialising with any permanence. Meetings and gatherings on journeys, often on public transport, acquire a poignant quality. It may have evolved in part from the elegiac sensibility exemplified in Hardy's poetry. An example of such is 'Midnight on the Great Western' (*Moments of Vision*, 1917):

In the third-class seat sat the journeying boy,
 And the roof's oily flame
 Played down on his listless form and face,
 Bewrapt past knowing to what he was going,
 Or whence he came.

*

What can be yours, O journeying boy
 Towards a world unknown,
 Who calmly, as if incurious quite
 On all at stake, can undertake
 This plunge alone?¹⁰⁹

In the first stanza, the protagonist's identity and background vanish amidst the motion of the train, leaving simply participation in mechanical process. It is a time of forgetting, and this is significant, for the train transports him away from his roots, both

figuratively and literally. For many migrants at this time, England was indeed ‘a world unknown’. Here, travel is a solitary experience, but elsewhere, it is more communal. Brooke’s ‘The Night Journey’ (1913) describes a feeling of unity that takes place among passengers in a train:

Lost into God, as lights in light, we fly,
Grown one with will, end-drunken huddled dreamers.
The white lights roar. The sounds of the world die

And lips and laughter are forgotten things.
Speed sharpens; grows. Into the night, and on,
The strength and splendour of our purpose swings.
The lamps fade; and the stars. We are alone.¹¹⁰

The warmth, peace and togetherness contrasts with less sympathetic depictions of trains in Georgian poetry: e.g. the train carriages in Thomas’s *Rest and Unrest* (1910) and ‘the tyrant train’ in Monro’s ‘Suburb’ (1914 – see later discussion). Here, however, the Georgians have perhaps been more ‘modern’ than they consciously intended. The apparatus of urban modernity – trams, trains etc. – which are part of the new technological civilisation that has supplanted the ‘old’ isolated communities, these are now (perhaps ironically) a source of limited social togetherness. A new group consciousness has replaced the old. Gibson captures a similar mood, and relates a similar experience in ‘The Tramcar’ (*Thoroughfares*, 1914):

Sallow-faced clerks, genteel in black;
Girls from the laundries, draggled and dank;
Ruddy-faced labourers slouching slack;
A broken actor, grizzled and lank;

A priest; a sailor with deep-sea gaze;
A soldier in scarlet with waxed moustache;
A drunken trollop in velvet lace –
All silent in that tense hush ...

* * *

We glided on in a timeless spell

Unscathed through deluge and flying fire
In a magic chariot of streaming glass,

Cut off from our kind and the world's desire,
 Made one by the unity that had come to pass.¹¹¹ (see Anthology, p.54)

The class mix here is diverse: the petit bourgeois (the clerks), the proletarian (the labourers), the bohemian (the actor), the underclass (the prostitute). Sympathy and solidarity, otherwise dormant, is reawakened by the destination of the tram and the sense of mutual process that this entails. It is all the more precious because it is fleeting. More significantly still, the poet includes himself in this harried, increasingly faceless populace: 'cut off from *our* kind'. While the Georgian viewpoint was derived from that of the Romantic Artist, there was recognition of the changes that had befallen this figure. He is no longer inspired in an asocial or exalted sense, but is himself part of the tired masses, quietly nursing his modest poetic gift. In this sense, Georgians such as Thomas, Brooke and Gibson might be seen to anticipate the poets of the Movement in the 1950s, itself a turning away from Modernism to a modern consciousness in traditional versification, albeit forty years later. In *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (1973), Donald Davie saw Philip Larkin, an important figure in the Movement, as Hardy's successor. 'I shall take it for granted,' he wrote, 'that Philip Larkin is a very Hardyesque poet; that Hardy has been indeed the determining influence in Larkin's career, once he had overcome a youthful infatuation with Yeats'.¹¹² However, although Auden and Tomlinson are glanced at, the book omits any serious treatment of the non-Modernist poets *between* Hardy and Larkin. In 1973, the omission of the Georgians was understandable: Davie was making a radical claim, and inclusion of poets popularly considered weak would have undermined it. But now, over twenty years later, when reassessment is underway, it is time for the Georgians to be allowed their place in the 'Hardy tradition' in British poetry.

iii.

Brooke and Monro

These two poets are part of a strain of Georgian poetry in which the louder tones of protest have faded, and have been replaced with a recognition that modernity is here to stay. Brooke's differences from the other Georgians are signalled in his Fabian prose piece, 'Democracy and the Arts' (1910), in which he condemned Morris's combining of socialism and medievalism:

We live in our own age (a very intelligent and vital one) and we must throw ourselves in with all its arts and schools of art, music and literature. Tapestries are both unhealthy and ugly. Let romaunt and clavichern moulder together.¹¹³

Brooke was more optimistic in his view of the modern world than the other Georgians. An enthusiasm for the modern city, for instance, is evident in his *Letters from America* (1916), in which he sees beauty in an illuminated advertisement of a woman's head, and also its relevance to human progress:

Her ostensible message, burning in the night firmament beside her is that we should buy pepsin chewing gum. But there is more, not to be given in words, ineffable ... she is immortal. Men have worshipped her as Cybele, Mother of the Gods, and as Mary. [...] Here among the fantastic civilisation she observes, she has no name.¹¹⁴

This ideological difference – looking forward rather than back – may also account for Brooke's formal differences from other Georgians. Clive Bloom describes Brooke's poetry as 'dextrous, urbane, metropolitan, free, distanced and ironic; his subject matter, modern life and experience'.¹¹⁵ While his verse forms and diction do not display the innovation and sophistication of Pound and Eliot (Brooke made extensive use of the sonnet), they have a complexity, flamboyance and humour that contrasts with the more subdued tone and dignified simplicity of much of the Georgian poetry hitherto discussed. 'Sonnet: In Time of Revolt' (1908) may serve as an example:

The Thing must End. I am no boy! I AM
 NO BOY!! Being twenty-one. Uncle, you make
 A great mistake, a very great mistake,
 In chiding me for letting slip a 'Damn!'
 What's more, you called me 'Mother's one ewe lamb,'
 Bade me 'refrain from swearing for - *her* sake -
 Till I am grown up'... - By God! I think you take
 Too much upon you, Uncle William!
 You say I am your brother's only son.
 I know it, and, 'What of it?' I reply.
 My heart's resolved. *Something must be done.*
 So shall I curb, so baffle, so suppress
 This too avuncular officiousness,
 Intolerable consanguinity.¹¹⁶

The mood is one of ironic humour. Comedy is not frequent in Georgian poetry, the tone of which is more commonly sombre. Furthermore, the experiences described here are clearly bourgeois, and this contrasts greatly with the poems and verse dramas of Masfield, Davies Abercrombie and Gibson – all of which deal mainly with workers and the poor. 'Sonnet Reversed' (1911) might also be cited as an instance of middle-class comedy:

Hand trembling towards hand; the amazing lights
 Of heart and eye. They stood on supreme heights.

Ah, the delirious weeks of honeymoon!
 Soon they returned, and, after strange adventures,
 Settled at Balham by the end of June.
 Their money was in Can. Pacs. B. Debentures,
 And in Antofagustus. Still he went
 Cityward daily; still she did abide
 At home. And both were really quite content
 With work and social pleasures. When they died
 They left three children (besides George who drank):
 The eldest Jane, who married Mr Bell,
 William, the head clerk in the County Bank,
 And Henry, a stockbroker, doing well.

Positioning the couplet at the beginning rather than the end conveys the bathetic descent from sexual passion to domestic conformity. Such poems capture an ambience that compares with that in which Eliot's Prufrock measures out his life in coffee spoons, although Brooke's poem is more positive and light-hearted.

Brooke's ironic tone and suburban content would find further expression in 'It's not going to happen again' (1913):

What Paris was tellin' for goodbye to Helen
 When he bundled her into the train –
 Oh, it's no going to happen again, old girl,
 It's not going to happen again.¹¹⁷

Once again, the poem works through a reversal: the ancients Helen and Paris are juxtaposed with the modernity of public transport and fashionable slang. In both tone and content, this seems different to most Georgian poetry. The work of Brooke constitutes a change from the work of other Georgians. They criticised the inhumanity of modern life; Brooke, on the other hand, was able to enjoy it. That is not to say, of course, that satire is the only element in the above quotation; it may also be read as a critical commentary on the cheapness of modern relationships, but the tone implies some enjoyment of contemporary living, too.

This ambivalence might explain why 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester' (1912) has been read in radically differing ways. Some have read it literally, as a statement of Brooke's devotion to an idyllic England, and therefore evidence of smugness and naivety, while others have read it as displaying irony, and therefore satirising bourgeois English conventions, such as 'honey still for tea'.¹¹⁸ The original title of the poem, 'The Sentimental Exile', lends credibility to the latter reading, and it might be argued that the poem is ambivalent, and depicts its middle-class vision of English life with both irony and genuine regard:

God! I will pack, and take a train,
 And get me to England once again!
 For England's the one land, I know,
 Where men with Splendid Hearts may go;
 And Cambridgeshire, of all England,
 The shire for Men who Understand;
 And of that district I prefer
 The lovely hamlet Grantchester.¹¹⁹

The amusingly impractical suggestion of dashing back to England, the jolly capitalisation ('Men who Understand') and the hackneyed superlatives – 'Splendid Hearts', 'lovely', 'all England' – suggest a stance that is clearly humorous and self-ironic. Yet the fun is gentle rather than biting, indicating some true affection, and stopping short of satire in the strong sense. The problem is that 'Grantchester', frequently anthologised, is often read in isolation. A look at Brooke's other poems throws its irony into clearer relief. In 'Wagner' (1908), for instance, he does not eulogise great music, but pokes fun at the composer's pomposity, obesity and middle-aged lechery. There are few Brooke poems that do not exhibit a comic consciousness, or a satirical suavety, and I would argue that – temperamentally – Brooke was unlikely to view life with the unproblematic patriotism that has sometimes been imparted to Grantchester.

Like Brooke, Harold Monro was a member of the Fabian Society. Monro's socialism, however, was blended with Christianity. In his tract *The Evolution of the Soul* (1907), he objected to 'the rise of material people', by which he meant 'the class that leads a deliberately material life, consisting of creatures sometimes intellectual and reasoning, but addicted by preferences to vices suicidal both to body and soul'.¹²⁰ Monro believed that the drive of Christianity was to

seek the amelioration of the whole universal social system. This part of the doctrine, as so often happens, can be summed up in one brief sentence as 'This is my commandment, that you love each other' or 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Thus the socialist may justly claim Christ for the founder of true socialism.'¹²¹

This idealistic Christian Socialism is nowhere more apparent than in Monro's long poem *Judas* (1908), which sees Iscariot as the first victim of capitalism, and especially in Monro's preface to it:

I have written this poem believing in Jesus of Nazareth. I dedicate it to those who, not pausing to impute its heresies to me, shall recognise that my concern has been to see as Judas saw, to understand as he understood, and to disclose

His kinship with the money-victims of this and every age.¹²²

Judas is indeed an accomplished and intelligent anti-capitalist fable. Despite its biblical setting, its pertinence to the present is always within sight. Judas's betrayal of Christ is situated as the first instance of industry, business and exploitation where 'human woe re-echoed from the world' and there was felt 'first shrieking of a hundred million slaves'.¹²³ And yet, as the vision of Judas fades before the speaker, there is some hope of redemption:

'Perchance you come from Caiaphus the priest:
Tell him I hold my offer open yet!
Take him my shekels! – You can save the world.
Cast them upon the pavement: leave them there.
And then shall be a miracle of joy,
And all the grinding of the wheels shall cease,
The shrieking and laughter shall be stopped,
The blood shall flow no longer. Take them back!'
This uttering, he pressed me with his hands
As though to force me outward from my dream.
I, growing conscious of that other human life
Which is not sleep, held firmly in my grasp
Those burning shekels to redeem the world.
 Then faintly I perceived
That dreadful form retreating through the grey,
Counting as in an ecstasy of greed.
His voice was like the grinding of the wheels:
And shrieking in the moonlight I awoke.¹²⁴

Once more, the influence of Morris can be seen. The collapse of the dream, coupled with a hint of hope is reminiscent of *News from Nowhere* (1890). The influence of Morris's socialist thought on the Georgians has been much neglected, but here seems once again prominent in the context of the 'culture and society' tradition.

Monro's contemporary poetry differs from Brooke's in that its tone is predominantly sombre, but it too is characterised by a more immediate modernity than the Georgian poetry discussed earlier. And as in Brooke, the class focus is predominantly petit-bourgeois rather than working-class, and the emphasis is on banality rather than poverty, the weakly gentile rather than the indigent. 'Suburb'

(*Children of Love*, 1914, included in the *Catholic Anthology*, 1915) may serve as an exemplar:

The dingy houses stand
 Pressed by some stout contractor's hand
 Tightly together in their plots.

* * *

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.¹²⁵

This has a clear contemporary mood to it: the episode is akin to Eliot's 'young man carbuncular' in *The Waste Land* (1922), while not so negative. Perhaps most significantly, Monro demonstrates his ability to think in terms of the suburban rather than the simplified rural/urban binary, and reveals a far more solid sense of an urban, human, sometimes trivial middle class.

For Monro, the country was not the symbol of social justice that it was for Davies and Bottomley. In 1933, T.S. Eliot remarked:

Monro's poetry, so far as it is concerned with the countryside, is rather that of the perpetual week-ender, oscillating between departure and return; his city is that of a man who must flee to the country, his country that of a man who must tomorrow return to town.¹²⁶

That is to say, the country is merely a holiday destination for the overworked city-dweller, and many of his poems acknowledge this new commuter's countryside. This is the case in the ironic 'Real Property' (*Real Property*, 1922):

I've bought that field; it's now my own:
 I've fifty acres in my head.
 I take it as a dream to bed.
 I carry it about all day.¹²⁷ (see *Anthology*, p.68)

The countryside in Monro's poetry is largely a fantasy, albeit a vivid and obsessive one. It is also a dream from which the poet is increasingly estranged. He wishes to 'connect' with it, but its actuality and authenticity recedes further into the past. The appropriately entitled 'Unknown Country' (1922) exemplifies the poet's alienation from the rurality (or notion of rurality) in which he hopes to find some cultural antecedent. A previous age of bucolic heartiness is both romanticised and eroticised, and the extent of the speaker's fervour implies that this paradise is irretrievable. He yearns for 'the sun-freckled lads' with 'a scent of hay' about them, but he is 'lonely, a stranger from an unknown land'.¹²⁸ The distance is not geographical but historical: the poet is mourning the fact that he is a man of the present who cannot re-enter this past. Monro's world is not of old England and its 'real' countryside, with clearly defined social roles and class structures; rather, it captures more convincingly the increasing homogeneity of the modern. It is similar in tone to Forster's *Howards End*, which C.K. Stead considered a Georgian novel, and, which, among other things, examines the expansion of the bourgeoisie:

We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet. This story deals with gentlefolk, or with those who are obliged to think that they are gentlefolk.¹²⁹

In not dealing with 'the very poor', *Howards End* is a Georgian novel in the mould of Brooke and Monro, but hardly in the manner of Masefield, Davies or Gibson. Or at least, not at a first glance. Forster did not deal with the truly indigent, but with the shabby genteel:

The boy, Leonard Bast, stood at the extreme verge of gentility. [...] In his day the angel of Democracy had risen, enshadowing the classes with leathern wings, and proclaiming, 'All men are equal – all men, that is to say, who possess umbrellas,' and so he was obliged to assert gentility, lest he slipped into the abyss where nothing counts ...¹³⁰

By the time of writing, the class of Leonard Bast was a large one: urban business required an army of clerks, who were the new workers. 'The vacillating clerk' of *Monro* is a similar figure to Forster's Leonard, suggesting that his brand of Georgianism was cognisant of and sensitive to developments in class structure. However, Forster's convincing depiction of genteel poverty reminds us that the impoverished clerk and the outwardly poor were not that far apart. Forster's assessment of the feckless and would-be respectable Basts is accurate, unsentimental and with a strong degree of realism, rather in the manner of the early Georgians:

Jacky also shook hands. She, like her husband, was shy, and furthermore ill, and furthermore so bestially stupid that she could not grasp what was happening. She only knew that the lady had swept down like a whirlwind last night, had paid the rent, redeemed the furniture, provided them with a dinner and breakfast, and ordered them to meet her at Paddington next morning.¹³¹

John Carey, in 'The Suburbs and the Clerks' section of *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992), has argued that clerks themselves were seen as an underclass, and that the most sustained attack upon them was T.W.H Crossland's *The Suburbans* (1905) with its objections to clerks and clerks' slang.¹³² In much of literature of the time, clerks were portrayed as physically weak, and with their pretence of middle-class dignity regularly collapsing. It might be argued that a petit-bourgeois focus was a continuation and transformation of a proletarian one, rather than a radical break from it. Leonard Bast is indeed one of Gibson's 'sallow-faced clerks, genteel in black' ('The Tram Car', 1914).¹³³ His spouse Jacky, his most immediate connection with lower strata, is, with her tipping and garish clothes, Gibson's 'drunken trollop in velvet and lace'.¹³⁴ Respectability was an ideal, a frame of mind, with varying degrees of credibility. Recognition of this social nuance characterises *Howards End*, and there is some consciousness of this 'new' England in the Georgianism of Brooke and *Monro*.

In *Monro's* work, there were also elements of continuity from earlier Georgian modes. In *Monro's* late collection, *The Earth for Sale* (1928), he redeployed many of

the themes that Abercrombie, Bottomley and Thomas had established in the 1910s. The message in the title poem is clearly an anti-capitalist one: it predicts a time when 'the Earth is covered with large auction boards'. 'Rumour' captures the claustrophobia of city experience:

In every street, this noisy town of ours
 Has stealthy whispering watchers walking round,
 Recording all our movements, every sound,
 Hissing and shuffling, and they have found
 To-day my name: tomorrow they'll find yours. ¹³⁵

There is a grim inevitability about the speaker's loss of privacy. One of the clear triumphs of Monro's verse is its ability to find the strangeness and alienation in modern city-life. 'Dream Exhibition of a Final World' takes up the important Georgian theme of the evils of mechanisation:

Aeroplanes flood the sky writing the news, and heaven
 Films to the world, and winks. With the electric
 Proscenium
 There shall be dawn every day, imitated;
 Whatever the season, beautiful, artificial,
 Such as the Worker loves, bright as a picture postcard.
 The exhibition was planned to endure through final
 Humanity. ¹³⁶

The poem brings to a culmination many of the concerns expressed in the work of earlier Georgians. Here, technology has not simply ruined nature; it has replaced it altogether. Machines have not merely enslaved humans; they will outlast them completely.

Conclusion

The evidence suggests that the Georgians can be resituated as poets characterised by a broad liberal impulse in their social views. This is apparent in both their depiction of the poor, the workers, and rural and urban settings, and this is also apparent in the production of the poetry itself. The Georgian periodical *New Numbers* was not published in London, unlike the *Georgian Poetry* collections, but in the Gloucestershire village of Dymock, where Gibson, Abercrombie, Thomas and Robert Frost were resident before the war. While this may have been a poet's idyll, one can also detect an element of political gesture. Although Raymond Williams understated the Georgians' political engagement, claiming that the Dymock gathering was something of a pastoral cul-de-sac – 'the Georgian observers, travelling and overhearing, spoke mainly among themselves' – he does acknowledge 'an honest appreciation of the beauty and the rest of the country; a respect for labour'.¹³⁷ Given the cultural climate of the time, a relocation to the country inevitably had some political implications: as Richard Shannon points out in *The Crisis of Imperialism* (1976), there was 'a contemporary mood of "back to nature"', the symptoms of which included

the ale-quaffing and wine-bibbing heartiness of Chesterton and Belloc, boy scouts, Georgian poets in the hedgerows and at sea, the early novels of D.H. Lawrence, the fame of Count Leo Tolstoy, were all contributory influences to a cultural atmosphere which produced also characteristic social and political manifestations. Land reform, the return of the land to the people, had always been an ingredient of the radical wing of Liberalism.¹³⁸

As has been argued in the course of this chapter, when Georgian poetry is located closer to contemporary political currents, it can be revalued as an ethically serious and socially intelligent poetry.

While dependent on nineteenth-century verse forms, Georgian poetry was not the feeble retreat to 'cats and dogs and goldfish' (Philip Henderson, 1939) that many still believe it to be.¹³⁹ While the Georgian poets' myth of England and some attendant exotic myths may have been an impediment to their development (while an integral part of it), the intermittent realism that can be seen alongside it can be effective and moving. They engaged with many of the issues of their time, and their work reflected the changing geography of the nation with some penetration and subtlety. What this chapter hopes to have made apparent is the presence of a fundamentally liberal attitude within the verse. Compared to contemporary Modernist poets, and despite the greater apparent formal and intellectual sophistication of the latter, it may be argued that Georgian poetry's principal achievement lies in its progressive and humane social vision.

Notes to Chapter Two

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- ¹ *Georgian Poetry*, ed. by James Reeves (Penguin: Middlesex, 1962), p.15.
- ² John Lucas, *Modern English Poetry from Hardy to Hughes* (London: Batsford, 1986), p.55.
- ³ I have included Bottomley in the later 'group', despite the fact that he published his first volume, *The Mickle Drede* as early as 1805. Like many Georgians, his work was known before 1911, although inclusion in Marsh's anthologies and resulting prominence was a high point of his career.
- ⁴ John Masefield, *Collected Poems* (London: Heinemann, 1926), p.61.
- ⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973; repr. London: Hogarth 1993), p.255.
- ⁶ Masefield, *Collected Poems*, p.3.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.
- ⁸ Robert Blatchford, *Britain for the British* (London: Clarion Press, 1908), p.3.
- ⁹ Robert Blatchford, *Not Guilty: A Plea for the Bottom Dog* (London: Clarion Press, 1906), p. 7.
- ¹⁰ Masefield, *Collected Poems*, p.24.
- ¹¹ W.H. Davies, *The Complete Poems*, (London: Cape, 1963), p. 106.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 41-52.
- ¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 154-55.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 225-26.
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.225.
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.567.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.266-7.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.88.
- ¹⁹ Richard Stonesifer, *W.H. Davies* (London: Cape, 1963), pp.1-10.
- ²⁰ W.H. Davies, *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* (London: Fifield, 1908) p.vii.
- ²¹ *ibid.*, p.295.
- ²² W.H. Davies, *Beggars* (London: Duckworth, 1909), p.130.
- ²³ W.H. Davies, *The Complete Poems*, p.209.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 546.
- ²⁵ Walter de la Mare, *The Complete Poems* (London: Faber, 1969), p. 121.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 90.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 234.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*, p.234.
- ²⁹ *ibid.*, p.234.
- ³⁰ *ibid.*, pp.283-284.
- ³¹ James Elroy Flecker, *The Collected Poems* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1941), pp.100-1.
- ³² *ibid.*, pp.48-49.
- ³³ James Elroy Flecker, *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* (London: Goschen, 1913), p. x.
- ³⁴ James Elroy Flecker, *The Grecians* (London: Dent, 1910), p.69.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, p.86.
- ³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 139.
- ³⁷ Bodleian Library, Flecker/Morrogordato MS, 44
- ³⁸ *ibid.*, [n.p.]
- ³⁹ See note. 3 on the debatable nature of Bottomley's chronology.
- ⁴⁰ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958; repr. London: Hogarth, 1990), [n.p.]
- ⁴¹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 255
- ⁴² Lascelles Abercrombie, *Speculative Dialogue* (London: Secker, 1913), p.26.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, p.28.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.35.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.28.
- ⁴⁶ John Drinkwater, *The World and the Artist* (London: the Bookman's Journal, 1922), p. 7.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 17.
- ⁴⁸ John Drinkwater, *This Troubled World* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1933), p.11.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.19.
- ⁵⁰ Edward Thomas, *Rest and Unrest* (London: Duckworth, 1910), p.122.
- ⁵¹ David Daiches, *Poetry and the Modern World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1940), pp.38-60.
- ⁵² Cheltenham and Gloucester Dymock Poets Archive, MS Gibson, 19
- ⁵³ Cheltenham & Gloucester Dymock Poetry Archive, Gibson MS, 20

- ⁵⁴ Wilfrid Gibson, *Collected Poems 1905-1925* (London: Macmillan, 1933), p.150.
- ⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp.110-11.
- ⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.265.
- ⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.162.
- ⁵⁸ Charles Williams, *Poetry at Present* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p.146.
- ⁵⁹ Wilfrid Gibson, *Friends* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1916), – flyleaf, extracts from press notices.
- ⁶⁰ Wilfrid Gibson, *Collected Poems*, p. 94.
- ⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.220.
- ⁶² Lascelles Abercrombie, *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p.329.
- ⁶³ Lascelles Abercrombie, *Lyrics and Unfinished Poems* (Gregynog Press, 1940), pp.ix- x.
- ⁶⁴ Bodleian Library, de la Mare MS, 176
- ⁶⁵ *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie*, p.12.
- ⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 13.
- ⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.357.
- ⁶⁸ Gordon Bottomley, *Chambers of Imagery: Second Series* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1912), p.19.
- ⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.19.
- ⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.22.
- ⁷¹ *ibid.*, pp.24-5.
- ⁷² John Drinkwater, *Poems 1908-1914* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1923), p.113.
- ⁷³ Drinkwater, *Tides* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1917), p.44.
- ⁷⁴ Drinkwater, *Poems 1908-1914*, p.90.
- ⁷⁵ Drinkwater, *The World and the Artist* (London: the Bookman's Journal, 1922), p.30.
- ⁷⁶ Drinkwater, *English Poetry* (New York: Freeport, 1938), p.10.
- ⁷⁷ Drinkwater, *Tides*, p.21.
- ⁷⁸ Drinkwater, *Prose Papers* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1917), p.146.
- ⁷⁹ Williams, *Culture and Society*, p.160.
- ⁸⁰ Drinkwater, *William Morris* (London: Martin Secker, 1917), p.33.
- ⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.158.
- ⁸² *ibid.*, pp.167-8.
- ⁸³ Peter Childs, *The Twentieth Century in Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.27.
- ⁸⁴ Edna Longley, *A Language not to be Betrayed* (London: Carcanet Press, 1981), p. 39.
- ⁸⁵ John Lucas, 'Edward Thomas, Ivor Gurney and English Socialism, *The Ivor Gurney Society Journal*, 4 (1998), 19-33.
- ⁸⁶ Edward Thomas, *Beautiful Wales* (London: Black, 1905), p.145.
- ⁸⁷ Edward Thomas, *Rest and Unrest* (London: Duckworth, 1910), p.125.
- ⁸⁸ Edward Thomas, *The Ickneid Way* (London: Constable, 1913), pp.97-101.
- ⁸⁹ Edward Thomas, *The South Country* (London: Duckworth, 1909), p. 71.
- ⁹⁰ Edward Thomas, *Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London: Secker, 1912), p.108.
- ⁹¹ *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas* (London: Faber, 1979), p.37.
- ⁹² Edward Thomas, *The South Country* (London: Duckworth 1909), p.113.
- ⁹³ *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas*, p.91
- ⁹⁴ Stan Smith, *Edward Thomas* (London: Faber, 1986) p.132.
- ⁹⁵ Interestingly, since writing this section, it has come to my attention that Piers Gray has remarked upon the significance of roads in the work of early twentieth-century British poets and later writers. His book *Marginal Men: Edward Thomas; Ivor Gurney; J.R. Ackerley* considers the road as symbol with regard to his three writers – all of whom he identifies as powerful non-Modernist writers.
- ⁹⁶ *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas*, p.142.
- ⁹⁷ Edward Thomas, *The Ickneid Way* (London: Constable, 1913), p.1.
- ⁹⁸ Masfield, *Collected Poems*, p.65.
- ⁹⁹ Ivor Gurney, *Collected Poems*, ed. by P.J. Kavanagh (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.140.
- ¹⁰⁰ *The Variorium Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1979), p.629-30.
- ¹⁰¹ Masfield, *Collected Poems*, p.39.
- ¹⁰² Edward Thomas, *Collected Poems*, p.2.
- ¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p.2.
- ¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.27.
- ¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p.31.
- ¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.35.
- ¹⁰⁷ Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus,

-
- 1970), p.182.
- ¹⁰⁸ Edward Thomas, *Collected Poems*, pp.65-66.
- ¹⁰⁹ *The Variorium edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, p.514.
- ¹¹⁰ *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, ed. by Gavin Ewart (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 278-9.
- ¹¹¹ Gibson, *Collected Poems*, p.260.
- ¹¹² Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1973), p.63.
- ¹¹³ Rupert Brooke, *Democracy and the Arts* (London: Hart-Davis, 1946), p.5
- ¹¹⁴ Rupert Brooke, *Letters from America* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1916), p.33
- ¹¹⁵ Clive Bloom, 'The Falling House that Never Falls: Rupert Brooke and Literary Taste', in *British Poetry 1900-1950: Aspects of Tradition*, ed. by Gary Day and Brian Docherty (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 37-47.
- ¹¹⁶ *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, ed. by Gavin Ewart (London: Macmillan, 1992), p.322.
- ¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 328.
- ¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.263.
- ¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.261.
- ¹²⁰ Harold Monro, *The Evolution of the Soul* (Cranleigh: Samurai Press, 1907), p.9.
- ¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.29.
- ¹²² Harold Monro, *Judas* (Cranleigh: The Samurai Press, 1908), p.4.
- ¹²³ *ibid.*, p.30.
- ¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.31.
- ¹²⁵ Harold Monro, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Alida Monro (London: Cobden Sanderson, 1933; repr. 1938), pp. 158-160.
- ¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.xv.
- ¹²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.82-3.
- ¹²⁸ *ibid.*, pp.93-4.
- ¹²⁹ E.M. Forster, *Howards End*, (London: Arnold, 1910; repr. London: Penguin, 1989), p.58.
- ¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p.58.
- ¹³¹ *ibid.*, p.224.
- ¹³² John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* (London: Faber, 1992), pp. 46-71.
- ¹³³ Wilfrid Gibson, *Collected Poems*, p. 260.
- ¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p.260.
- ¹³⁵ Monro, *Collected Poems*, pp.24-25.
- ¹³⁶ *ibid.*, pp.36-40.
- ¹³⁷ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.256.
- ¹³⁸ Richard Shannon, *The Crisis of Imperialism 1865-1915* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.437.
- ¹³⁹ Philip Henderson, *The Poet and Society* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1939), p. 90.

‘That Pleasant Inn Called Woman’:
Representations of Women in Georgianism

During a bombardment on December 1917, Virginia Woolf read one of the *Georgian Poetry* collections in her coal cellar, and wrote of ‘the heart [her own] which perversely resists the solemn and premeditated assaults of Eddie’s young men’.¹ Her comment implies that the Georgians were not only contrived in mood and laboured in technique, but also exclusively masculine in their approach to literature and life. Certainly, there is no central female writer within Edward Marsh’s circle of Georgian poets, and this would appear to support the impression of a masculinist movement. However, this chapter will seek to demonstrate that Georgian poetry and poetic drama in fact display an unexpectedly positive and sympathetic attitude toward the female sex. It will be argued that Georgianism represented a significant development in the portrayal of women, a development that has not hitherto received its due acknowledgement.

The Edwardian and Georgian years represent a period of reappraisal in gender relations. In *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power* (2000), Julia Bush has demonstrated that among the female aristocracy and bourgeoisie, there were varying degrees of the ‘revolutionary’ (the Women’s Social and Political Union, the Conservative Woman’s Suffrage Society, the National Union of Women workers, the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies), and varying degrees of the ‘reactionary’ (the National League for Opposing Women’s Suffrage, the Victoria League, the Primrose League).² It was clearly a time when educated women were thinking of themselves in political terms. Seemingly contradictory views often coincided: many suffragists were also staunch imperialists, while many anti-suffragists

were politically progressive in other ways. During the early Georgian years, there was a sharp increase in suffragette activity – including many incidents that are now famous. In November 1910, there was ‘Black Friday’, in which a W.S.P.U. rally in Parliament Square ended in violence, and in some cases indecent assault. Later that month, groups of women shattered the windows of the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the Board of Education, and the Treasury. By December 1912, the attacks extended to post boxes, private houses and golfing greens. During the Derby Day of 1913 (14 June), Emily Wilding Davison died by throwing herself under the king’s horse. This politically charged climate has, of course, been fully documented. Eileen Sypher in *Wisps of Violence* (1993) examines the undertones of social unease in a range of early twentieth-century British fiction, largely with regard to sexual politics. She takes her title from Eric Hobsbawm’s claim that the pre-war years were a time

when wisps of violence hung in the English air, symptoms of a crisis in economy and society which the self-confident opulence of the architecture of the Ritz hotels, pro-consular palaces, East-end theatres, department stores and office blocks could not quite conceal.³

Sypher’s study interprets the light of this political unrest, especially with regard to gender issues. In the coming pages, it will be argued that the poetry and poetic drama of the period are also imbued with these tensions.

The Georgians were not oblivious to the social changes outlined above. Georgian poetry is indeed written mainly by men, but embryonic feminist discourses are at work within it, and many of the opinions expressed are unexpected. The contention of this chapter is not that the main body of Georgians should be seen as an unsung school of proto-feminists; rather, that much Georgian poetry reflects the increasing complexity and tension of male/female relations in the early twentieth century.

i. Masefield, Davies, Thomas

These poets show an incipient sympathy with women, while being at the same time broadly patriarchal. John Masefield's poetry, for instance, reveals a mindset in which a championing of the female could exist beside an appreciation of the masculine worlds of seamanship, manual labouring and boxing. His *Ballads and Poems* (1910) contains many poems that involve male bonding, but also 'C.L.M', an elegy to his mother:

In the dark womb where I began
 My mother's life made me a man.
 Through all the months of human birth
 Her beauty fed my common earth.
 I cannot see, nor breathe, nor stir,
 But through the death of some of her.⁴

By outlining male dependence on the procreant female – for biological birth, and for the artistic creation that can only follow once the artist is born and cared for as a child - a woman is not only the author of the author's existence, but is, by implication, also fundamental to his creative process; she has given birth to him, and therefore to his poetry. Masefield goes on to attack directly the political situation of the time:

Men triumph over women still,
 Men trample over women's rights at will,
 And man's lust roves the world untamed.⁵

'Imagination', also from *Ballads and Poems*, compares the creative faculty itself – the imagination – with the birth and nurture implicit in femininity. Woman/imagination is seen as a humanising and civilising agent: 'WOMAN, beauty, wonder, sacred woman, / Spirit moulding man from brute to human'. The poet even goes so far as to envy the state of being feminine: he announces his desire to 'Be you, while your swifter nerves divine / Wisdom from the touch unfelt by mine'.⁶

In his long narrative poems of the 1910s, Masfield's social range broadens widely from the nautical and masculine themes that are dominant in his first two collections. The narrative poems frequently foreground feminine hardship in an impoverished society. It is thus significant that Saul Kane, the roguish protagonist of *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911), is berated by an irate and underprivileged mother:

I've washed eight little children's limbs,
 I've taught eight little souls their hymns,
 I've risen sick and lain down pinched
 And borne it all and never flinched;
 But to see him, the town's disgrace,
 With God's commandments broke in's face
 Who never worked, not he nor earned,
 Nor will do so till the seas are burned,
 Who never did since he was whole
 A hand's turn for a human soul,
 But poached and stole and gone with women,
 And swilled down enough gin to swim in;
 To see him only lift one finger
 To make my little Jimmy linger.⁷

Mrs Jaggard's account of her child-rearing is bitterly uncompromising and realist, and is characteristic of Masfield's sensitivity to the struggles of women. It is significant that Kane's other climactic reprimand is also from a woman: the Quaker, Miss Bourne's admonishment converts 'boozer Kane' to Christian piety. The role of womanhood in his salvation is clear: there is even a maternal pun in Miss Bourne's name: bourne = born /reborn. *The Everlasting Mercy* has its 'whores', 'sluts' and 'doxies', and yet it is clear that women are also the moral touchstones of the poem. To an extent, these women may be placed by Masfield on a conventional moral pedestal, but the irascibility and pungent colloquialism of Mrs Jaggard (her manner is indeed 'jagged') prevent her from being merely a social type. The fact that the women portrayed by Masfield frequently grate on the reader – they are plaintive, abusive, manipulative, possessive and vulgar – indicates an unsentimental realism. They are called on to suffer and sacrifice, and we should not expect this to instil winning manners.

The Widow in the Bye Street (1912) is primarily about the survival of women in a proletarian community in which they are dependent upon male providers. Fittingly, however, it is the women who *do* survive, whereas the men are shown to be less pertinacious. The street conversation after Jimmy's hanging encapsulates questions and concerns that inform the poem as a whole:

'I know these women; they're a rotten lot.'
 'You didn't seem to think so in your youth.'
 'No; but I'm wiser now, and not so hot.
 Married or buried, I say, wived or shot,
 These unmanned, unattached Maries and Susans
 Make life no better than a proper nuisance.'

'Well, I don't know.' 'Well, if you don't you will.'
 'I look on women as good as men.'
 'Now, that's the kind of talk that makes a man ill.
 When have they been as good? I ask you when?
 'Always they have.' 'They haven't. Now and then
 P'haps one or two was neither hen nor fury.'
 'One for your mother, that. Here comes the jury.'⁸

There is much irony here. Ern is killed and Jimmy hanged as a result of their own sexual appetites and complete lack of regard for the women in their lives. The women are as much the victims of the two hapless men as the other way round. Much of the reader's sympathy goes to the women because they are the more rounded characters. The widow is self-sacrificing but not saintly, and shows a crafty instinct for her own survival. Anna is opportunistic, but not without conscience, and shows guile and resilience in starting life anew. Her comment to a female friend on the train might be taken to summarise the poem: 'It's very hard to bear the ills men make, / He thought he loved, and it was all mistake'.⁹

W.H. Davies, primarily remembered as a Georgian nature poet (as Masefield is a Georgian sea poet), could also write realistic poems where the most significant discourses are those between women. A prime example is 'The Hospital Waiting Room':

The mothers – one in finest cloth,
 With velvet blouse and crocheted lace,
 Lips painted red, and powdered face;
 The other ragged, whose face took
 Its own dull, white, wormy look –
 Exchanged a hard and bitter stare.
 And both the children sitting there,
 Taking examples from that sight,
 Made ugly faces full of spite.
 The woman said, though not a word
 From her painted lips was heard –
 ‘Why have I come to be
 In such a slattern’s company?’
 The ragged woman’s look replied –
 ‘If you can dress with so much pride,
 Why are you here, so neat and nice,
 For medicine free and free advice?’¹⁰

This poem is distinguished by its acute social observation. The women are shown to cultivate their own abasement by the very fact that they attack each other in such an overtly gendered way:

And I, who needed richer food,
 Not medicine to help my blood;
 Who could have swallowed then a horse,
 And chased its rider round the course,
 Sat looking on, ashamed, perplexed,
 Until a welcome voice cried ‘next!’¹¹

Some readers might find Davies’s implication that women are inclined to mutual hatred discomfiting, but the speaker is regretful that the women have been reduced to this, and is aware of the unequal society that perpetuates this intrasexual strife. As J.B. Priestly suggests in *The Edwardians* (1970), vestiges of gentility were bitterly fought over in Edwardian and Georgian England.¹² Davies has brought to life a scene in which symbolic capital – in this case that derived from clothes and bearing - is sharply contested. Men were at least empowered as financial providers; women, on the other hand, were forced instead to depend on these social codes. Davies was no feminist (some of his poems are angry diatribes against women, berating their alleged shallowness and caprice) but, like Edward Thomas, he was sensitive to miseries faced

especially by females in difficult times. As he remarked in ‘Saturday Night in the Slums’ (*New Poems*, 1907), ‘the woman – it is something now / If she lose pride to dress her hair’.¹³ ‘The Collier’s Wife’ (1914) shows similar consideration:

Oh, collier, collier, underground,
 In fear of fire and gas,
 What life more danger has?
 Who fears more danger in this life?
 There is but one – thy wife!¹⁴

Such awareness is also present in Davies’s prose writing. His memoirs, *Beggars* (1909) and *The True Traveller* (1912) contain frank and tender accounts of the trials faced by women he has known. Davies made no secret of his dealings with prostitutes, and in *The True Traveller*, emphasises the kindness of courtesans to tramps such as himself, and to bag ladies:

How these women help each other is wonderful. [...] Those ragged, wretched-looking old women whom we see so often in the streets of London, know very well who to appeal to. Not to the respectable lady, but to the girl who is easily known by her roving glances.¹⁵

Edward Thomas showed a similar concern with male dependence upon the female as Masfield. In ‘And You, Helen’, there is frank recognition that her woman’s role, as opposed to his station as man and poet, has involved self-sacrifice:

I would give you youth,
 All kinds of loveliness and truth,
 A clear eye as good as mine,
 Lands, waters, flowers, wine,
 As many children as your heart
 Might wish for, a better art
 Than mine can be, all you have lost
 Upon the travelling waters tossed,
 Or given to me.¹⁶

The poem does not profess that his wife is young, beautiful or – in real terms – equal in education or aptitude to himself. Instead, the poet is left simply with the knowledge of his debt to her, and awareness that his worth as a man results from her sacrifices as a

woman. This is then clinched in the telling statement ‘I would give you back yourself’. Thomas’s lack of sentimentality in regard to his wife is elaborated in her memoirs, *As it was* (1926) and *World Without End* (1931). In the latter, her own frankness suggests that she too was under no illusion: ‘There was never any pretence between us. All was open and true. Often he was bitter and cruel, but I could bear it because I knew all. There was nothing left for me to guess at, no lies no falsity’.¹⁷ It is a possibility that Thomas’s attitude to his wife informed and actually sharpened his wider sympathies towards women in general. His book, *Feminine Influences on the Poets* (1910), reveals that femininity was a concern even before he started to write his poetry, and allows us to place poems such as ‘And You, Helen’ within the context of his wider *oeuvre*. Among the ‘female’ qualities that he admires in *Feminine Influences* are resilience and a clearness of vision in practical matters which he deems lacking in men:

Women are more earthly than men, more directly connected with the circumstances and foundations of life. The earth and this life are nearly good enough for them; not from them has there ever been much whining about their souls and immortality.¹⁸

This view is also present in his poetry. In ‘Up in the Wind’, the ‘wild girl’ at the inn, a voluble barmaid who has moved from London to a situation in the provinces, shows earthliness and resignation to her temporal lot:

Here I was born,
 And I’ve a notion on these windy nights
 Here I will die. Perhaps I want to die here.
 I reckon I shall stay. But I do wish
 The road was nearer and the wind farther off,
 Or once now and then quite still, though when I die
 I’d have it blowing that I might go with it
 Somewhere distant, where there are trees no more
 And I could wake and know where I was
 Nor even wonder if they would roar again.
 Look at those calves.¹⁹

The woman, despite her London background and fond memories of Kennington, has settled down amidst solitude and nature with a grudging contentment, which recalls the distinctive female resolve that Thomas considers in *Feminine Influences*.

Thomas followed *Feminine Influences* with *The Tenth Muse* (1910), in which he examines the portrayal of women in British poets from the Elizabethan to the Romantic era. The poets are frequently criticised for a lack of sympathy towards, or understanding of, the female sex. W.S. Landor, in particular, is sharply rebuked:

It is very probable that he liked stupid and easy women best. He fell naturally into a patronising tone towards women when he was not flattering, and in his *Imaginary Conversations* he knows nothing between the exalted womanliness which he might have borrowed from literature, and the kittenish vacuity which looks as if it might have been what he was used to in living women.²⁰

In objecting to ‘kittenish vacuity’, he shows a clear disdain for stereotypical representations of women, at a time when such conventions were still strong. There were similar objections to Herrick’s perceptions of women:

His ‘fresh and fragrant mistresses’ are marionettes. They bear no resemblance to real women, and no man could write of real women so, at least without making them or himself either contemptible or ridiculous. [...] He liked little, delicate things, and, consciously or unconsciously, he created images of little things.²¹

It is clear, then, that Thomas was indeed interested in ‘real women’. In his more general prose, perceptive comments on, and depictions of, the female sex, are common, and gender awareness plays an important part in the social conscience and descriptive power that distinguishes these books. His sociological observation is frequently most powerful when examining the afflictions of women. ‘Seven Tramps: A Study in Brown’ (1902) includes a convincing depiction of a female tramp: ‘She was foolish when drunk, mad when sober and talked continually at the top note of tragical expression. None was crueller to the child than she’.²² There is an awareness of the effects of a vagrant life upon women: ‘She “married” Tim when she was seventeen, a gay dairy beauty from Devon; but when she was twenty she was “that ugly that to see her in the morning was a

curse”'.²³ In *Rest and Unrest* (1910), the emphasis is likewise upon the unglamorous, with portraits ranging from destitution and drudgery – ‘squalid hooded hags who crawled by, or the work girls beside them carrying younger sisters or bastards in shawls’²⁴ – to the tired and disappointed: ‘They were older than their mother. Their bony painful hands were clasped tightly on their knees; their plain dresses ruffled over their flat chests, their heads bent’.²⁵ The social range of such writings reveals an early twentieth-century writer whose prose has been underrated, and who had much to say about the women of England. It should not be assumed that he dealt only with ugliness and deprivation. *Rest and Unrest* also contains a robust appreciation of young female beauty: ‘a pretty and merry slut, with her sleeves and skirts tucked up, had fallen asleep in the midst of her toil’.²⁶ But Thomas’s humane detail and descriptive simplicity is most vividly realised in the vignette ‘Olwen’ (*Light and Twilight*, 1911):

Olwen was eighteen and a Welsh girl, with light brown hair so closely coiled and so abundant that no fancy was needed to see it down to her knees. [...] She wore the clothes of a slattern. She walked and stood still and sat down with the pride of an animal in the first year it had a mate. The curlew, the hare, the sheep upon the mountain, were not wilder, or swifter, or more gentle than she.²⁷

While this animal imagery may seem sexist to a feminist reader, Thomas’s affection and genuine regard for his protagonist become clear as the sketch gets underway. He takes us into Olwen’s world, relating details of her daily work, her care of siblings, and relations with neighbours, and the most mundane things are made to seem interesting and significant.

More affecting still is ‘Death by Misadventure’ (1911), which relates the death of a railway plate-layer to the lot of women. The piece moves vividly from the scene of the accident to the female bystanders whose lives it is to affect:

In the little gardens the housewives and daughters were already watching. Old and young, buxom and slender, fresh and worn, in their white aprons and print dresses, leaned over the low fences, one stood upon the fence and stared. The scent of death had not taken a minute to reach those women whose sons and

husbands and lovers include some – it is not known which of them – who are destined to die bloodily and unexpectedly.²⁸

The sentiments here are similar to Davies's in 'The Collier's Wife', and one might also liken it to D.H. Lawrence's 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' (1909). The closing sentences take us back to the incident itself, where the emphasis is upon the continuity of the conditions that have caused it, and the expendability and anonymity of the dead man himself:

There was not a sound except the hissing of the steam, until the guilty train began to grunt forward again and take us past a little group of uniformed men with ashen faces surrounding the brown humpy cloth which covered the remains of the chosen one.²⁹

Here, I wish to concentrate mainly upon the depiction of women, but the wider import of the piece must be noted. The indifference of industry to the welfare of its workers (and their wives) takes us back to the poems of Gibson. Thomas, it seems, was also deeply aware of the women left behind in the wake of industrial accidents, their lives limited by both class and gender.

ii. Bottomley, Brooke, Flecker, Gibson, Abercrombie, Drinkwater

These are the poets who experimented with poetic drama, the medium in which the Georgian portrayal of women reached its most ambitious and complex level. They exhibit differing degrees of empathy and compassion with regard to women. In the case of Bottomley, Drinkwater and Abercrombie, the sympathy is more overt, and comes closer to feminism. Gibson, Brooke and Flecker are included in this second section, not

because their views on women are more advanced than Masfield and Davies, but because they wrote verse dramas in which women play a substantial part.

Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife* (*Georgian Poetry II*, 1915) is a compelling example of this genre. The play is mainly about women, and their fraught position in a violently masculine society. The female characters have a fatalistic awareness of their own dehumanisation:

Hygd
 We are good human currency, like gold,
 For men to pass among them when they choose.³⁰

Although the events depicted are bleak, the women are redeemed by their possession of at least some humanity. No character is presented with less sympathy than the one significant man, the goatish Lear. Moreover, in caring for her dying mother, and showing some concern for the infant Cordeil, the otherwise remorseless Goneril displays the only compassion that we witness. Furthermore, she is shown to develop a quasi-feminist independence from Lear and his male kingship:

You cannot know this feeling that I know,
 You are not of her kin or her house; but I
 Share blood with her, and, though she grew too
 Worn,
 To be your queen, she was my mother, Sir.³¹

The only warmth in the play is that between two women, but it is equally significant that the deepest hatred also flourishes in the female sphere. It is the women who are the rounded, passionate and feeling characters: they supply the play's emotional power. The loathing that exists between Goneril and Gormflaith, Lear's kept woman, is intense:

Gormflaith
 ... Your daughter Princess Goneril has said
 (With lips that scarce held back the spittle from my
 face)
 That if the Queen is left again I shall be whipt.

Lear

Children speak of the punishments they know.
Her back is now not so white as yours,
And you shall write your will upon it yet.³²

Amidst the prevalent hatred there is also a strong element of sadism. At this point, it is most apparent in *Lear*, although we later see it arise in Goneril's degradation and murder of Gormflaith, in which she displays a marked physical intimacy with the object of her detestation:

Goneril

Ah, poor fragile beauty, you cannot rise
While this grave burden weights your drooping
head.

*[Laying her hand caressingly on Gormflaith's
she gradually forces her head farther and farther down]*

*

Gormflaith You had better take care,
For where my neck has bruises yours shall have
wounds.³³

In the Georgian plays, there is often a marked sexual tension that affronts respectability, and this is most apparent in the female characters. They are overtly sexual beings, and recognition of this was quite radical for the time. The Georgians were not concerned with maintaining Victorian domesticity, but rather, challenged it with a degree of force and candour. It will become evident in the course of this chapter that the common features of the spirited women in Georgian verse drama are pride, resourcefulness, an element of cynicism, earthiness, and practicality in the face of adverse circumstances.

Brooke's play *Lithuania* (1913) has something in common with Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife*, where the women are also shown to surpass the men in strength and ruthlessness. In the latter, one can detect a sense of sexual anarchy in the insistent emphasis on the male characters' lack of virility. The two women are hefty and sternly reserved, and the two men diminutive and voluble: 'He's an undersized, white-handed

dirty little man', and 'he's not a man, he's a little, weak chattering half a man, like you'.³⁴ The two women seem to have usurped the masculinity of the men. If one can detect the presence of the 'New Woman' here, it is clear that Brooke views her ambivalently. On the one hand, there is revulsion. Brooke was not outwardly progressive in his views on women, and in his prose, there are anti-feminist sentiments. For example, in an article on Strindberg, published in *The Cambridge Magazine* (11 October 1913), he wrote:

The morbid symptom of lovelessness is that denial of sex called feminism, with its resultant shallowness of woman and degradation of man. Feminism disgusted Strindberg, who was born with a curiously high standard of emotional and intellectual morality; [...] A congenital monogamist, he was born into a community suffering from a 'woman's movement'.³⁵

He goes on to compare Strindberg with Ibsen:

He [Strindberg] not only seems to stand for the tragedy of feminism, but also for the revolt against it, and especially against its apostle, a great and dirty playwright, Ibsen. Ibsen was the better writer, though Strindberg wrote two or three plays greater than anything of Ibsen's.³⁶

In choosing to champion Strindberg rather than Ibsen, Brooke allied himself to sexual conservatism. However, the fact that he read both these dramatists (who were considered advanced and daring for the time) shows that he was subject to the influence of new and complex portrayals of women. This is evident in the fact there is also a degree of relish in the bitter, vulgar, violent and sensual women in his own play. It is quite explicit for its time, and despite his repulsion, Brooke invests his creations with a vigorous sexual aliveness. This is evident in the stage movements and gestures of the Daughter:

DAUGHTER (*gets up suddenly and crosses to him, Limping slightly*)
I'm lame. A dog bit me. Would you like to see?
(*Pulls up her skirt and down her stocking and shows place under her knee*) Are ladies' legs like that?³⁷

The conversation of the Mother and Daughter as to whether to seduce the Stranger shows further disregard for notions of feminine refinement and decorum:

MOTHER

Anyhow, who could come here at night?

DAUGHTER

They come here, sometimes.

MOTHER

Sometimes! They come a lot to see you, don't they? – Young men. Twice a year! When I was a girl – ³⁸

Brooke was certainly capable of portraying women who were not coy, domesticated or passive. And as in Bottomley's play, the most significant conflicts are between the women. The relationship of the mother and daughter is extraordinarily bitter. In lieu of significant males, the two women battle each other, reasserting the fact that here decisive action and genuine emotion are female characteristics. Brooke's own troubled relations with women, particularly his mother, are analysed in depth in Christopher Hassall's *Rupert Brooke* (1964). It is an interesting possibility that *Lithuania* may further reflect the sexual and familial strife of the poet's own life. It is clear, though, that Brooke, like Thomas and Masefield, emerges as possessing a complexity in regard to women not usually imputed to the Georgian poet.

James Elroy Flecker's play *Hassan* (1913), is of interest for similar reasons as Brooke's *Lithuania*. Neither play is sympathetic to women, but there are nevertheless feministic counter-currents. Women initiate the decisive action in *Hassan*. We are not intended to like the character of Yasmin, but it is clear that she is strong, resourceful, resilient, thick-skinned and disarmingly honest:

YASMIN: I have left Selim because he proved a coward, a fool, a poor man, and nobody. I have come to you because you are rich, famous, and a man of taste. The day you fall into disfavour (may it be far, O master) I shall undoubtedly leave you. Till that day you will find me faithful. I am that which you call me – but I bring you fair merchandise.

HASSAN: I thank you, O seller of yourself. I buy no tainted meat. I beg you seek another market, and that extremely soon.³⁹

Moreover, like Bottomley's Hygd, Yasmin has a penetrating awareness of her own status as a commodity, and it is her wiliness and cynicism that allow her to survive. She is correct in her estimate of society's view of her. As Hassan himself says, when finding the money to seduce her, 'A carpet is a carpet, and a woman is a woman'.⁴⁰ The other female lead in the play, Perveneh, is idealistic, a foil to Yasmin, although the two do not meet. Perveneh, however, is passionate and decisive, self-destructive though she is. Incarcerated with her lover, Rafi, it is she who emerges as the stronger personality:

PERVENEH: Why is your voice so sorrowful? Your words do not keep step with your decision nor march like standard-bearers of your great resolve?

RAFI: What have I decided? What have I resolved? ...

PERVENEH. Do you repent? Do you unsay the golden words?⁴¹

*

RAFI: Alas, you are still dreaming: you are still blind with exaltation: Your speech is your metaphor. You do not see, you have never heard the high, thin shriek of the tortured ...⁴²

Here, there is an emphasis on language, whether it be weak or insincere, bombastic or empty, and as we will see later, this was also the case with Abercrombie and Drinkwater. Perveneh and Rafi accuse each other of similar weaknesses of language – of words not in keeping with what they represent. Another theme that arises here – and one that arises in Georgian poetic drama in general, particularly that of Abercrombie – is unrealistic conceptions of women. Hassan initially believes Yasmin to be the perfect maiden, but it is soon revealed that she is a harlot, who takes a feisty delight in showing him as much. Perveneh, a different sort of woman, also attacks Rafi's masculine illusions about her:

RAFI. ... There in the clouds I shall see your face, and remember you with a wistful remembrance as if you had always been a dream and the silver torment of your arms had never been more than the white mist circling around the mountain snows.

PERVENEH. (*with growing anger*): And so, wrapped in pleasant fancies, you will forget the woman whose honour you have sold to a tyrant. And so, while I, far from my country and my home, am dying of shame and confinement, you will dream on and dream!⁴³

The play's gender concerns are accentuated in its finale:

THE WATCHMEN (*consoling the women*):

What would ye, ladies? It was ever thus.

Men are unwise and curiously planned.

A WOMAN:

They have their dreams and do not think of us.

The Watchman closes the gate.

VOICES OF THE CARAVAN (in the distance singing):

We take the Golden Road to Samarkand.⁴⁴

Forsaking the court, Hassan, Ishak and others opt for 'the Golden Journey to Samarkand', which might be read as a metaphor for poetry and artistic creation in general. It is interesting that this is seen as incompatible with harmonious relations between the sexes, and the women are left by the track lamenting the men's indifference to them. In terms of sex relations, *Hassan* does not offer any answers or solutions; rather, the question and problems are shown to remain.

In Wilfrid Gibson's poetry, an increased awareness of female labour and female suffering began to appear as his work changed from late pre-raphaelitism to the plainer style of dramatic verse that dealt with social issues. This transformation moved the critic, Mary C. Sturgeon, to write in 1916:

Mr Gibson is a poet of his time in this as well – in his large comprehension and generous acknowledgement of the feminine part in the scheme of things. I do not quote to illustrate that because it is an almost constant factor in his work.⁴⁵

Daily Bread (1910) involves a parallel exploration of proletarian patriarchy and matriarchy. Gibson's dramatic poems often start with the linear generational structure of the patriarchal family:

He cannot break with it – the pit that all
His folk have worked so long in. It is said
That Martin's father's grandfather was born

At the pit bottom – Ay, lass, born and died there:
 For two days after he was wed they found him,
 Crushed by a fall ...

He will never leave the pit
 Although his father and brothers ... and he, himself ...
 I will never sleep soundly any more –
 Though sound enough I slept that night when they
 Were dying ... I ...⁴⁶

The patriarchal line is shown to be broken and intermittent: the males of one generation die in dangerous jobs, and the family power-structures that remain are largely female. This continues until the boys become men and assume their identities as miners, fishermen and stokers – and die shortly after doing so, as their fathers did before them. Children are left in the care of mothers and grandmothers, and wives – sometimes pregnant - in the care of mothers and mothers-in-law, and the process then begins again. Gibsonian males often abscond, and the result is much the same: the absence of the father and the presence of the mother.

The death or absenteeism of male providers suggests the existence of a matriarchal proletarian England, and Gibson – more than any other poet – explores this neglected history in depth. His treatment of the theme reached its culmination in the 1920s with *Krindlesyke* (1922), which tells of the labours of a family of hill farmers; it is split into two books, and both are entitled with the name of the family's self-sacrificing matriarch for that generation: 'Book I – Phoebe Barrasford', 'Book II – Bell Haggard'.⁴⁷ There is clearly a concern with power being passed from woman to woman in generational succession, which is conveyed directly in the title of an earlier version of *Krindlesyke*: 'Womenkind' (1912), and in the slogan attached to *Krindlesyke*: 'From one generation to another'.⁴⁸ The subject of the play is 'womenkind': the trials and sacrifices of Phoebe, Bell and Judith, and as in Masefield and Davies, there is a strong respect for the virtues commonly ascribed to women: sacrifice, kindness, sharing, domesticity. The theme of a woman's role appears again in *Kestrel Edge and Other*

Plays (1924), where two related poetic dramas are named after the current leader of a gypsy camp: 'Red Rowan' (the initial leader) and 'Blackadder' (her young successor).⁴⁹

In these plays, the relationships between women take on a particular significance, and involve debate about their role and station in the community. Although a pattern of matriarchy has been established, it is challenged - and most vehemently - by other women. As Nettles says to the eponymous heroine of 'Blackadder':

Not I: I'm not the sort
To settle things for men: I'd never snatch
The reins from menfolk's hands: but one thing's certain
We're none of us from this on going to do
The bidding of a petticoat.⁵⁰

The theme continues in the longer drama, *Lover's Leap* (1924), where Rachel, a more traditional matriarch, upholds her sons' male power over her daughter-in-law, Lucy, and the farm-girls, Esther and Adah. Although the climactic struggle is between Angus and Esther, there is also a conflict played out between the women:

Esther. *Woman!*
Lucy. You call me 'woman'? I'll teach you who it is
You're calling 'woman'. I'm your mistress still.⁵¹

This exchange exemplifies an important feature of Gibson's portrayal of female characters in his verse dramas: modes of address reveal a complex web of social relations. Mothers and daughters, mistresses and servants, neighbours and sisters are all 'placed' by their language. 'The Betrothed', (in *Daily Bread*, 1910), the collection in which this verbal sensitivity first became evident, typifies this tendency:

What else is left me, *woman*?
Happen I've been blind and foolish, *lass* ...
You should be with the other *women folk*
As I'd be if only I could crawl so far ...
Daughter, it's strange how little happiness
It takes to keep us going.⁵²

First names are seldom used. A young woman often addresses an older one as 'woman' or 'mother'. The older of the two women will often address her junior as 'lass', 'girl', 'child', 'maid', 'daughter' or 'woman'. It depends on the context, but there are differing connotations of affection, recognition, contempt, censure, condescension, protectiveness, and solidarity. To return to an earlier point, these words are used among women in the purchase and exchange of social power. Economically disempowered, the hierarchy among females is based on words. The men in Gibson's dramatic poems are less linguistically insistent on the role and station of their sex; they rarely use terms like 'menfolk' among themselves. As suggested earlier, one could argue that symbolic currency (in this case, language; in Davies's 'The Waiting Room', it is clothing) is exchanged between women because men possess a more material form of status: their accepted role as breadwinners. Gibson's women are shown to have their own fields of vision, separate from the men, but these are no less immersed in grief, drudgery and hardship:

We struggle on, and find ourselves in the struggle,
 And to a woman working for a child,
 Life cannot be all barren; and barrenness
 Is the only bitterness.⁵³

Of all the Georgians, Lascelles Abercrombie was the most sympathetic towards women, and the most feministic in his outlook. In his journalism, he wholeheartedly supported the women's suffrage movement. Writing for *The Liverpool Courier* (in fact, a Tory paper), he published several articles on the issue. 'Banners' (9-11-1908), a leader article, is about the use of 'majestic banners' by suffragettes to convey their message effectively. He praises

the determined and energetic ladies who manage the Woman Suffrage movement [who] have adopted many striking and (meaning it in no invidious sense) arresting devices for the furtherance of their cause and the attraction of public attention to their demands.⁵⁴

He then goes on to see the suffragettes' particular use of publicity as possessing a peculiarly female genius, and this leads him to discuss gender differences in the art of persuasion:

When a man seeks to move the people into a belief in his cause, he does not altogether neglect an emotional appeal, but he is much more anxious to capture their reasons. Whereas a woman, not being wholly given up to that world of make-believe which man calls his reason, seeks primarily to seize the popular heart, knowing quite well that when seizure is effected the reason will follow. Her intuition, in fact, has brought her into line with the most modern philosophy, which asserts that reasoning is not a self-sustaining faculty, but merely an emanation of the Will to Live; and the Will to live is only an out-of-the-way name, such as philosophers delight in, for what the plain man calls emotion. Reason is formalised emotion. The every-day actions which we attribute solely to the operation of reason, in reality proceed ultimately from the emotion. Emotion is the steam in the boiler, reason the elaborate engine of piston, cylinder, and crank which the emotion keeps going.⁵⁵

This is typical of Abercrombie's writing, with its searching analysis of human nature, coupled with a strong emphasis upon the gender gap. The qualities that he imparts to women – emotional honesty and direct contact with actualities – is reminiscent of Thomas's sentiments in *Feminine Influences* and *The Tenth Muse*. This similarity results from a common sensibility: there is a strong sympathy with women which nevertheless still upholds that certain strengths and qualities are peculiar to women. There is an element of the feministic, but also an element of the patriarchal. The engine analogy in the above quotation is appropriate to the complexities of this outlook, and it reminds us of Abercrombie's background as a chemist, as do several of his poems, which talk of mingling 'male' and 'female', often with sparks, spray and light. As a journalist, however, he had a sound grasp of publicity, and his conclusions about the 'female' use of it are unequivocal:

It is their surprising grasp upon this truth {gender differences} which has made the Suffragettes leap in a few years from a group of estimable but obscure ladies into the most talked-of persons in the land. [...] It is very true, a mighty array of banners does not necessarily betoken the justice of a cause, but it certainly does betoken the ardour and conviction of those who upheld the cause.⁵⁶

Abercrombie's compassion for and sympathy with the suffragettes increased as women were mistreated in the more militant incidents. On 7 December 1908, he published the poem 'The Charge of the Knight's Brigade', in *The Courier*, with the caption 'At the Albert Hall Suffragist meeting on Saturday nearly a hundred "gentlemen volunteers" acted as stewards and "chuckers out"'.⁵⁷ The witty poem is not available in any of Abercrombie's collections of poetry, so here it will be quoted in full:

Women to right of them,
 Women to left of them,
 Women all round them,
 Fainted, shrieked, clamoured.
 Scorning to save or spare,
 Careless of hats or hair,
 They, old and young alike,
 Out, and all down the stair,
 Ruthlessly hammered.

Flashed female shoulders bare,
 Flashed as they turned in air,
 Grabbed by the heroes there
 Warring with women, while
 Chivalry wondered.
 Plunged 'midst mere women-folk
 Through all restraint they broke.
 Wife, mother, maiden
 Reeled from the knightly stroke,
 Half their clothes plundered.
 Five to each woman fought!
 Brave gallant hundred.

When can their glory fade?
 Oh! The brave show they made!
 Not they who blundered.
 Honour the part they played,
 Honour the Knight's brigade –
 The steward's hundred!⁵⁸

This ironic address, based on Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', indicates strongly that the Georgians should not be classed as stuffy belated Victorians, but as part of a young, Liberal intelligentsia capable of satirising Victorian conventions with confidence and wit. It shows that writers such as Abercrombie did not shy away from truly controversial issues: it was an unpleasant truth that women were sometimes

sexually assaulted in the mêlées that followed suffrage meetings, and that civic order was not the first aim of many of the men who ‘controlled’ these gatherings. Abercrombie’s sympathy with the suffragette movement found fullest voice in ‘The Disadvantage of Justice’ (16-1-1909), in which he saw women’s suffrage as a cause beyond dispute, and had no sympathy for its opposers:

When a cause is opposed as Woman Suffrage is, by nothing more than unintelligent sluggishness and mere blockish wilfulness, its advancement cannot afford much high entertainment. There is nothing so dull as a weight-lifting competition. The Woman Suffrage movement is no more than weight-lifting, and we hasten to add no less. The weight its exponents have to lift is enormous; it is in fact all that is left of savagery in the civilised man, and there is a considerable deal of savagery remaining in that curious creature. The load is very heavy and difficult to handle; and the exertions of the Suffragists to get a purchase on its are admirable.⁵⁹

This prompts one to question the extent to which these feminist sympathies are present in the main body of his poetry. The long poem, *Emblems of Love* (1912), explores the changing perceptions of love in the history of humankind, including a recognition of the changing role of women. The awe of women expressed by the wolf-hunters in ‘Prelude’ reflects Abercrombie’s philogyny that is apparent throughout his work:

GAST. Ay truly
For look how from their wondrous bodies comes
Increase: who knoweth where such power ends?
They are in league with the great Motherhood
Who brings the seasons forth into the open world.⁶⁰

This fascination with female forces is also apparent in ‘Jean’, when the feisty heroine reflects upon her seductiveness and sees it as resulting in empowerment rather than submission:

Now what a thing it is to be a girl!
Who’d be a man? Who’d be fuel for the fire
And not the quickening touch that sets it flaming?
‘Tis true that when we’ve set him well alight
(As I, please God, have set this Morris burning)
We must be serving him like something worshipt;
But is it to a man we kneel? No, no;
But to our own work, to the blaze we kindled!’⁶¹

Abercrombie does not always claim women to be more virtuous than men, but he frequently shows them to be stronger and more pertinacious, so that the most memorable characters from the verse dramas and poems are usually women. They include the termagant in 'Witchcraft: New Style' (*Georgian Poetry IV*, 1919), who terrifies the men in the pub and uses hypnotism to reduce her husband to a bleeding heap; the young tramp-woman in 'The Staircase' (*New Numbers IV*, 1914) who is witty, resilient and worldly; and the spirited prostitute in 'Ham and Eggs', who confounds both customer and madam.

In Abercrombie's treatment of women, one can see the influence of Thomas Hardy, whom he greatly admired. In *Thomas Hardy* (1912), he described him as 'one of the greatest inventors or describers of feminine character'.⁶² 'Judith', like *Tess*, is about virginity, purity and despoilment; and 'Vashti', again like *Tess*, examines unreal male perceptions of women. The heroine talks of 'women kept as wine to make you dream',⁶³ which is similar to the mistake of Angel Clare, whose 'love was doubtless ethereal to a fault'.⁶⁴ This romanticising and de-romanticising of female love-objects is a pattern that recurs in his work, and which he expounds in *Thomas Hardy*:

They [the women in Hardy's novels] do not simply form a passive characterless nucleus, round which male desire crystallises in the form of imagined perfection, to become in the end distracted by finding there in nothing in the reality of womanhood answering to the ideal. Hardy's women exist in their own right.⁶⁵

In Hardy's fiction, therefore, Abercrombie recognises a sophisticated 'de-mythologisation' of the female. He elaborates further:

So it is only the gleaming of his own desire that the lover worships; each amour ends in the desire being once more disappointed of perfection, as soon as the lover is able to distinguish the woman underneath the dazzling transfiguration he himself has caused; the ideal of love becomes a ceaseless irony.⁶⁶

Several of Abercrombie's longer dramas demonstrate this movement from an unrealistic ideal of womanhood to the bitter disillusionment that accompanies reality. In 'The

Adder' (performed at the Liverpool Rep, 1913), the insane Newby believes his daughter to be free of sin, but she is killed by the snake in which he believes he has trapped this quality. It is demonstrated that unrealistic expectations of women do not survive the circumstances that test and expose them, often with much cruelty. 'The Staircase' (*New Numbers 4*, 1914) is perhaps the most protracted examination of wishful perceptions of women. The joiner, fantasising about the girl who once inhabited the bedroom he is repairing, has his attitudes changed when she returns to the deserted house as a hungry vagrant. The movement from fantasy to reality is one that the woman herself recognises:

Woman. Indeed
 It goes up hill, out of dream to truth.
 But I've come down a little; I thought to find
 My old angry father; and I find you! –
 Now, are we right yet?⁶⁷

It is significant that the female vagrant is not given a name: she is simply 'the Woman', thus lending her a wider, symbolic significance as representing female fortitude. C.L. Sastri, in *Abercrombie's Poems* (1971), justifiably sees her as the greatest of Abercrombie's company of heroines:

Abercrombie gives a full-length portrait of the Woman. [...] A penniless woman, with hunger gnawing at her soul, with the officers of the law dogging her footsteps, with her man thoroughly brutalised and utterly devoid of any vestige of self-respect and altogether dead to all sense of shame and duty, she still has plenty of good spirits left to laugh and joke, to remonstrate and philosophise.⁶⁸

Proto-feministic currents exist in Abercrombie's work partly because the world he brings to life is a dangerous one for women, in which there are many violent and lecherous male characters. The king in 'The New God' (1908) attempts to engineer his daughter's rape by feeding her heathen suitor a love potion. The lecherous demon in 'Asmodeus in Egypt' pursues 'the odour of female flesh' and when unable to rape Sara due to his ghostly state, strangles her.⁶⁹ In 'Judith', the heroine is caught between the lusts of Ozias in her own city and the equally goatish Holofernes in the enemy camp. In

all of these texts, the woman is confronted with the possibility of rape. It is thus that the author establishes an arena for the purpose of testing and celebrating female resolve. Even the natural environment in Abercrombie's poetry can be aggressively phallic. In 'Mary and the Bramble' (1910) the protagonist is assaulted by 'eager thorns, tearing her dress to seize / And harm her hidden white virginites'.⁷⁰ Throughout the poetry, Abercrombie's attitude is an ambivalent one: he shows a sympathy for female independence, and yet also a conflicting fascination with feminine vulnerability. Reminiscent of Hardy, his sexual politics can seem both radical and reactionary at the same time, clearly attesting the complexity of these Edwardian/Georgian authors and their climate.

On occasion, Abercrombie also shows an interest in the ascendancy of women at times of familial or communal crisis, and in this respect, resembles his friend Gibson. Two of Abercrombie's verse dramas – 'Judith' from *Emblems of Love* (1912) and *Deborah* (1913) - show an interest in the position of *superior* women who have the social standing to command a share of power within the patriarchal framework. This power, however, is accompanied by the demand for the woman's self-sacrifice, which is clear from the outcomes of the dramas. Judith saves her city, but sacrifices her virginity and purity of soul. Deborah is the mainstay of the social healing process after the plague, but she cannot protect herself and others from the moral weaknesses of those she saves. The implication is that the limited power that women gain from a self-sacrificial role is not enough.

The feminist message in Abercrombie's work is further demonstrated in 'Vashti', another text in *Emblems*, where the heroine commences the battle for separate being:

And turning aside into that pleasant inn
 Called woman, there is entertainment kept
 For man ...⁷¹

We women know our style. Ay, we are fooled
 Sometimes with heady tampering thoughts, that
 Come to bother our submission.⁷²

With such asides, Vashti challenges the conventional view of women's 'natural' submissiveness. Abercrombie's sense of a new consciousness of self among women, and his focus on intelligent and socially aware women, prompts a more historicised reading. Can 'Vashti' be read as an allegory of a Georgian suffragette? The pro-suffrage journalism examined above and the consistency of a feminist message in his poetry as a whole suggests that it can be. At the same time, 'Vashti' gains power and historical depth from its biblical setting. An outcast in the desert, Vashti encounters the goddess Ishtar, who offers her speaking visions of other women who have stood out in history or legend: Helen of Troy, Sappho, and St. Theresa. The heroine is thus made to take her place in a line of women who have disrupted social and sexual norms, and feminism is consequently situated as an historical movement. As in Gibson's poetry, there is also an interest in power, knowledge and responsibility being passed from woman to woman. In 'Vashti', this female line of inheritance is not native and linear as patriarchy is, but is historically diffuse and multi-racial. It is presented as an alternative to masculine power, and therefore works in a different way. Although Abercrombie, influenced by Hardy, is adept at seeing the pain, caprice and violence in relations between men and women, there was also a contrasting current of idealism and optimism. This is evident in Ishtar's final deliverance of her creed:

I have not done with man. – Thou sayest true,
 Women are as a sin in life: for that
 The gods have made mankind in double sex.
 Sin of desiring woman is to be
 The knowledgeable light within man's soul,
 Whereby he kills the darken'd ache of being.
 But shall I leave him there? Or shall I leave
 Woman amid these hungers? Nay: I hold
 The rages of these fires as a soft clay
 Obedient to my handling; there shall be
 Of man desiring, and of woman desired,

A single ecstasy divinely formed,
Two souls knowing themselves as one amazement.⁷³

There is a familiar ring to some of the phrases here – ‘ache of being’, ‘rages of these fires’, ‘single ecstasy’. The preoccupation with ‘male’ and ‘female’ forces is reminiscent of D.H. Lawrence, who may have been influenced by Abercrombie.

Lawrence read *Emblems of Love* in 1913, and was generally impressed.⁷⁴ In *Emblems*, Abercrombie stressed the potential harmony between the sexes, whereas, in Lawrence’s fiction, the emphasis was more on the potential violence and disillusion. The complexity, however, and the imagery (stars, light, incandescence etc) is similar. Few scholars choose to ally Lawrence with the Georgians, but as friend to Marsh, Abercrombie, and Gibson, and contributor to the *Georgian* anthology himself, he may well have been influenced to some degree by the gender awareness within Georgian verse drama.

Perhaps the most sophisticated aspect of Abercrombie’s portrayal of female characters is his awareness of the sexual power-structures within language itself. This is particularly the case in ‘Judith’. The protagonist’s womanhood enables her to be ‘outside’ male language. This is evident in her visit to Holofernes: ‘For captured kings peasants or for captured kings / Such words have the right big sound. But I / am woman and I hear them not’. She shows contempt for Ozias and his verbal complacencies:

Thou fool,
Death is nothing to me and life is all,
But what foul wrong have I done to thee, Ozias,
That thou shouldst go about to put such wrong
Into my life as those defining words.⁷⁵

‘Those defining words’ are part of the assault upon Judith’s freedom. Again, one can detect Hardy’s influence: in his novels, there is a similar notion of language being male, and women being able to retreat beyond it. In a much cited passage from *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Bathsheba sees the language of males as alien: ‘It is difficult

for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs'.⁷⁶ The heroine of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) is also placed at a linguistic remove: 'To fling elaborate sarcasms at Tess, however, was very much like flinging them at a dog or a cat. [...] she only received them as inimical sounds which meant that anger ruled'.⁷⁷ It was the achievement of Abercrombie and other Georgians to bring these complexities into dramatic poetry. The fine sense of the social properties within language relates back to the verbal deliberation discussed in Chapter One: the Georgians were not complacent in their use of words, and this includes the relation of those words to women.

A concern with the struggles of women is also present in the poetic drama of John Drinkwater. *The Storm* (1915) shows much in common with the dramatic poetry of Gibson's *Daily Bread*. Drinkwater's play addresses the fears and anxieties of women whose husbands succumb to occupational deaths. The cast is mainly female, and a key theme is the trans-generational struggle between women of different ages. In a Gibsonian tableaux, Sarah, an 'old neighbour woman', upholds the patriarchal norm of the community:

Alice: My man – I must go myself.
 Joan: There is nothing you could do.
 Sarah: 'Tis men
 Should carry the dead man in.⁷⁸

The conflict here is over whether the dead man is the property of wife or workmates. The widow angrily maintains her personal claim to her husband's corpse, and sees the woman as the dominant force in marriage:

A woman takes a mate
 And like the patient builder governs him
 Into the goodman known throughout the countryside,
 Or the wise friend that the neighbours will seek out,
 And he, for all his love, may never know
 How she has nourished the dear fine mastery
 That bids him daily down the busy road
 And leaves her by the hearth.⁷⁹

In this play, Drinkwater does not argue radically for a new role for women; but within his Georgian liberalism, he does suggest that traditional female roles deserve respect.

In two other plays, *Rebellion* (1914) and *Mary Stuart* (1915), Drinkwater's treatment of women is similar to that of Abercrombie. Both plays examine the plight of an exceptional woman who wields significant but ultimately limited power in a male-dominated society. The following exchanges between Phane and Shubia in *Rebellion* reveal a sexual power struggle between king and queen, husband and wife:

Shubia. Still your babbling here
Sets trivial thoughts against my sleep.
Phane. How trivial?
Shubia. What else? The old reiterated talk
Of state and fended rights and policy,
Chatter of huge heroic issues ...
Phane. Still
You reckon up the process of a king
In a scornful word, the sinewy enterprise
Of a state set in peril by evil hands
You are not just, my queen: go to your sleep.
Shubia. Go to my sleep. A child, thrusting
Among
The affairs of men, distracting their graver councils,
Scolded, not roughly though, and sent to sleep.⁸⁰

In comparing herself to a child being sent to bed, away from the affairs of *men*, Shubia recalls other notable women in Georgian drama: Bottomley's Hygd, in her comparison of women with gold passed between men, and Abercrombie's Vashti, who described woman as an 'inn' man visits for light entertainment. And as in Abercrombie's 'Judith', language itself is a sexual battleground in *Rebellion*. The woman champions female discourses, and, significantly, it is Phane's words that Shubia attacks: 'babbling here', 'old reiterated talk', 'chatter of huge heroic issues'. This is also apparent in *Mary Stuart*, where Mary is beyond Riccio's comprehension, and belittles both him, and, perhaps more significantly, what he has to say: 'There is no peace in you, David. Just a buzzing in the jar'.⁸¹

In *Mary Stuart* particularly, the woman's position compares closely with those of Abercrombie's heroines. As Mary herself becomes a possession, under the 'protection' of Bothwell, we are left with the realisation that even powerful women can be no more than prizes. The notion of sexual possession is important here, since the opening conversation between Boyd and Hunter examines this form of 'ownership' with much subtlety, and provides a focus with which the audience or reader can view the unfolding events:

Boyd. Or your sense of mastery in owning her?

Hunter. You can't refine things like that.

Boyd. But you must, or fall into the mere foolishness
Of life. You must answer yourself. Do you
Want to enjoy her love or do you want to
Enslave it?

Hunter. How can I believe what she gives
To Finlay isn't taken from me?

Boyd: She can take nothing from you that is
Yours.

Hunter: Her love belongs to me.

Boyd. If you can keep it.⁸²

A concern with the emancipation of women is thus established from the start. Hunter's marriage problems in present-day Scotland are shown to re-enact the battle for possession of Mary. As in Abercrombie's 'Vashti', there is an awareness of similar struggles throughout the centuries, and this lends historical depth to the proceedings.

In nearly all these Georgian poetic dramas, a strong and complex portrayal of women is attempted. Moreover, there is a recurring connection made between female resistance to patriarchy and awareness of the sexually arbitrary properties of language. As their situations become more desperate, these women acquire a philosophical and linguistic intensity that sets them beyond the male characters. There is nothing left to lose, and in the war of words at least, women are victorious.

This, I would argue, goes somewhat towards refuting the claim that Georgian poetry was flawed by an overly masculinist focus. It is true that both *New Numbers* and

the first three *Georgian Poetry* collections contained only the poetry of men, and it was not until *Georgian Poetry IV* (1919) that some poems by the now largely forgotten Fredegond Shove were included. Three years later, another lone female poet, Vita Sackville West, was featured in *Georgian Poetry V* (1922). Women writing on the fringe of the movement, but not appearing in the Georgian anthology, included Charlotte Mew, Rose Macauley and Eleanor Farjeon. While the present study has attempted to show that the Georgians were far more sensitive in gender terms than has hitherto been acknowledged, there is nevertheless a dearth of female poets in the inner circle. Some scholars have countered this by drawing attention to the substantial part played by the wives of the poets in the Dymock settlement, and the support of their poet husbands through chequered careers.⁸³ Catherine Abercrombie, an intelligent woman with an artistic background, was extensively involved in the administration of *New Numbers*. Geraldine Gibson also had some independent connection with both educational and literary worlds: she was educated at Newnham College, and had found employment at Monro's Poetry Bookshop, where she met Gibson, then its assistant editor. Helen Thomas was also of a literary background, being the daughter of the writer James Ashcroft Noble. Her own capabilities became evident when she wrote two affecting memoirs of her husband – *As It Was* (1926) and *World Without End* (1931). To extend this point beyond Dymock, to the Georgians of London and elsewhere, one might add that after Harold Monro's death in 1932, his widow Alida showed resolve in keeping the Poetry Bookshop going for another three years, before its final closure in 1935. Other Georgians had the benefit of relationships with strong and capable women. Flecker's wife, Hellé Skiaderessi, was a poet in her own right (his 'Greek Poetess'⁸⁴, as he called her), and de la Mare's female friends included the literary hostess, Naomi Royde Smith, who would one day be a close friend of Eleanor Farjeon.

With regard to the maleness of the literary scene, there were woman poets in the first two decades of the twentieth century who were not Modernists, but nor have they been considered as Georgians. They include Margaret L. Woods, Olive Custance, Sarojini Naidu, Helen Parry Eden and Eva Gore Booth. These poets had collections published, and appeared beside the Georgians in general anthologies. Perhaps to avoid the 'poetess' label, several woman poets of the time used male pseudonyms: John Presland (Gladys Skelton), Lawrence Hope (Adela Nicholson), and Michael Field (Katherine H. Bradley and Edith E. Cooper). Most of these poets are forgotten now, although renewed interest in Georgian poetry might lead to their rediscovery, and to their being discussed alongside the neglected authors examined in the present study.

Notes to Chapter Three

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- ¹ *The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1912-22*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson (London: Hogarth, 1976), p. 203.
- ² Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), pp.3-13.
- ³ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 193.
- ⁴ John Masefield, *Collected Poems* (London: Heinemann, 1926), pp.77-8.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, pp.77-8.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p.80.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, p. 120.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, p.181.
- ⁹ *ibid.*, p. 183.
- ¹⁰ *The Complete Poems of W.H. Davies* (London: Cape, 1963), pp.230-1.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, pp.230-1.
- ¹² J.B. Priestley, *The Edwardians* (London: Heinemann, 1970), pp. 70-80.
- ¹³ *The Complete Poems of W.H. Davies*, p.592.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.565.
- ¹⁵ W.H. Davies, *The True Traveller* (London: Duckworth, 1912), p.95.
- ¹⁶ Edward Thomas, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1979), p.19.
- ¹⁷ Helen Thomas, *As It Was and World Without End* (London: Faber, 1956), p.111.
- ¹⁸ Edward Thomas, *Feminine Influences on the Poets* (London: Secker, 1910), p.49.
- ¹⁹ Edward Thomas, *Collected Poems*, pp.78-9.
- ²⁰ Edward Thomas, *The Tenth Muse* (London: Secker, 1911), p.84.
- ²¹ *ibid.*, p.32.
- ²² Edward Thomas, *Cloud Castle and other Papers*, ed. by W.H. Hudson (London: Duckworth, 1922), p.104.
- ²³ *ibid.*, p.104.
- ²⁴ Edward Thomas, *Rest and Unrest* (London: Duckworth, 1910), p.120.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, p.32.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, p.128.
- ²⁷ Edward Thomas, *Light and Twilight* (London: Duckworth, 1911), p.150.
- ²⁸ Edward Thomas, *Cloud Castle* (London: Duckworth, 1922), p.115.
- ²⁹ *ibid.*, p.115.
- ³⁰ *Georgian Poetry II*, ed. by Edward Marsh (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1915), p.14.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, p.34.
- ³² *ibid.*, p.22.
- ³³ *ibid.*, p.37.
- ³⁴ Rupert Brooke, *Lithuania* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1935), p.9.
- ³⁵ *The Prose of Rupert Brooke*, ed. by Christopher Hassal (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1956), p.176.
- ³⁶ *ibid.*, p.177.
- ³⁷ Brooke, *Lithuania*, p.4.
- ³⁸ *ibid.*, p.18.
- ³⁹ James Elroy Flecker, *Hassan*, ed. by Basil Dean (London: Heinemann, 1970), p.45.
- ⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.4.
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.68.
- ⁴² *ibid.*, p.70.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, p.69.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.88.
- ⁴⁵ Mary C. Sturgeon, *Studies of Contemporary Poets* (London: Harrap, 1916), p.101.
- ⁴⁶ Wilfrid Gibson, *Collected Poems 1905-1925* (London: Macmillan, 1933), p.112.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.526 and p.552.
- ⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.523.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 667 and p.683.
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.684.
- ⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.643.

- ⁵² *ibid.*, pp.72-81.
- ⁵³ *ibid.*, p.80.
- ⁵⁴ Lascelles Abercrombie, 'Banners', *The Liverpool Courier*, 9 November 1908, p.7.
- ⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.7.
- ⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.7.
- ⁵⁷ Lascelles Abercrombie, 'The Charge of the Knights' Brigade', *The Liverpool Courier*, 8 December 1908, p.5.
- ⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.5.
- ⁵⁹ Lascelles Abercrombie, 'The Disadvantage of Justice', *The Liverpool Courier*, 16 January 1909, p.7.
- ⁶⁰ *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie* (London: Oxford, 1930), p.135.
- ⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.197.
- ⁶² Lascelles Abercrombie, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Secker, 1912), p.85.
- ⁶³ *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie*, p.170.
- ⁶⁴ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 315.
- ⁶⁵ Lascelles Abercrombie, *Thomas Hardy*, p.31.
- ⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.73.
- ⁶⁷ *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie*, p.392.
- ⁶⁸ C.L. Sastri, *Abercrombie's Poems* (Waltair: Andhra University Press, 1971), p.114.
- ⁶⁹ *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie*, p.319.
- ⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.277.
- ⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.139.
- ⁷² *ibid.*, p.142.
- ⁷³ *ibid.*, p.175.
- ⁷⁴ On 6 Feb 1912 Lawrence wrote to Arthur McLeod: 'Lascelles Abercrombie's Emblems of Love are fine – magnificent phrasing, but a bit over topping'. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. by James T. Bolten, Vol. 1 1901-13 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.362.
- ⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.222.
- ⁷⁶ Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.412.
- ⁷⁷ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, p. 300.
- ⁷⁸ John Drinkwater, *Pawns and Cophetua* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1926) p.6.
- ⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.12.
- ⁸⁰ *The Plays of John Drinkwater, Volume 1* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1925) p.40.
- ⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.181.
- ⁸² *ibid.*, pp.163-64.
- ⁸³ Keith Clark, *The Muse Colony* (Bristol: Redcliffe, 1992), p.53. See also Rennie Parker, *The Georgian Poets*, (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1999), p.4.
- ⁸⁴ Bodleian Library, Flecker/Morrogordato MS, 6

‘We Willed It Not’: The War and the Georgian Poets

Few recent studies have sought to establish common ground between Georgianism and war poetry. However, the apparent dichotomy between them has not always been the case. For example, Riding and Graves’s *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) was published at a time when war poetry was not held in any great esteem, so that while they dismiss Georgian poetry as ‘a dead movement’ war poetry is merely seen as ‘Georgianism’s second wind’.¹ Nine years later, Yeats excluded Owen from *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, professing ‘a distaste for certain poems written in the midst of the Great War’,² while giving generous coverage to pre- and post-war Georgians like Abercrombie and Turner. In an undated paper, probably written in the late 1920s or early 1930s, Wilfrid Gibson gave some indication of the brevity of war poetry’s initial popularity:

The poets who attained an instant vogue during, or immediately after, the War – Mr Siegfried Sassoon, Mr Robert Graves, Mr Edmund Blunden, and Mr Robert Nichols – have scarcely maintained their considerable popularity, even though their work has matured.³

A further sign of the relatively recent privileging of war poetry is the fact that I.M. Parsons, in the introduction to his anthology *Men Who March Away* in 1965, justified his selection by commenting that ‘more good poetry came out of World War I than is generally recognised’.⁴ Thirty-five years on, this would scarcely need to be said – the result of the boom in war poetry anthologies and criticism of the later 1960s and the 1970s. But a reflex of this process of elevating the war poets was precisely to sink their Georgian forebears and contemporaries even further into critical disregard.

John H. Johnston's *English Poetry of the First World War* (1964) argues that 'the Georgians, neither willing nor able to confront the external reality, developed a protective subjectivity and envisaged their art as a timeless refuge wherein the church clock might always stand "at ten to three"'.⁵ Bernard Bergonzi, in *Heroes' Twilight* (1965), speaks of 'the week-end cottage view of nature of the typical Georgian' and repeats 'the charge of escapism, of retreating ostrich-like from the reality of battle into a pastoral dream-world'.⁶ Jon Silkin's *Out of Battle* (1972) also equates Georgianism with a withdrawal from reality: writing of Wilfred Owen, he suggests 'there is too much genuine horror here for one to think of these responses as of a Georgian idealist's revulsion from the horrific'.⁷ Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), took a similar line: 'Golden half-light was Brooke's world, and when Georgian figure and discovered actuality merge, the red of sunset is seen as identical with the red of freshly spilt blood'.⁸ More recently, Patrick J. Quin's *The Great War and the Missing Muse* (1994) seeks to distance both Graves and Sassoon from Georgian antecedents: 'both poets largely rejected Georgian poetic roots and attempted to write poetry about the war which showed its unseemly side as well as an awareness of the unrealistic attitude of the civilian populace'.⁹ It will be argued in the following pages that Georgianism supplied the impetus for both these intentions.

This chapter will re-examine the responses to the Great War of the Georgian poets so far considered in this thesis, and will seek to present Georgianism as a pre-war poetic, which, in the event, supplied both the political and formal foundations on which the war poetry of realism and protest would be mounted. It will be argued, for example, that there is continuity between the Georgians' condemnation of poverty and exploitation and the war poets' condemnation of modern warfare, the military hierarchy and civilian complacency. Many of the senior Georgians were not, of course, 'trench poets' (combat experience being denied to them), but they did not glorify war in the

manner of the popular 'heroic' tradition. Rather, they were poets who conveyed the ambivalences of their period and social attitudes, blending a strong streak of pure patriotism with a genuine distaste for war.

i. Masefield, de la Mare, Davies, Monro, Thomas

The 'war' poetry of these older Georgians is in fact distinguished by a lack of aggressive nationalism, a sombre tone, a liberal social awareness, a distrust of the motives behind the conflict, and a recognition that the Great War would be a historical watershed.

John Masefield's response to events of 1914-18 has been underrated.

'August, 1914', commonly thought to be his one poem addressing the war, is indeed patriotic and conventional. Nevertheless, it does not glorify the war. The departing soldiers, with their 'dumb loving of the Berkshire loam' and 'dumb hearts of the English kind', are described with sensitivity and compassion:

But knew the misery of the soaking trench,
The freezing in the rigging, the despair
In the revolting second of the wrench
When the blind soul is flung upon the air ... ¹⁰

The final line here is reminiscent of Isaac Rosenberg's 'Dead Man's Dump', which also contains images of the soul's severance of the body amidst noise and violence. And Masefield, like Rosenberg, is conscious of precious and innocent lives being cruelly extinguished:

And die (uncouthly, most) in foreign lands
For some idea but dimly understood
Of an English city never built by hands
Which love of England prompted and made good.¹¹

It is recognised that there is no glory in the death of young men through war, and it is further implied in the stanzas above that those young, ordinary, working-class men are to be sacrificed for a nation that has done little for them. The phrase ‘never built by hands’ is particularly effective since it conveys and implicitly critiques the prevalence of an idealised notion of ‘England’ – of seeing the nation as benevolent and pure.

Masefield’s response to the conflict also includes his war letters, and *Lollingdon Downs and Other Poems* (1917). The title poem will be considered first. As its title implies, ‘Lollingdon Downs’ and its companion pieces do not explore trench fighting itself. Instead, it concentrates on the landscape of the Downs, and the humanity that has populated it over the centuries. The war is occasionally invoked directly:

And Dorothy’s sons have been killed out in France,
 And May lost her man in the August advance,
 And Em the man jilted, and she lives all alone
 In the house of this dance which seems burnt in my bone.¹²

Mostly, however, the war is offset against the continuum of history. Much of the emphasis falls on the underprivileged and labouring classes who continue to toil in the background of large events. In ‘The Workers’ and ‘The Sailors’ sections, each group of workers is given their own address; in ‘poem xxii’, the philosophical deliberations come to a halt, and we are told the Housmanesque tale of how Old Farmer Kyrle was shot dead by his son for beating his daughter, and how the son was then hanged in Gloucester prison. There is recognition that major events such as wars come and go, and the cyclical futility of humankind continues. Consequently, this perspective on history and humanity allows the Great War to be set in the background, and the primary focus to be on an English landscape and those that inhabit it through the ages. Masefield’s awareness of greater continuities is similar to Hardy’s ‘In Time of “The Breaking of Nations”’ (1915), with its knowledge that the burning grass of farmers ‘will go onward

the same / Though dynasties pass'.¹³ At the same time, the landscape of Lollingdon Downs is informed with the war's echoing presence: life is 'a red hour's war', and suffering is rife: 'in the sorrowing lands, / Women and men take hands'.¹⁴ This identification of historical continuities in suffering allows the poem to avoid the predictability of situating the war beside idyllic interludes, and the result is something that might be compared in form and intent (if not in scale) to Hardy's *The Dynasts*.

If Georgian poetry has been criticised for not addressing the actuality of the war, the work of Owen and Sassoon has been criticised for meeting it too narrowly and obsessively. Johnston, for instance, arrives at the conclusion that the stronger war poetry is the later writing of Herbert Read and David Jones: he argues that 'The End of a War' and *In Parenthesis* are 'epic' as opposed to 'lyric', and therefore have a detachment and a tragic grandeur that is lacking in the work of Owen, by virtue of the fact that such qualities can only be achieved through the medium of distance.¹⁵ Although similar objectivity is attempted and at times achieved in *Lollingdon Downs*, it is balanced and complicated by a humanitarian anguish, a celebration of compassion, and a desire for connection between people:

So by the bedside of the dying black
I felt our uncouth souls subtly made one:
Forgiven, the meanness of each other's lack;
Forgiven, the petty tales of ill things done.
We were but Man, who for a tale of days
Seeks the one city by a million ways.¹⁶

At a time of international crisis, these lines show a desire for racial and national reconciliation. Here, the 'other' is a black man, but the poem was written at a time when the other was also German. Despite the hostility to the Germans that is so evident in Masfield's war correspondence, his displacement of the German into the black other reveals a craving for peace and mutual forgiveness. His position is fundamentally removed from the 'bardic' poetry of, for example, Henry Newbolt, who still glorified

battle in poems such as 'The Service'. In Masfield's wish for harmony between hostile races, one can see the liberal impulse in British poetry that led to the renunciation of national antagonism in better-known pieces such as Edward Thomas's 'This is no Petty Case of Right or Wrong' or Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting'.

As a medical orderly in France, Masfield observed first-hand the misery of trench fighting, and his letters to his wife Constance record this meticulously. One might say that these letters are his 'war poetry':

Nothing else in the world matters but to stop this atrocious thing. Blood and intellect and life are simply nothing. Let them go like water to end this crime. You've no idea of it, you can't even guess the stink of it, from the bloody old reeking stretchers to the fragments hopping on crutches, and half heads, and the leg gone at the thigh, and young boys blinded and grey-haired old men with their backs broken. I never knew I loved men so much. They are a fine lot, I love them all.¹⁷

Even in the midst of the suffering which this letter (5 March 1916) documents unflinchingly, there remains in Masfield a belief in humanity and the sacredness of life (the closing statements are not meant ironically). We might ask why he did not put this powerful experience into verse. In another letter to Constance (29 March 1916), he supplies an answer:

We literary men have been very evil, writing about war. To fight is bad enough, but it has its manly side, but to let the mind dwell on it and peck its carrion and write of it is a devilish, unmanly thing, and that's what we've been doing, ever since we've had leisure, circa 1850.¹⁸

This passage implies that Masfield saw war poetry as against his principles rather than beyond his capabilities. He saw 'literary men' as having a parasitic relation to the suffering of soldiers, but, perhaps understandably at this stage, he did not foresee soldiers and writers soon becoming one and the same. Sassoon, Owen and Graves were able to do what Masfield felt he had no right to as a non-combatant; his letters, however, reveal that he had similar views to those who are now far better-known as war writers and artists. The prioritising of a humane consciousness over any artistic

endeavour is similar to Owen's statement that 'I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War',¹⁹ and Paul Nash's realisation that 'I am no longer an artist interested and cautious, I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on forever. It will have a bitter truth and may it burn their lousy souls (16 Nov 1917)'.²⁰ In turn, these comments should be related to the similar pre-war pledges of social reportage in Masefield's prologue to *Salt Water Ballads*, Gibson's epilogue to *Daily Bread*, Davies's justifications in *Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* - all of which are symptomatic of a literary climate in which the social awareness of Blatchford and others flourished.

Walter de la Mare also responded to the war from a humanitarian perspective, and his dominant note was one of appalled disbelief. *Motley* (1918) contained several pieces that dealt with the conflict – among them the title poem itself (see Anthology, p.36). The poem, spoken by a clown figure, portrays the war as 'unreal', insane in even a jester's logic:

They are at war! –
 Yes, yes, the bodies go
 Neath burning suns and icy star
 To chaunted songs of woe,
 Dragging cannon through a mire
 Of rain and blood and spouting fire,
 The new moon wide glinting hard on eyes
 Wide with insanities!

* * *

Nay, but a dream I had
 Of a world gone mad.
 Not simple happy mad like me,
 Who am mad like an empty scene
 Of water and willow tree,
 Where the wind have been;
 But that foul Satan-mad,
 Who rots in his own head
 And counts the dead ...²¹

De la Mare does not excuse the war in any way. There is no political and no emotional justification: war is simply seen as madness. This view is also present in 'The Marionettes' (see Anthology, p.38):

Let the foul scene proceed:
 There's laughter in the wings;
 Tis sawdust that they bleed
 Only a box death brings ...

* * *

Strange, such a piece is free,
 While we the spectators sit,
 Aghast at its agony,
 Yet absorbed in it!²²

The marionette show may be read as a political metaphor. European humanity is so embroiled in mass destruction that men are not in control of their destinies; they are stringed puppets, manipulated at will by those that control them. The damaged sawdust-bleeding puppets are to be taken as the soldiers, and the audience of the show is society: a society that is complicit in the slaughter. De la Mare's suggestion that warfare is an armchair entertainment, indulged at leisure by a bourgeois and money-grubbing society ('Strange, such a piece is free'), allies him with the anti-war polemic of such a poet as Sassoon and pacifists like Bertrand Russell and Lytton Strachey.

De la Mare's view, while no doubt that of a civilian, is nevertheless socially aware and humane, and it is an outlook that characterises the original generation of Georgian poets. The moral judgements are made at a distance, but that does not mean that they are insincere or wrong. While treatment of first-hand experience of warfare is obviously absent, such poems remind us that civilian compassion did exist, and that an awareness of the indefensibility of the war was not the sole preserve of those in the trenches.

W.H. Davies did not see war as having any glory or heroism. His sympathy was for those whose lives would be lost. In 'War', included in *Songs of Joy* as early as

1911, he sees Britain's domestic politics as the decisive factor in the deteriorating situation:

Ye Liberals and Conservatives,
Have pity on our human lives,
Waste no more blood on human strife;
Until we know some way to use
This human blood we take or lose,
'Tis sin to sacrifice our life.²³

Despite its bardic tones, with his use of 'we' and 'our', Davies is speaking for a generation (as Brooke was to do in the '1914' sonnets) on the subject of sacrifice; but the message is radically different. Davies concentrates on the 'sin' of the politicians rather than the passive endurance and nobility of the soldiers. This political independence is quite radical when read in its full context: Davies had no direct experience of the fighting, but he did live through those years in which Anglo-German relations deteriorated, and war was a growing possibility. The terms he uses – 'pity', 'human lives', 'human blood', 'our life' - convey a belief in the sanctity of life, and this belief would later inform the work of the trench poets.

'In Time of War' (*Raptures*, 1918) shows further detachment from the popular euphoria:

As I go walking down the street
Many's the lad and lass I meet;
There's many a soldier I see pass,
And every soldier has his lass.

But when I saw the others there,
The women in black mourning wear,
'Judged by the look of these,' I said,
'The lads those lassies court are dead.'²⁴

The mood of the poem is both pessimistic and prescient, and the simple versification and diction contribute to the poem's terseness. The colloquial tone – 'lads' and 'lasses' - lends an intimacy to the poet's sentiments, but also an immediacy. Those about to be

killed and those about to be widowed are in no sense distant, but the young men and women the poet sees every day.

One of Davies's most successful war poems is 'The Birds of Steel' (in the 1918 section of Jacqueline T. Trotter's *Valour and Vision*, 1920):

I hear those bees again – ah no,
It is the birds of steel, instead,
Seeking their innocent prey below.

Man-ridden birds of steel, unseen,
That come to drop their murdering lime
On any child or harmless thing
Before the early morning time:
Up, nearer to God, they fly and sing.²⁵

Nature as a victim of war will be examined in more detail when the war poets are discussed, but here we see a Georgian love of natural beauty and suspicion of modern technology being effectively adapted to war-time experience.

Davies would also recognise the fragility and insufficiency of poetic utterance at a time of international crisis. 'We Arm to Fight' explores the weakening of the poet's voice when occasional eloquence seems most appropriate. It also sets off the personal desires of the poet against his public mission in a fresh and simple way:

We arm to fight the Kaiser's troops,
And every man will do his part;
One song was mine, a call to arms,
To cheer my country's heart,
My love –
To cheer my country's heart.²⁶

There is no valorisation of warfare here. The poet is clearly aware of the bad times to come, as we can see from his desire to 'cheer my country's heart'. He is not lamenting his inability to embolden the troops with patriotic song; rather, he is mourning his inability to offer them the limited solace of 'cheer':

For now we meet, and my one cry
Is 'Molly, Molly,' night and day;

We fight the foe, and I am dumb:
 Oh kiss my shame away,
 My love!
 Oh kiss my shame away!²⁷

'Killed in action' (1918), an elegy for Edward Thomas, recognises the frailty of poets themselves in the midst of human combat:

War, with its hell-born childishness,
 Has claimed thy life, with many more:
 The man that loved this England well and only left it once before.²⁸

Thomas is here correctly acknowledged as a patriot – albeit of the peace-loving 'pure' kind - while he and his ideals fell victim to the other, martial patriotism. The magnitude of the war was indeed something for which the Georgians' liberal politics were unprepared, but they acknowledged this with honesty and dignity.

It is worth noting that Davies, like several better-known writers, was also to consider the war in retrospect, and his views remained sceptical. In his memoir, *Young Emma*, written in the 1920s, he shows awareness that the sudden adoration of the common soldier during 1914 was the mere euphoria of the public mood, misguided and temporary:

It was now the time of the Great War, and the sexual relationship between a man and a woman had undergone a change. Prostitutes, who in times of peace would not look or speak to a common soldier, because of his small pay, were now the first to pay him attention.²⁹

In that book, he is also perceptive enough to find continuity between the butchery of young men during the war and the economic exploitation of them before and after it. Speaking to some destitute soldiers in a poor hospital, he finds them so downtrodden as to not be aware of any ill treatment:

All their stories were of how they were fed, where and how they slept, and never a word about battle. They could not forget the fact that they were fed better than they had ever been before, and the larger issues of the Great War did not seem to matter. This, of course, only applies to the common soldiers, and not to the officers.³⁰

Davies, like Sassoon, lived long enough to see the beginning of the Second World War (he died in 1940). His views did not change. In 'Armed for War' (from *The Loneliest Mountain and Other Poems*, 1939), the country's leaders are once more seen as unlistening and patrician, and there is also anger at the violence about to be committed against nature:

When we have questioned Church and State,
Is there anyone else to ask?
Is it the Baby, three weeks old,
That wears a gas-proof mask?

Is the Infant armed to meet
A poisoned earth and sky –
A thing too weak to lift its hand,
To rub a sleepy eye?³¹

The most intense scepticism about the war to be found in the generation of older Georgians is perhaps in the poetry of Harold Monro. He saw much futility at the centre of the war, and his condemnation is readily apparent in a handful of poems that deal directly with it. *Children of Love* was published in 1914, and this collection contains 'Youth in Arms' (see Anthology, p.74), which displays the same foresight that we have found in de la Mare and Davies:

Happy boy, happy boy,
David the immortal willed,
Youth a thousand times
Slain, but not once killed,
Swaggering again today
In the old contemptuous way ...

* * *

Soldier, rifle, brown khaki –
Is your blood as happy so?³²

The soldier is given allegorical significance. He is both himself and every young man who has marched away to war. Described here as David, he faces a Goliath whom he

never beats: death. Monro is aware that this scenario has been repeated throughout history, and that it will continue to happen in the future. Furthermore, he identifies a conspiracy of age against youth:

Greybeards plotted. They were sad.
 Death was in their wrinkled eyes.
 At their tables, with their maps
 Plans and calculations, wise
 They seemed; for well they knew
 How ungrudgingly Youth dies.³³

This resentment of older and more established men also found voice in Owen's 'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young' and Osbert Sitwell's 'The Modern Abraham', both of which use the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac to reflect the mass 'sacrifice' of the war. Particularly in Monro's poem, there is a malevolence in the old, with their wisdom of ages, and a masochistic compulsion in the young who never learn. This implies that the war is a conspiracy of one generation against another. Monro's distrust and censure of the war effort reaches its culmination in 'The Carrion' section of 'Youth in Arms', where the Carrion speaks to the dead soldier who lies in its proximity:

It is plain now what you are. Your head has dropped
 Into a furrow. And the lovely curve
 Of your strong leg has wasted and is propped
 Against a ridge of the ploughed land's watery swerve.

You are swayed on waves on the silent ground;
 You clutch and claim with passionate grasp of your fingers
 The dip of earth in which your body lingers;
 If you are not found,
 In a little while your limbs will fall apart;
 The birds will take some, but the earth will take most
 Your heart.

* * *

No girl would ever kiss you. But then
 No girls would kiss the earth
 In the manner they hug the lips of men:
 You are not known to them in this, your second birth.³⁴

There is a strong sense of the beauty of youth and the shame of its despoilment. The language that depicts this is implicitly erotic: ‘the lovely curve of your strong leg’, ‘no girl would kiss you’, ‘as they loved you living I love you dead’. This sexual undertone emphasises the voracity of war, its appetite for death being ruthlessly appeased. ‘The Carrion’ is a force that ‘devours’ life.

Monro also had reservations about the writing of ‘war’ poetry itself. This is evident in ‘The Poets are Waiting’ (*Children of Love*, 1914):

The unprofessional
 Little singers,
 Most intellectual,
 Merry with gossip,
 Heavy with cunning,
 Whose tedious brains are draped
 In sultry palls of hair,
 Reclining as usual
 On armchairs and sofas,
 Are grinning and gossiping,
 Cake at their elbows –
 They will not write us verses for the time;
 Their storms are brewed in teacups and their wars
 Are fought in sneers or little blots of ink.

To what God
 Shall we chant
 Our songs of Battle?³⁵ (see Anthology, p.73)

Monro’s refusal to trust a conventional poetic voice at a time of unprecedented crisis is admirable, and this compares with the hesitations of Masfield and Davies, who were also reluctant to spin fine lines about the war. The satirical contempt that the piece exudes is powerful, and the achievement is similar in kind to Sassoon’s ‘Base Details’ and ‘Glory of Women’, which also attack the complacency of those who have not experienced combat.

In ‘Fragment’ (see Anthology, p.71), Monro questions whether mankind has learnt anything from the carnage: ‘Who talked of peace? / Or the next Great War to

come?'. Recognising that capitalism lay behind the First World War, Monro suggests that the decisive factor in the shape of the future will be industry:

The Vast Directors growled and spumed,
 The sirens from the factories shrieked,
 And all the Earth was vaguely fumed
 Drenched with calm smoke, and coned, and streaked.

I held my hands back to my heart
 And watched like someone at a show
 Who waits dispassionately apart
 For what the unknown dice might throw.³⁶

The imagery in the above stanzas harks back to pre-war Georgian poems such as Bottomley's 'To Iron Founders and Others', Gibson's *Daily Bread*, and Abercrombie's 'Indignation: an Ode' (see Chapter Two). The focus is once more on the industrial landscape, and this is significant: for though many believe that the war finished Georgianism, it did not finish the social and economic conditions that the best pre-war Georgian verse had made some attempt at criticising. In other words, there may be grounds for disputing the premise that the Georgians were flawed by a naïve handling of the Great War, just as there are for disputing the view that they were no more than effete pastoral poets.

In 1917, Thomas Secombe wrote an obituary of Edward Thomas, saying that 'Three years ago, he was a typical liberal of the intelligentsia'.³⁷ This clearly acknowledges that the war brought about a change in political sensibility, and also identifies Thomas as 'typical' of the Georgian outlook prior to 1914. Given the positive, revised understanding which the present study seeks to establish for that period, this seems appropriate. His prose piece, 'This England' (1914), illustrates his liberal standpoint, his mixed views of the coming conflict, where the will to fight (Thomas was no pacifist) is inspired not by desire for martial glory, but by an attachment to natural beauties, and a respect for the English past:

I was deluged, in a second stroke, by another thought, or something that overpowered thought. [...] Either I had never loved England, or I had loved her foolishly, aesthetically, like a slave, not having realised that it was not mine unless I were willing and prepared to die for it as Belgian women and old men and children had left their country. Something, I had omitted. Something, I felt, had to be done before I could look again composedly at English landscape, at the elms and poplars about the houses, at the purple-headed wood – with two pairs of dark leaves on a stiff stem, who stood sentinel among the grasses or bracken by the hedge-side or wood's edge. What he stood for I did not know, anymore than what I had to do.³⁸

The emphasis is upon unknown feelings: the young poets who enlisted as officers did not actually know what they felt when they went to war, and in their sentiments, there are strong feelings of anticipation and foreboding. 'When, indeed, Edward Thomas was killed in Flanders', claimed de la Mare in 1920, 'a mirror of England was shattered of so pure and true a crystal that a clearer and tenderer reflection of it can be found nowhere but in his poems'.³⁹ He continued: 'England's roads and heaths and woods, its secret haunts and solitudes, its houses, its people – themselves resembling its thorns and juniper, its very flints and dust, were his freedom and peace'.⁴⁰ This is very much a textbook definition of English 'pure patriotism' - one that also summarises the Georgian outlook - and one that found strong and clear expression in poetry. 'This is no case of petty Right or Wrong' (see Anthology, p.82) bespeaks a poet who does 'hate not Germans, nor grow hot / with love of Englishmen to please newspapers', but ultimately, must put his trust in England and what it means to him:

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.⁴¹

Despite this resignation to a simple way of seeing, Thomas's poems which refer to the war are laced with social conscience. For example, the speaker in 'The Owl' stops short of fully relishing the warmth of the inn when he remembers 'all who lay under the stars,

/ Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice'.⁴² Recognition of the connection, the oneness, between the poor and the enlisted is also present in Masefield, Davies, and, it will emerge, in Gibson and the fully-fledged war poets. In addition, Thomas was too much of a realist to see anything but death in coming events:

The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood
 This Eastertide call into mind of men,
 Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts, should
 Have gathered them and will never do again.⁴³

This poem, with its muted fatalism, might be compared to Davies's 'In Time of War'. It recognises that a casualty of war will be ordinary human relationships, and the pleasant but everyday experiences of youth.

Thomas's importance as a meeting point between Georgianism and war poetry is nowhere more apparent than in the surviving Georgians seeing him as a sort of liberal laureate some years after the war, representative of an expired age that was both near and far. Davies's 'Killed in Action' and de la Mare's memoir have already been mentioned, but one might also cite Gibson's 'The Golden Room' (1925), with its reminiscences of both Brooke and Thomas:

Now on the crest of the Aegean isle,
 Brooke sleeps, and dreams of England: Thomas lies,
 Neath Vimy Ridge, where he, among his fellows,
 Died, just as life had touched his lips to song.⁴⁴

Ivor Gurney, too, remembered Thomas as embodying values of the near past, admirable but perhaps discredited. In 'I saw England – July Night', he places Thomas in his rightful lineage: 'Edward Thomas by Arras fallen, / Borrow and Hardy, Sussex tales out of Roman heights / Callen'.⁴⁵ Thomas's spirit haunts him again in 'The Mangel Bury':

It was after the war; Edward Thomas had fallen at Arras –
 I was out walking by Gloucester musing on such things
 As fills his verse with goodness.⁴⁶

Even with the war having changed things, Gurney continues to see the merits of the generation that fought it. Despite its obvious differences from Modernism, Thomas's verse is indeed full of 'goodness' – humanity, benevolence, right feeling – and this claim might now be made for much Georgian poetry.

ii. The 'Heroic' Lapse: Brooke and Flecker

Rupert Brooke and James Elroy Flecker responded to the war in a 'heroic' manner which is unlike the social concern of the older Georgians. Brooke's '1914' Sonnets have been most instrumental in perpetuating the idea of an ingenuous Georgian patriotism that was discredited by the horrors of trench warfare. Even today, critical opinion about Brooke is divided. Many still condemn him: for example, George Parfitt in *English Poetry of the First World War* (1990) makes reference to 'the vapid diffusions of Rupert Brooke'.⁴⁷ But there are also those who take a revisionist view which usually involves distancing Brooke from the war altogether: Jon Stallworthy, for instance, sees Brooke at his best when 'a poet of peace', stressing the importance of laughter in his poetry.⁴⁸

However, it is certainly difficult for the revisionists that the poet sometimes considered the most talented of the Georgians responded to the war in a way that sits uncomfortably with the liberal-realist spirit of pre-war Georgianism:

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His
Hour,

And caught our youth, and wakened us from
 Sleeping,
 With hand made sure, clear eye and sharpened power,
 To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
 Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
 Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
 And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
 And all the little emptiness of love!⁴⁹

In comparing the march away to war with a dive into water, Brooke presents the conflict as having the potential for purifying a decadent society. This has much in common with James Elroy Flecker, another Georgian who responded to the war in heroic terms. His 'The Burial in England' (*The Old Ships*, 1915) like Brooke's '1914' Sonnets, anticipates death, and sees it as a necessary purge (see Anthology, p.50):

'Death is a dour recruiting-sergeant: see
 These women weep, we celebrate the dead.'
 Boys, drink the cup of warning dry. Face square,
 That grim old hazard, 'Glory or the grave.'
 Not that we shall trick your pleasant years away,
 Yet is not death the great adventure still,
 And is it all loss to set ship clean anew
 When heart is young and life an eagle poised.⁵⁰

The willingness to sacrifice 'pleasant years' and set 'ship clean anew' recalls the image of Brooke's awakened youth diving into water. But Flecker's response seems even more at odds with the sentiments of the older Georgians than Brooke's war sonnets – which at least talk about sacrifice rather than heroism. The terminology in Flecker's lines – 'Glory or the grave', 'great adventure', 'an eagle poised' – is deeply *un*Georgian in the sense that I have tried to establish. Rather, it harks back to the exuberant militarism in the verse of Newbolt, Austin and Noyes. Considering the humane and liberal opinions expounded in Flecker's *The Grecians* (1910) and 'Liberalism and Youth' (1912), this seems an apostasy. In fact, in *The Grecians*, with an alarming prophecy, Flecker wrote: 'La Giocosa [Flecker's educational utopia] will give England men of intelligence, fit to govern her, and not private soldiers fit to be shot down in some financial war'.⁵¹ The war brought public pressure on poets to respond in an approved way, and in addition,

we must also remember that few literary 'movements' completely eschew the former movements they have sought to reject. In 1914, Brooke and Flecker had no way of predicting the slaughter that would take place, and their war verse in some ways represents a deviation from some of their other poetry. As Gavin Ewart points out, Brooke - as a Fabian socialist - should have seen the capitalism that lay behind the war,⁵² and he seems to be less prescient than many lesser known Georgian poets to whom in a formal sense he was genuinely superior.

In other writings by Brooke, however, one can see the beginnings of a different perspective, and one more in keeping with the progressive thought that can be found, for example, in 'Democracy and the Arts' (1910). Contrary to popular belief, Brooke did see some military action, although it was limited. Before his death, he was present at the chaotic evacuation from Antwerp. This he recorded in his letters, which, after his death, would comprise the 'Antwerp' section of Edward Marsh's *Memoir* (1915). There is, in fact, a growing sense of the ominous, as if he is becoming steadily aware that the war is not to be the glorious episode at first envisaged:

The sky was lit by burning villages and houses; and after a bit we got to the land by the river, where the Belgians had let all the petrol out of the tanks and fired it. Rivers and seas of flame leaping up hundreds of feet, crowned by black smoke that covered the entire heavens. It lit up houses wrecked by shells, dead horses, demolished railway stations, engines that had been taken up with their lines and signals and pulled out, as a bad child spoils a toy ... the glare was like hell.⁵³

Brooke had actually shown earlier indications of this more realistic outlook in his *Letters from America* (1916). In the closing pages, he talks of the worsening situation in Europe, and tells us of 'a friend' (clearly an analogy for himself) who has mixed feelings about the developments: 'He thought often and heavily about Germany. Of England, all the time. He didn't know whether he was glad or sad. It was a new feeling'.⁵⁴ This final chapter of *Letters from America* was closely based upon his short article 'An Unusual Young Man', published in *The New Statesman* (29-8-1914). Once

again, Brooke described the emotions of an unnamed young man (himself) as the international situation deteriorated:

Something was growing in his heart, and he couldn't tell what. But as he thought of 'England and Germany' the word England seemed to flash like a line of foam. With a sudden tightening of his heart, he realised that there might be a raid on the English coast. He didn't imagine any possibility of its succeeding, but only of enemies and warfare on English soil. The idea sickened him.⁵⁵

As in Edward Thomas's '1914', there is an emphasis upon intense but unidentifiable feelings. Once again, it should be noted that the Great War was a conflict of unprecedented scope and intensity, and the young intelligentsia simply did not know what was to happen. There is patriotism here, but in the remainder of the article, it emerges as the pure kind, with the emphasis on rural beauty and a benevolent landscape standing for continuities in peaceful English life:

Grey, uneven little fields, and small, ancient hedges rushed before him, wild flowers, elms and beeches, gentleness, sedate houses of red brick, proudly unassuming, a country side of rambling hills and friendly copses. [...] To his great disgust, the most commonplace sentiments found utterance in him. At the same time he was extraordinarily happy.⁵⁶

This conveys, perhaps more clearly than the 1914 Sonnets, Brooke's true feelings: that 'the most commonplace sentiments found utterance in him' – there is no rhetoric of the occasional kind here. One might compare this to Davies's 'We Arm to Fight', another effective piece which ponders the elusiveness of a grandiloquent response, and is to some extent vindicated by doing so.

How other Georgians remembered Brooke is also of importance. Just as some allowance should be made for Brooke's response to the war, there should also be some reappraisal of the Georgian response to his early death. Many elegies were written on Brooke, and they employ similar themes and images. An example is Abercrombie's 'R.B.' (1915):

Beautiful life! As air delights to find
The white heat of fire and to be flame,

The eager world throng'd into his glowing mind
And flame of burning beauty there became.⁵⁷

The imagery here – fire, light, godlike stature – finds its way into most poems about Brooke's death, another instance being Gibson's 'To Edward Marsh, in Memory of Rupert Brooke' (*Fires*, 1916), which describes a timber fire witnessed by Gibson, Brooke and Marsh:

The night we saw the stacks of timber blaze
To terrible golden fury, young and strong
Aflame and burning like a god of song,
As we together stood against the throng
Drawn from the midnight of the city ways.⁵⁸

With only partial awareness at this stage, Abercrombie and Gibson are mourning the demise of a certain conception of the poet as a young and intrepid man, essentially English, liberal and Romantic. Rather than simply eulogising Brooke, and, indeed, helping to mythologise him, they are lamenting an age, an attitude and an ideal of masculinity that was about to perish.

iii. Drinkwater, Abercrombie, Gibson

The attitudes towards warfare of Drinkwater, Abercrombie and Gibson differ greatly from the patriotism of Brooke and Flecker, and connect instead with the directions established by Masefield, Davies or de la Mare.

John Drinkwater approached the war with mixed impulses. The title of his 1915 volume *Swords and Ploughshares* (1915) suggests a viewpoint that is clearly anti-war. It is from a biblical decree that God's people should pursue peace:

They shall beat their swords into
 ploughshares,
 and their spears into pruning
 hooks.
 Nation will not take up sword
 against nation,
 nor will they train for war any
 more.⁵⁹

The collection, however, does not altogether fulfil the promise of its title. 'We willed it not', for instance, shows a pastoral patriotism, different certainly to the sabre rattling of Newbolt, but also involving a measure of naivety – Drinkwater seems unaware of Britain's own participation in power politics:

We willed it not. We have not lived in hate,
 Loving too well the shires of England
 Thrown
 From sea to sea to covet your estate
 Or wish one flight of fortune from your
 Throne.

* * *

We love the hearth, the quiet hills, the song,
 The friendly gossip from every land,
 And very peace were now a nameless wrong, -
 You thrust this bitter quarrel to our land.⁶⁰

However, Drinkwater's plays of the period are rather more interesting. Rennie Parker has suggested that these dramas contain an implicit pacifism, and this certainly seems to be the case. *The God of Quiet* (1915) depicts a flickering of peace amidst warring nations, and then the ultimate failure of this peace to materialise, suggesting Drinkwater's hostility to war. Although the play has an ancient setting, it is clearly informed with the tensions of the author's present. 'A Citizen' speaks of the inevitability of slaughter, and the consequent possibility of peace when there are none left to fight:

So death shall have his season in the land,
 Distracted death, till life shall come again
 A water to the maddened tongues of men
 Burnt on the sand of sterile leagues of waste;

And all the words, all the tumult, and the haste
That prosper now to feed some curious pride
Shall pass.⁶¹

There is little or no indication as to the reasons for the war, suggesting that they do not matter because human conflict cannot truly be justified. In the above lines, the cause of the war is disclosed as merely 'some curious pride'.

A similar repugnance to war can be found in *X=0*, which appeared two years later. The unusual title, a mathematical equation, indicates humanity's decimation through war. The play shows the mutual realisation among Greek and Trojan soldiers that the fighting is less necessary than they first thought: there is an increasing reluctance 'to avenge some wrong done in our babyhood / On beauty we have not seen'. This leads to the revelation that war is not perpetuated by its direct participants, but by the political leaders who manipulate them:

Great kings may hate,
And priests may thunder hate, and grey-beard prophets
May cry again to those who cry their hate
In pride of their new-found authority,
Fearing lest love should mark them as they are,
And send them barren from their brutal thrift.
But not for us this envy. It is ours
Merely to die, or to give the death that these
Out of their hatred or indifference will.⁶²

Drinkwater's unequivocal condemnation of the Great War finally came in the 1930s. In the 'Is it Peace?' section of *This Troubled World* (1933), he made more explicit the views that one can discern in *The Quiet God* and *X=0*:

There are no considerations that can justify licensed murder as a means of settling disputes. [...] War is not only rotten, it is inescapably futile. And I will go so far as to say that if we should ever be so mad and wicked as to make war again, it will not matter in any moral conception of the world who wins it.⁶³

The war, in fact, left Drinkwater with a fear of weapons and warmongers. In 'Is it Peace?', he went on to condemn the military manufacture of poison gasses and disease germs:

The peoples of the earth should not rest until, by whatever means they can command, they have made it imperative for every government in the world to ascertain the places where this devilish work is being done, to publish their knowledge, and in the name of common humanity to stamp them out as they would stamp out a nest of gunmen. [...] The scientist who is using his talents and his knowledge for such ends is an antisocial menace of the most contemptible kind, and should be treated as such.⁶⁴

This, it might be argued, is a continuation of a Georgian view that existed before the war – a general distrust of modern technology.

Lascelles Abercrombie's poetic response to the war was minimal but perceptive. 'Rhyton Firs', his one poem that deals with this event, was in fact written some time after the conflict. C.L. Sastri's book on Abercrombie, *Abercrombie's Poems* (1971), shows no awareness of this time-lapse, and accepts it as a poem written at the time of World War One. Jan Marsh's 'Georgian Poetry and the Land', on the other hand, reveals that the Rhyton trees were not felled to supply wood for the war effort, but were cut down later, in 1919, as a result of the sale of the Beauchamp estates.⁶⁵ Abercrombie's connecting of a landscape despoiled by a financial deal with the earlier waste of the Great War itself is suggestive in that there seems to be an implicit recognition of the greed and capitalism that lay behind that war.

'Rhyton Firs', like Masfield's *Lollingdon Downs and Other Poems*, sets out to contemplate the war through the medium of a landscape. The poem opens with a heated diatribe against the Kaiser:

There was a fool who pulled fierce faces
At his photographer thirty years;
He swore, now I'll put you through your paces,
Jaegers, Uhlans, and Grenadiers!

Was he to blame? Or the looking-glass

That taught him his moustachios?
 How could that joke for an Attila pass?
 Who was to blame? Nobody knows.

He but let loose the frantic mood
 That toppled Europe down pell-mell;
 It rippled against our quietude,
 And Rhyton Firs, like Europe, fell.⁶⁶

The war is not glorified, nor is it mistakenly seen as a social purge. With some understatement, it is seen in the early days for what it was: 'a frantic mood'. Perhaps surprisingly, given the non-nationalistic nature of his pre-war poetry and prose, Abercrombie is one-sided in his condemnation: 'The fool' and 'the joke for an Attila' is the Kaiser. There remains, however, a broad liberal impulse in that Abercrombie talks of the fall of Europe rather than the defeat of Germany and the 'victory' of Britain. The war is seen clearly as an economic and military disaster for both victors and vanquished.

There is further significance in the fact that the poet chooses to mourn for a landscape. Natural beauty and the healthiness of rural work were the main sources of national pride in 'pure patriotism'; it stands to reason, therefore, that the destruction of 'green' England would be an immediate source of indignation. As a non-combatant, Abercrombie responded to the war with the experience available to him, and he acknowledges this with the simple statement: 'Dear boys, they've killed our woods'. The presiding image of the Rhyton trees – 'shorn so bare', 'a monstrous march of rugged brown caterpillars', 'lopt greenery'⁶⁷ – is a potent symbol of waste and destruction, and it was a motif that also appeared in pictorial representations. For example, images of blasted trees were recurrent in the bitter war art of Paul Nash: 'Desolate Landscapes, Ypres Salient, 1917', 'Landscape, Year of our Lord, 1917', 'Chaos Decorif', 'Broken Trees', 'Wytschaete, 1918', 'We are making a New World, 1918', 'Void, 1918', 'The Menin Road, 1919'.

The concluding part of Abercrombie's poem represents the trees reborn in the poet's imagination:

Light has killed the winter and all dark dreams.
 Now winds live all in light,
 Light has come to the earth and blossoms here
 And we have golden minds.⁶⁸

These lines should not be read as a naïve pastoral dream after a war that has made such dreams unlikely: Abercrombie does not expect us to swallow this vision of a renewed idyll. When Hardy-esque figures such as 'The Voices' and 'The Dance' (one should again note the influence of *The Dynasts*) appear and proclaim the resurrection of the Rhyton woods, the reader is rather made aware that this is a poignant impossibility. 'The Voices' are by their very nature phantoms, and when they speak of their return, they are announcing their final exit with self-irony. Although the poet resents the change, he does recognise the war and its aftermath as an historical dividing-point.

Moreover, it should be noted that after the war, Abercrombie, like Drinkwater, remained within the compass of advanced and progressive political thought. He was, for example, a staunch member of the SCR – the Society for Cultural Relations between the Peoples of the British Commonwealth and the USSR. Upon Abercrombie's death, Judith Todd, the secretary of the society, wrote to Catherine Abercrombie on 28 Oct 1938: 'As our first president he did so much for the Society, and for the larger cause of Anglo-Soviet relations, that we can never forget his work, and the interest he took in our activities. We were fortunate in having such a poet and scholar among the first of our friends'.⁶⁹ The SCR's vice presidents included liberals and leftists such as H.G. Wells, Beatrice Webb, E.M. Forster and Bertrand Russell.⁷⁰ It is clear that Abercrombie had a strong commitment to peace and international equity. The thinness of his reference to the war resulted from quiet resistance to a jingoistic climate rather than any inadequacy as a thinker and a poet.

George Parfitt argues that Wilfrid Gibson was the only Georgian to have transmuted the war into satisfactory poetry.⁷¹ While one might dispute that he was the only Georgian poet to respond to the war in an adequate and convincing way, it is clear that Gibson's war verse is the most impressive. His volume *Battle* appeared as early as 1915, and although not a combatant, Gibson was able to rise above the jingoistic climate and achieve the empathy which makes his poems powerful and convincing. An underrated part of Great War literature, this influential volume was read by several major war poets. Owen read it at Scarborough in 1917, along with Masefield's *Lollington Downs*. Further, in an undated letter (probably December 1916), Isaac Rosenberg wrote to Edward Marsh:

Gibson's 'Battle' was sent to me and delighted me. It is as good as Degas. In a way it seems a contradiction that a thinker should take a low plane as he does there instead of the more complex and sensitive personality of a poet in such a situation. Most who have written as poets have been very unreal and it is for this reason, their naturalness, I think Gibson's so fine.⁷²

Ivor Gurney was also impressed. In a letter to J.W. Haines on 1 May 1916, he wrote: 'And cheero for Gibson. I leant "Battle" to my platoon sergeant for an experiment; and he particularly chose 'Comrades', which pleased me'.⁷³

The poems in *Battle* tend to concentrate on the domesticity of civilians and on reluctant soldiers who are ill-at-ease in khaki – just as his 'industrial' poems focused on the effects of modern economics on workers and their dependants. It was Gibson's habit of sympathising with the poor that allowed him to see beyond the war fervour, and view events from the perspective of the ordinary soldier. 'Breakfast' is a poem which emphasises the working-class background of the soldiers in the ranks, and depicts their trench culture:

We ate our breakfast lying on our backs
 Because the shells were shrieking overhead.
 I bet a rasher to a loaf of bread
 That Hull United would beat Halifax
 When Jimmy Stainthorpe played full-back instead

Of Billy Bradford. Ginger raised his head
 And cursed, and took the bet, and dropt back down dead.
 We ate our breakfast lying on our backs
 Because the shells were screeching overhead.⁷⁴

Here, the familiarity of a domestic ritual such as discussing football over breakfast is juxtaposed with the strangeness of a corpse in the midst of the meal, and the fact that the living lie down like the corpse to continue eating. The entwining of cheerful normality and everyday violence creates a sense of intense disquiet. The short sharp sentences – simple facts with little accompanying comment – convey the emotional distancing of the soldiers from the reader and each other. Another such poem is ‘The Father’:

Till, as he told
 The fiftieth time
 Without a change
 How three-year-old
 Prattled a rhyme,
 They got the range
 And cut him short.⁷⁵

Gibson is aware that war does not respect individuals: this young man and proud father is just a figure in a gun-sight – anonymous and expendable.

In terms of immediate physical presence, the Germans themselves are invisible in Gibson’s war poetry. In the above lines, the enemy are described simply as ‘They’, an impersonal and distant presence. In ‘Hill-born’, for example, they are ‘unseen enemies in lowland mud’. The focus is on the after-effects that shelling and sniping have on vulnerable British soldiers. This allows the poet to shock the reader by depicting graphic violence with stark simplicity:

*Two rows of cabbages,
 Two of curly-greens
 Two rows of garden peas,
 Two of kidney beans,*

That’s what he keeps muttering,
 Making such a song,

Keeping other chaps awake
The whole night long.

Both his legs are shot away,
And his head is light,
So he keeps on muttering
All the blessed night ...⁷⁶

In Gibson's poems, war and work have both become impersonal and mechanised for the soldiers and the workers. Just as the Germans are largely absent from his war poetry, the owners and bosses are similarly absent from his pre-war poems about industry; rather, their presence is manifested in the physical and mental injuries suffered by their employees. In 'Mangel-Wurzels', there is recognition that with the arrival of the war, workers and soldiers became one and the same, and that one form of hardship was replaced by another:

Last year I was hoeing,
Hoeing mangel-wurzels,
Hoeing mangel-wurzels all day in the sun,
Hoeing for the squire
Down in Gloucestershire,
Willy-nilly till the sweaty job was done.

Now I'm in the wurzels,
In the mangel-wurzels,
All day in the wurzels neath the Belgian sun:
But among this little lot
It's a different job I've got –
For you don't go hoeing mangel-wurzels with a gun.⁷⁷

What is also haunting about this poem is its unusual prosody. John Wilson in 'Wilfrid Gibson and the War' (1976), has suggested that some of the poems in *Battle* seem to approximate the rhythm of soldiers' songs of the period.⁷⁸ With the repetitions of 'hoeing' and 'wurzels', there is a sense of marching, and intentionally trite expressions such as 'all day in the sun' and 'neath the Belgian sun' consolidate this chanting, song-like pitch. There is an element of the Kiplingesque here, although Gibson's social stance differs greatly to Kipling's.

Readily apparent in *Battle* is the setting of the war in the context of a wider society. As Kelsey Thornton points out in his introduction to The Cyder Press's reprint of *Battle*, 'there are fathers, mothers, sons, lovers and soldiers, all of whom find their lives wrenched away from a peaceful past in the stark oppositions of home and abroad, the past and the present, sanity and insanity, the old and the young, life and death'.⁷⁹ This more comprehensive social vision is sometimes lacking in better-known war poets, who tend to concentrate on the suffering of soldiers. Sassoon's opinion of women and civilians, for example, bordered on invective, sometimes unreasonably so, and this is something that Gibson's poetry avoided.

Battle conveys the destructiveness of war on a variety of levels – physical, mental, social - while at the same time recognising its vast experiential properties, and the potential of these in poetry. Abercrombie, writing for *The Quarterly Review*, recognised this new depth:

The emotion they imply [the poems in *Battle*] is not patriotic, but simply and broadly human; this is what war means we feel; these exquisite bodies insulted by agony and death, these incalculable spirits devastated. [...] The poems are moments isolated and fixed out of the infinite changing flux of human reaction to the terrible galvanism of war. But that thrilling galvanism does not alter humankind; and sometimes Mr Gibson forces us to realise the vast unreason of war by bringing it into withering contact with a mind still preoccupied with the habits of peace.⁸⁰

This comment returns our attention to the Georgian concern with lived experience, discussed in Chapter One. In Gibson's case, this focus led to a convincing war poetry, with its most impressive feature being a compassionate recognition that there are mental as well as physical casualties of war. The civilian father in 'The Return' ponders,

Just what it meant to smile and smile
And let my son go cheerily
My son ... and wondering all the while
What stranger would come back to me.⁸¹

He is thus aware that the experience of combat changes men inalterably. The repetition of 'my son' is particularly affecting: it is attempting, with conscious futility, to retain a common identity that is about to vanish. As Owen and Sassoon knew, misery and trauma made soldiers a race apart, with distinct experiences that set them apart from others. 'Mad' depicts a soldier succumbing to hysteria in the heat of battle:

Neck deep in mud
 He mowed and raved – He had braved
 The field of blood
 And as a lad
 Just out of school
 Yelled – April fool!
 And laughed like mad.⁸²

This might be compared to more widely-known war poems dealing with 'madness' such as Owen's 'Mental Cases' and Sassoon's 'Repression of War Experience'. At a time when Newbolt's heroic view of war still prevailed, in which remaining level-headed amidst slaughter was not an achievement but a duty (e.g. in 'Vitae Lampada'), Gibson's civilian recognition of battlefield neurosis is striking. We can see, too, that his use of poetry as social documentation, his awareness that war can destroy minds as well as limbs, is firmly rooted in his pre-war social poetry and its critique of industry: for example, Joseph Pringle in 'The Furnace', whose mind is taken over by 'the blazing hell-mouth';⁸³ the injured traffic policeman in 'Wheels', whose consciousness is overrun by 'wheeling worlds and stars in whirling flight';⁸⁴ and the printer in 'The Machine' with pain 'jigging a riot through his head'.⁸⁵

It might further be noted that Gibson, like Davies and Sassoon, saw England go to war once again, and his poems of the second world war shows similar qualities to those written in the first. They demonstrate acute social observation, capturing perceptively national characteristics that have been changed in the face of warfare. In 'Neighbours' (*The Alert*, 1940), he noted a new communal spirit supplanting British reserve:

Neighbours for years, they'd never even spoken
 Till their indifference by a bomb was broken,
 Till, blowing out their windows, the blast shattered
 Their smug reserve. Now, like old friends they chattered.⁸⁶

Unlike *Battle*, there is not always the same convincing and disturbing depiction of combat, but the portrayal of war in the lives of civilians and relatives is still effective. 'In the Cinema' (*The Searchlights*, 1943) is a sensitive exploration of wartime film-going. The contrast between Hollywood and the banal life of the British factory-girl is neatly conveyed:

Her sad eyes on the screen, she tries to keep
 Her mind on the story, all about those strange
 Americans whose lives would seem to be
 So unlike anything she had known.⁸⁷

And so is the gulf between cinematic renderings of war and the greater anguish of reality:

Again the screen
 Catches her eye: and now she sees men fight
 And fall in heaps, smashed by a swooping flight
 Of devilish dive-bombers. Suddenly,
 Reeling in death, one turns towards the light
 A white drawn face, like Jim's, if Jim it should be ...

Blindly she leaves her seat, and blunderingly
 Rushes out into the black drenching night.⁸⁸

When events experienced by soldiers themselves are invoked, the tone is unsentimental and the form brief and sharp. 'The Clerk' (*The Outpost*, 1944) is striking in its bluntness:

In civil life, he drove a patient pen
 On smooth white ledger pages, harmlessly:
 Now up the rough road of a mountain glen
 He drives a fell machine to cancel men.⁸⁹

Readily apparent here is the quiet conventionality of Gibson's metrics and versification. Some might consider writing this way in the 1940s retrograde but the dignity and

simplicity seem peculiarly suited to the wartime experiences of grief, exhaustion, bereavement and austerity. If this is true of his handling of the Second World War, then one can see more clearly how Georgian techniques - rather than Modernistic ones - allowed for an effective poetry of the Great War to be written. This will be investigated next.

iv. The War Poets and Georgianism

There is no doubt, however, that the Georgians did effect change in terms of subject matter. Without such a fundamental shift in ideas of what was permissible, the war poetry of Sassoon, Graves, Owen and Blunden could scarcely have developed – for it was not obvious that the Imagist modes could have helped them here. Had there been no Georgian changes, the poetry of the First World War would have been a patriotic song (as there were indeed so many of), then a lament, and then silence.⁹⁰

Reawakening of interest in Georgian poetry is a healthy development; it is obviously of vital importance that we understand properly the evolution of form, tone, and technique in the war poetry, and this evolution was in many cases dictated by what we may loosely call a Georgian sensibility.⁹¹

The first of these perceptive suggestions was made by Jan Marsh in her Ph.D thesis, 'Georgian Poetry and the Land' (1973), and the second by G.M. Stephen in his doctoral thesis 'The Development of the Georgian Sensibility in the Poetry of the First World War (1975). They are bold assertions that run contrary to accepted wisdom. While it has been acknowledged that the war poetry of Graves, Sassoon, Owen and Rosenberg has its origins in Georgianism, critical orthodoxy has continually sought to make a qualitative distinction between the two sorts of poetry. It is the purpose of this section, therefore, to reassess the extent of this connection, and to explore further Marsh's

passing reference to the inability of Imagism to 'help' in establishing a poetics capable of accommodating and articulating war experience.

Identifying a common location for Georgians and war poets is not difficult. Most obviously, there are the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies. Critics, on the whole, have been too dismissive that Sassoon, Graves, Blunden and Rosenberg all appeared in them; and while Owen did not, he nevertheless stayed at the Poetry Bookshop, and later, on 31 December 1917, wrote in a letter to his mother: 'I am held peer by the Georgians. I am a poet's poet'.⁹² While this comment may contain an element of irony, it does still acknowledge that Georgianism was the poetic fashion at the time young writers like Owen went to war, and that he was pleased to be recognised by such poets. Edward Thomas also did not appear in *Georgian Poetry*, but he was intimately acquainted with several of the anthology Georgians, and as 'Edward Eastaway', he featured with them elsewhere: for example, in R.C. Trevelyan's *An Annual of New Poetry* (1917), alongside Bottomley, Davies, Gibson and Sturge Moore; and in *Twelve Poets* (1918) he (this time as Edward Thomas) appeared with Davies, de la Mare, Turner and others. This grouping together of Georgians and war poets persisted for some years after the war: Jacqueline Trotter's anthology, *Valour and Vision* (1920), for instance, undifferentiatedly included those we now know as war poets (Owen, Sassoon, Blunden) amidst Georgians such as de la Mare, Gibson, Davies and Drinkwater, together with others now comprehensively forgotten (e.g. Everard Owen, Crosbie Garstin, R.A. Hopwood). However, more important than simply noting that Georgians and war poets were published in the same anthologies is the identification of significant common features amongst them: in particular, their treatment of nature; the similarity between Georgianism's social compassion and war poetry's focus on the experience of the common soldier; and the continuity between Georgianism and war poetry in the use of plain speech and simple versification.

Although the Georgians, as I have argued, should not be seen as mere pastoralists, a celebration of the natural world was a vital part of their poetry. The violence done to nature by human warfare, therefore, comes to represent a terrible sacrilege. This perceptual shift is well characterised by John Masefield, who, in 1902, had expressed his zest for nature in 'Tewkesbury Road':

O! to feel the warmth of the rain, and the homely smell
 Of the earth
 Is a tune for the blood to jig to, a joy past power of
 Words⁹³

But in a letter of 12 March 1917, he is now aware only of its corrupted and loathly aspect:

All of these green hills were once covered with trees, and green and pleasant. Now they are ploughed with shells, lepered with shells, on a sort of livid and earthy scab of shell holes which looks like a disease. They look like sick hills, and all the blistered splintered rumpikes of trees stick up like bristles on them.⁹⁴

This nightmarish vision of nature, becomes a theme of much war poetry, and it is a Georgian sensibility that allows for it. Sassoon's poetry, for example, may be more concerned with the destruction of bodies and minds than landscapes, but nature remains an important component in it. In his trench poems, there is a natural world that is both unspoilt and benevolent, and one that is scarred and malevolent: in 'Prelude: The Troops', 'safety and bird-sung joy' are contrasted with 'Sad, smoking, flat horizons, reeking woods, / And foundered trench lines volleying doom for doom'.⁹⁵ The speaker in 'The Dream' thinks of 'Moonlight and dew-drenched blossom, and the scent / Of summer gardens', but is then confronted by 'drizzling dusk', 'a squalid farm', 'byre and midden', and 'the rank smell'.⁹⁶ In 'Break of Day', the dawn is simply 'the bleak end of night', but nevertheless sparks memories of 'a dusty Sussex lane' and 'glimmering fields with harvest piled in sheaves'.⁹⁷ The most graphic contrast of this kind occurs in 'The rank stench of those bodies haunts me still', where the speaker's brief enjoyment

of 'a green, trenchless land / Twelve miles from the battering guns' is undermined by what lies in its proximity:

Tonight I smell the battle; miles away
Gun-thunder leaps and thuds along the ridge;
The spouting shells dig pits in fields of death,
And wounded men are moaning in the woods.⁹⁸

Owen's poetry develops this perspective on nature further still, where the focus upon human suffering is so intense that rain, mud, wind and snow are seen as complicit in the misery of men. The speaker in 'Exposure', for instance, catalogues 'the merciless iced winds that knife us', 'the wind's nonchalance', and 'the pale flakes with fingering stealth [that] come feeling for our faces',⁹⁹ while 'The Show' bitterly speaks of 'myriad warts that might be little hills'.¹⁰⁰ The soldier in 'Asleep' is subject to 'these rains, / these sleets of lead, / And these winds' scimitars'.¹⁰¹ Nature becomes inextricably associated with suffering, and things that are traditionally seen as beautiful take on a lurid ugliness: 'Sunlight,' says Owen in 'Mental Cases', 'seems like a bloodsmear', and 'Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh'.¹⁰² 'A Terre', perhaps the most revealing of all these poems, is a conscious critique of the traditional Romantic nature sensibility that the trench poets had taken into the war, and then transformed:

'I shall be one with nature, herb and stone',
Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned:
The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now.
'Pushing up daisies' is their creed, you know.¹⁰³

This perspective on nature entered the work of most of the war poets. Robert Graves, like Owen, found a new scepticism about the Romantic artist's relation to the elements. This is most overt in 'Sorley's Weather' (from *Fairies and Fusiliers*, 1917),¹⁰⁴ where an old poet and his relation to nature are eschewed for a new poet and a nature that is far less exhilarating:

You rest there, Shelley, on the sill,
For though the winds come frorely

I'm away to the rain-blown hill
And the ghost of Sorley.¹⁰⁵

The hostility of the elements is a steady feature throughout Graves's trench verse. 'Dead Cow Farm' sees nature at the heart of the senselessness: 'Here now is chaos once again, / Primeval mud, cold stones and rain'.¹⁰⁶ In 'The Cruel Moon', the moon has none of its traditional mystery, serenity, or power, but is shown to combine malevolence, indifference and inconsequence:

The cruel moon hangs out of reach
Up above the shadowy beach.
Her face is stupid, but her eye
Is small and sharp and very sly.
Nurse says the moon can drive you mad?

* * *

Don't heed what frightened nurses say:
Moons hang far too much away.¹⁰⁷

Even Edward Thomas, by the time of 'Rain', for example, while seeing the downpour initially as apparently purifying – 'washing me cleaner than I have been / Since born of this solitude' – finally sees it as complicit in his desolation: 'me who have no love which this wild rain / Has not dissolved except the love of death'.¹⁰⁸ However, it is Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), and the poems appended to it, which offer the most sustained examination of the parallel destruction of human beings and nature during warfare. In the main, nature is seen as benign, and itself a victim of the carnage, with 'Preparations for Victory' drawing our attention to 'the yet unmurdered tree'¹⁰⁹ and 'Third Ypres' speaking of 'a whole sweet countryside amuck with murder'.¹¹⁰ Here, Blunden's poetry, like Sassoon's and Owen's, makes a contrast between nature and the 'unnatural' practice of war, but in other poems, the paraphernalia of war takes on the imagery of nature. In 'Vlamertinghe', the speaker refers to 'those brute guns lowing at the sky',¹¹¹ and in 'The Zonnebeke Road', 'that

wretched wire before the village line / Rattles like rusty brambles or dead pine'.¹¹² The unnatural, in other words, begins to seem natural, with war bringing about a new, sinisterly anthropomorphic, kind of landscape (as also, for example, in Paul Nash's painting, 'We Are Making a New World'). This is particularly true in 'Trench Raid Near Hodge', where man-made armaments are shown to parody nature with a hellish effect: 'false dawns fan-flashed' and 'false thunders clashed'.¹¹³ Daylight offers little respite and is just as bleak as the night:

Rosy dawn at last appearing
 Through the icy shade
 Might mark without trembling the new deforming
 Of earth that had seemed past further storming.¹¹⁴

'Thiepval Wood' describes nature with the imagery of a dying soldier: 'the shoulder of the chalkdown convulses' and the trees 'protrude / From the poisonous smoke – past all impulses'.¹¹⁵ The trees are then seen as dead beings: 'To them these silvery dews can never again be dear, / Nor the blue javelin-flame of thunderous noons strike fear'.¹¹⁶ The poet is literally describing the death of nature. Samuel Hynes, in *War Imagined* (1990), discusses what he calls 'the death of landscape', largely in relation to the pictorial art of the war:

Other painters – those who had been experimental painters before the war – recorded another kind of ending: the end of Romantic Nature, and of its visual expression, the Romantic landscape. On the Western Front Nature was dead – not simply in the sense that growing things could not survive the destruction there, but in the sense that the Wordsworthian idea of natural benevolence had died. And if nature had died, then landscape painting was dead too. The paintings of men like Nash, Nevinson, and Lewis are not landscapes; in some cases – Nash's, for instance – they are more like elegies for the death of landscape.¹¹⁷

The process that Hynes describes in art is also present in the poetry, as, indeed, it is in the medium of war prose too. In the work of Blunden, many of the most potent depictions of nature's despoilment are in the main text of *Undertones of War*, and the prose has much the same power as the poetry. Blunden is shocked

that a mill, with some steady old miller, some aproned blue-eyed daughter, with pigs in the sty and perch in the pool, should come to be so ugly even in the moon! It had been in my mind that the stream might be used for a water-expedition against the German expedition in the swamp; I studied the locality carefully; but the mill killed all such mock-heroic fancies, and I never thought again of its possibilities. A sordid cripple, it hated us all.¹¹⁸

As in Masefield's war letters, the landscape seems diseased and evil, and likely to infect its inhabitants:

The water below, foul yellow and brown, was strewn with full-sized eels, bream and jack, seething and bulged in death. Gases of several kinds oozed from the crumbled banks and shapeless ditches, souring the air. One needed no occult gift to notice the shadow of death in one's hand, the discoloured tepid water in one's bottle.¹¹⁹

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In the late-1890s and early twentieth century, nationalistic poets were obsessed with notions of England and Englishness. They wrote as if identity was primarily national rather than to do with class and region. Collections of poetry of this sort include Newbolt's *Admirals All* (1897) and *The Island Race* (1898), Alfred Austin's *Songs of England* (1898), and Alfred Noyes's long poem *Drake* (1906) and *Forty Singing Seamen* (1907). However, a transformation from celebration of nation to celebration of region, and from an implicit assumption that 'England' meant the upper classes to a focus on the lower orders, had begun before the war: Hardy, Housman and Kipling, in their different ways, were influential in this, but the Georgians were the poets who consolidated regional localities and lower-class life as fit subjects for poetry. As we have seen, Masefield's and Gibson's verse deals extensively with both; the titles of poems in Drinkwater's *Poems of Love and Earth* (1912) are revealing: 'The Feckenham Men', 'Malvern Lyrics', 'At Grafton', 'A Garden in Kent', 'A Warwickshire Song'; and even Brooke, who was not a Georgian of the realist kind, had a regional awareness of his Cambridgeshire:

For Cambridge people rarely smile
 Being urban, squat, and packed with guile;
 And Royston men in the far South
 Are black and fierce and strange of mouth;
 At Over they fling oaths at one,
 And worse than oaths at Trumpington,
 And Ditton girls are mean and dirty,
 And there's none in Harston under thirty ...¹²⁰

While Brooke's own stance is bourgeois, albeit wittily so, and with some element of irony, it is clear that he has gone a stage further than the Newbolt/Austin outlook which sees England in terms of the heroes of empire. This, I feel, holds good for Georgian poetry in general. The importance of place, for instance, is central in both the poetry and prose of Edward Thomas, as are the petit-bourgeois city-dweller and the true countryman. None of these poets writes of an 'Englishman' based on the playing-fields of Eton, and this tendency represents both the distinctiveness of Georgianism before the war and a model which the war poets could draw on.

In the work of the major war poets, there is a marked departure from the heroic view of the soldier as 'Happy Warrior', and a continuation of focus on the common man which had been instituted by Masfield and Gibson in particular in the pre-war period. Sassoon's 'A Working Party' is a good example, taking as its protagonist an ordinary 'chap' from 'a midland town':

He was a young man with a meagre wife
 And two small children in a midland town.
 He showed their photograph to all his mates,
 And they considered him a decent chap
 Who did his work and hadn't much to say,
 And always laughed at other people's jokes
 Because he hadn't any of his own.¹²¹

The sympathetic and convincing depiction demonstrates that Sassoon was a perceptive observer of the less privileged who served under him. 'In the Pink' also shows a young working-class soldier of limited aspirations and scant understanding who nevertheless finds small satisfactions as the likelihood of death increases:

So Davies wrote: 'This leaves me in the pink'.
 Then scrawled his name: 'Your loving sweetheart,
 Willie'.
 With crosses for a hug. He'd had a drink
 Of rum and tea; and, though the barn was chilly,
 For once his blood ran warm; he had pay to spend.

* * *

To-night he's in the pink; but soon he'll die.
 And still the war goes on – he don't know why.¹²²

Such an awareness of regional and lower-class identity also features in the work of other war poets. In Ivor Gurney's 'The Silent One', the officer's 'politest, finicking voice' forms a contrast with the 'infinite lovely chatter of Bucks accent',¹²³ and others of his war poems refer lovingly to 'Cotswold' and 'Gloucester'. 'While I write', for example, tells us, 'as for brave / None might challenge Gloucesters'.¹²⁴ 'Butchers and Tombs' speculates: 'After so much battering of fire and steel / It had seemed well to cover them with Cotswold Stone'.¹²⁵ The meeting of regional identity and wartime experience is perhaps the main theme in Gurney's poetry, as the title of his first collection implies: *Severn and Somme* (1917). Similar awareness is present in the work of Gurney's close friend F.W. Harvey, as indicated by the titles of his collections of the period: *Gloucestershire Friends: Poems from a German Prison Camp* (1917) and *A Gloucestershire Lad at Home and Abroad* (1918). In Edward Thomas's 'Man and Dog', a man speaks of 'a year soldiering with the Berkshires', and as in Gurney, there is awareness of the link between regimental and regional identity.¹²⁶ The same consciousness can also be found in Graves's *Over the Brazier* and *Fairies and Fusiliers*, the latter of which is dedicated to the Welch Fusiliers. England is present in these collections, but not with the same respect or affection as Wales. 'The Next War' dwells upon the children 'with bows and arrows and wooden spears, / Playing at Royal Welch Fusiliers', whose aim it will be to 'stop young Slavs from cutting bows / And bendy spears from Welsh hedgerows'.¹²⁷ In 'Letter to S.S. from Mametz wood', Graves

envisages giving Sassoon a tour of Wales ‘Apres-la-guerre’, and features of the local landscape are recounted with fond detail: ‘Gweithday Bach, my country seat in Wales’, ‘Snowden and Hebog capped with white’, ‘the two Rhinogs tower, / Rhinog Fach and Rhinog Fawr’.¹²⁸ There is even a summoning of Welsh mythology:

You’ll see where Math, Mathonwy’s son,
Spoke with the wizard Gwydion
And bad him for South Wales set out
To steal that creature with the snout ...¹²⁹

Wales, for Graves, fulfils the same purpose it does for Edward Thomas. It is a possible source of pride and belonging, and one that offers some respite from the imperialist, militarist associations of a common conception of ‘England’. A region rather than a nation, it allows these two poets – who *were* English and knew it – a taste of the identity that Gurney and Harvey, for example, found in Gloucestershire.

Wilfred Owen’s ‘Disabled’ and ‘S.I.W’ contain convincing and compassionate portraits of ordinary provincial young men whose lives have been destroyed by a war they do not understand and have no responsibility for, while ‘The Letter’ and ‘The Chances’ are creditable attempts to use working-class squaddies’ idiom as the language of poetry. ‘The Letter’ records directly the words of a soldier as he writes to his wife, while at the same time arguing with his friends:

I think the war will end this year.
We don’t see much the square-’eaded ’Uns.
We’re out of harm’s way, not bad fed.
I’m longing for a taste of your old buns.
(Say, Jimmie, spare’s a bite of bread.)
There don’t seem to be much to say just now.
(Yer what? Then don’t, yer ruddy cow!
And give me back me cigarette!)
I’ll soon be ’ome. You mustn’t fret.¹³⁰

‘The Chances’ describes the consequences of a failed attack from a private’s point of view:

One of us got the knock-out, blown to chops.

T'other was 'urt, like losin' both 'is props.
 An' one, to use the word of 'ypocrities
 'Ad the misfortune to be took be Fritz.
 Now me, I wasn't scratched, praise God Amighty,
 (Though next time please I'll thank him for a blighty).¹³¹

One might also adduce attempts at colloquialism by lesser-known war poets. F.W. Harvey's 'C Company Cook' (1918) depicts a man (possibly shell-shocked) consigned to catering duties:

'Do you want jam on it?' he'd say,
 Twirling a red moustache.
 We chaffed him over rations every day,
 'Jim, tell us, do
 Why you put sugar in the blooming stew.'
 '- And there's a heap of coal in this - not
 half!
 To all our chaff
 'Do you want j-jam on it?' he'd say.

Regional identity and an attempt to bring the common worker/soldier's voice into poetry also relate to the continuity of simplicity of language and form between Georgian and trench verse. With the exception, perhaps, of Owen and Rosenberg in their most mature poems, neither Georgian nor soldier-poets were significant formal innovators. The latter simply inherited conventional Georgian versification and infused it with the horrors of modern warfare, the compulsion behind much war-poetry being principally the effective communication of subject-matter rather than a refinement of poetics. Fittingly, therefore, trench poetry is pared down, formally unobtrusive and deploys ordinary language. But if we ask the origin of the latter, or of the device of incorporating 'authentic' speech in poems such as those referred to above or in Sassoon's 'Counter-Attack' and Owen's 'The Sentry', then we should credit the Georgians who had first embraced common language and verbal austerity in seeking to free poetry from the late-Victorian bardic grandiloquence. Reviewing an edition of Yeats in 1907, Edward Thomas wrote:

We are now more than ever struck by the beauty of the ordinary speeches which, in their naturalness and real poetry, prove as much as Wordsworth's *Preface* that the speech of poetry can be that of life.

It was his passion for simplicity and colloquialism that led Thomas to criticise Pater (1913), saying, 'ordinary mortal speech, meaning so much more than it says, is better than this inhuman and yet imperfect refinement'¹³² and he went on to suggest that 'the words [Pater's] only have an isolated value, they are shorthand ... anything but living and social words'.¹³³ De la Mare shared this view in 'The Poetry of Barnes' (1909), praising that poet's plainness and use of dialect and deeming it 'truly virgin English'.¹³⁴ His later essays on a similar theme include 'Rustic Speech' (1914) and 'Pure English'. In an article on John Donne, published in *The Nation* (15 Feb 1913), Brooke praised his ability to be sincere in mood, adding:

[Donne's] colloquialism helped him. It has been the repeated endeavour of half the great English poets to bring the language of poetry, and the accent and rhythm of poetry, nearer to those of the intensest moments of common speech.¹³⁵

Similarly, Drinkwater, in 'Poetry and Conduct' (1917), proclaimed his enthusiasm for 'pregnant and living words, pregnant and living: for here is the secret of poetry';¹³⁶ and Lascelles Abercrombie also wrote, in *The Theory of Poetry* (1924), of 'the nameless indefinable electricity of common speech'.¹³⁷ Later, in *The Art of Wordsworth* (1933), he claimed that poetry should be 'the "real language of men" in a state of vivid sensation'.¹³⁸

This link between Georgianism and war poetry was also directly acknowledged by Ivor Gurney, who admired the Georgians for their use of stark language. Writing to J.W. Haines on 1 May 1916, he exclaimed of Gibson's *Friends* (1916): "'Friends" has some real slap-up damned good stuff. Clear simple direct untortured thought and verse'¹³⁹; and in the same letter, he praises Drinkwater's 'fine technique'.¹⁴⁰ In a subsequent letter (22 June 1916), he admired Abercrombie, but criticised him for not being simple enough: 'the blank verse, also very fine, is hardly often enough simple. It

is too skilled, too educated. One must have a background of simplicity, it seems to me, and then those seizing expressions will have enough weight behind them to drive home'.¹⁴¹ Writing once more to Haines on 11 September 1918, he enthused: 'de la Mare is an important man who can do wonders with words, as "The Listeners" showed'.¹⁴² Gurney was a voracious reader of the Georgians, and it might be argued that without the changes in subject matter and language use brought about by those poets, he would not have been able to write the powerfully colloquial 'Billet':

"I wish to bloody hell I was just going to Brewery – surely
To work all day (in Stroud) and be free at tea-time – allowed
Resting when one wanted, and a joke in season,
To change clothes and take a girl to Horsepool's turning,
Or drink a pint at "Traveller's rest", and find no cloud.
Then God and man and war and Gloucestershire would have
A reason,
But I get no good in France, getting killed, cleaning off mud.'
He spoke the heart of all of us – the hidden thought burning,
Unturning.¹⁴³

While Gurney benefited from the directness and concision of Georgian poetry, Rosenberg was influenced by Georgianism in its more grandiloquent vein. His objections to Brooke's 'begloried sonnets' are well-known, but his enjoyment of Brooke's more sophisticated poetry, such as 'Town and Country' and 'Clouds', is seldom mentioned; nor is his far deeper admiration of Abercrombie and Bottomley.¹⁴⁴ Rosenberg's letters, including many to Georgian insiders such as Edward Marsh and R.C. Trevelyan, reveal the enthusiasm with which he read these poets.¹⁴⁵ In an undated letter of 1916, he wrote to R.C. Trevelyan:

I hope Bottomley is quite better now – he is a man whose work (I have only read 'Chambers of Imagery') has made me feel more rare and excited feelings than any poetry I have ever read. The little poem 'Nimrod' – the image in the first stanza to me is one of the most astonishing in all literature. Another thing that seems for me too astounding for comment is Abercrombie's 'Hymn to Love'.¹⁴⁶

In an earlier letter of spring 1915, to his friend and former teacher Winifreda Seaton, he likewise indicated his Georgian reading diet:

I do not know whether I leant you Abercrombie's 'Olympians' in *New Numbers*, will you tell me? The book you leant me of G. Bottomley made me buy the second 'Chambers of Imagery'. The fine things in this are simpler and more harmoniously complete than the first book. I like Bottomley more than any modern poets I have come across.¹⁴⁷

Abercrombie, in particular, seems to have had a strong influence on Rosenberg. Both poets are typified by inversions, bold questions and statements, and compound words; images of suns, seas, winds and stars, gold and fire, dust and spray; an interest in purity and essences; and the frequent evocation of the divine and the biblical. Rosenberg's reading of texts such as *Emblems of Love* (1912) exposed him to lines such as:

And by my spirit made marvellous here by thee,
 Poured out all clear into the gold of thee,
 Not myself only do I know; I have
 Golden with me the whole fate of man;
 That every flesh and soul belong to one
 Continued joyward ravishment, whose end
 Is here, in this perfection.¹⁴⁸

Rosenberg was able to appreciate this grandness, with its hyperbolic imagery and rough rhythms, but then shape, prune and harden this into the sharper poetry with which he met his wartime experience:

Three lives hath one life –
 Iron, honey, gold.
 The gold, the honey gone –
 Left is the hard and cold.

Iron are our lives
 Molten right through our youth.
 A burnt space through ripe fields
 A fair mouth's broken tooth.¹⁴⁹

Rosenberg's Georgian lineage becomes still more apparent in Sassoon's foreword to the *Collected Works* (1937): 'I have recognised in Rosenberg,' wrote Sassoon, 'a fruitful fusion between English and Hebrew culture. Behind all his poetry there is a racial quality – biblical and prophetic'.¹⁵⁰ While Rosenberg's Jewish background is vital to his

verse, his biblical imagery also owes something to both Bottomley and Abercrombie, both of whom drew substantially on the stories and images of the Old Testament. More significantly still, the Georgians themselves were deeply 'racial' writers. As the present study has argued, they were very conscious of their English origins, and of the *English* language that they used and explored. When Sassoon comments upon Rosenberg's rhythm and syntax, further connections with the Georgians come to light:

His imagination had a sinewy and muscular aliveness; often he saw things in terms of sculpture, but he did not carve or chisel; he modelled words with fierce energy and aspiration, finding ecstasy in form, dreaming in grandeurs of superb light and deep shadow; his poetic visions are mostly in sombre colours and looming sculptural masses, molten and amply wrought. Watching him working with words, I find him a poet of movement; words which express movements are often used by him and are essential to his natural utterance.¹⁵¹

The terms here – 'imagination', 'energy', 'ecstasy' – resemble the Romantic properties of Georgianism discussed in an earlier chapter. Moreover, the references to the kinetic qualities of Rosenberg's words are reminiscent of the extended coverage given to words, their order, rhythm, and history in the prose works of Thomas, Drinkwater and Abercrombie.

Many of the Romantic qualities in Georgianism are also present in war poetry, and Rosenberg can be taken as a case in hand. For example, in Chapter One it was suggested that the recurrence of the word 'dream' in Georgianism resulted from a weakening of signification brought on by the dissipated Romantic impulse at the core of it. This word is also frequent in Rosenberg, especially in his early work. In 'O'er the Celestial Pathways' (1912), he summarises relations between man and god with the phrase 'And then he dreams his dreamer's face; forgets, nor knows himself a dream'.¹⁵² This tautology, and the repetition of the word 'dream', in an attempt to invoke a sensuous atmosphere, is reminiscent of de la Mare. There is a similar turn in 'Twilight II' (1913): 'I have seen lovely thoughts forgot in the wind, effacing dreams; / And dreams like roses wither leaving perfume not nor scent'.¹⁵³ This characteristic

sometimes surfaced to effect in his war poetry. For instance, in the final stanza of 'Returning, we hear the Larks' (1917):

Death could drop from the dark
 As easily as song –
 But song only dropped,
 Like a blind man's dreams on the sand,
 By dangerous tides,
 Like a girl's dark hair for she dreams no ruin lies there,
 Or her kisses where a serpent hides.¹⁵⁴

There is much in these lines that is characteristic of Georgianism: an awareness of the precarious nature of 'song', and its morally problematic connection to the war, an issue also considered by Masefield, Davies, and Monro, and the recourse to the image of dream at a crucial point in the poem. Here, 'dream', both in itself, and in the wider context of the Georgian struggle with diminishing meaning, is an effective image of the fragility of poetic utterance at a time of personal and political crisis: 'a blind man's dreams on the sand, by dangerous tides'.

Among the war poets, Rosenberg was not alone in his use of 'dream' and dreaming. In Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est', the gas attack is envisaged in terms of dreams: 'In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning', and 'If in some smothering dreams you too could pace / Behind the wagon we flung him in'.¹⁵⁵ The Georgian difficulties of signification, signalled by the word 'dream', are actually very well suited to the description of wartime experience: how can *any* poetry capture the horror? The only poetry that can be even remotely appropriate is one with some doubt as to its own power. Furthermore, Owen uses this vocabulary of Georgianism to make the proceedings literally dreamlike, and reinforces this impression with pauses and slow rhythms, so there is a lulling, wandering, 'dreamy' effect in the fashion of de la Mare and Brooke. In 'Exposure', for instance,

We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare,
 snow-dazed,
 Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,

Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird,
 fusses,
 - Is it that we are dying?¹⁵⁶

As indicated earlier, such intervals, where the poet escapes through dream to scenes of rural peace and beauty, are particularly common in the work of Sassoon. The tellingly-titled 'Dreamers' is a representative example:

Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win
 Some flaming, fatal climax with their lives.
 Soldiers are dreamers; when the guns begin
 They think of firelit homes, clean beds and wives.¹⁵⁷

The soldier's role and plight thus serve as a justification for his flight to dream: Sassoon is here addressing the charge of escapism directly, and asking for allowances to be made.

It is traditional to see Georgianism as a poetic mode rendered untenable by the horror of war, but I would argue that it was rather the vehicle that allowed for effective expression of trench experience. Robert Graves is another war poet whose work supports this argument, and which can now be examined more closely. A strong Georgian element in Graves's poetry has been noted before. Myron Simon, in 'The Georgian Infancy of Robert Graves' argues that the concision of Graves's later work has much in common with earlier Georgian ideas, and Robert H. Canary's *Robert Graves* contains a chapter entitled 'The Georgian Poet'.¹⁵⁸ Can Graves at any stage be described as such? His insight into subjectivity, for example, suggests that he can. In *The Meaning of Dreams* (1924), he explored extensively the significance of dreams and dreaming (in chapters such as 'Varieties of Dreams' and 'Dreams and Poetry'), and the mysteries of human psychology – all of which were present to some degree in the work of older Georgians. His 'Theory of Double Self', the second chapter of the above book, discusses matters relevant to the doppelgänger in Georgianism (see Chapter One):

When we discuss a man, one John Jones, and say that we would know John Jones anywhere, this may seem obvious and true, yet when we come to examine John Jones it is possible that two or more John Joneses who are very hostile to each other may appear in the one person.¹⁵⁹

This may remind us of Thomas's 'Other', Monro's 'Strange Companion', de la Mare's 'wraith of thee, I', and Abercrombie's 'twy-spirited' state, as well as the versions of this condition that fall within Modernism such as Yeats's anti-self. In some parts of *The Meaning of Dreams*, Graves shows an advanced knowledge of Freud, Jung, Bergson, and W.H.R. Rivers, thus demonstrating an openness to modern psychoanalytical thought:

Dr. Rivers, about whom I shall speak at length in the next chapters, frequently found himself symbolised in his patients' dreams as a river or rivers; ... Freud's theory about dreams put forward some years before the war was, as I have said, bound up with the notion that all dreams concern a disappointment to the passions; when the war came, however, and some of the best qualified doctors in this country spent their energies in trying to cure soldiers suffering from 'shell shock', it was discovered that the dreams of these soldiers, the doctors' best guides to the nature of their illness, were in nine cases out of ten not concerned with passionate instincts at all, but with danger instincts aroused in battle; and it is now generally agreed among more advanced psychologists that dreams may arise from all sorts of hopes, fears, problems, and solutions in the previous waking life of the dreamer.¹⁶⁰

The book pays much attention to Rivers, the neurologist who treated both Owen and Sassoon, and in this sense it is haunted by the war. But what of Graves's war poetry? It will emerge that he had a sharp sense of the strangeness of war, and developed Georgian forms to impart this anomie.

Graves himself underrated his wartime achievement, perhaps seeing it as too reliant upon the Georgian poetry that he vilified in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927). It might be argued, however, that in *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1917), he took the conception of Georgianism represented by de la Mare, and adapted it with some success to the horror of combat. *Fairies and Fusiliers* draws on themes of faerie and childhood,

but in a way that makes it intrinsic to the wartime experience rather than detached from it. 'A Child's Nightmare' may serve as an example:

Through long nursery nights he stood
 By my bed unwearying,
 Loomed gigantic, formless, queer,
 Purring in my haunted ear
 That same hideous nightmare thing,
 Talking as he lapped my blood,
 In a voice cruel and flat,
 Saying forever, 'Cat! ... Cat!... Cat! ...'

* * *

When I'm shot through heart and head,
 And there's no choice but to die,
 The last word I'll hear, no doubt,
 Won't be 'charge!' or 'Bomb them out!'
 Nor the stretcher-bearer's cry,
 'Let that body be, he's dead!'
 But a voice cruel and flat
 Saying forever, 'Cat! ... Cat! ... Cat!'¹⁶¹

Here, there is a Georgian emphasis upon the tensions and irrationalities of the mind, particularly in childhood, and recognition that these anxieties persist in adult life. Moreover, the fear and cruelty in childhood (as opposed to idyllic security) are reminiscent of de la Mare's collections of children's verse – *Songs of Childhood* (1902) and *Peacock Pie* (1913) - both of which show that the years of seeming innocence are mixed with fear, death and corruption. Graves's *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1928) reveals that he read de la Mare, if by that time grudgingly, and his relation of a pre-war Georgian theme to the new experience of trench warfare, demonstrating the perennial nature of fear and trauma, is effective.¹⁶² This poem may not approach the power of the best verse of Owen and Sassoon, but there is a vivid sense of the terrors of the Georgian nursery meeting the new terrors of the battlefield, with unlikely echoes and similarities. There is the same sense of the macabre that is present in de la Mare, Davies, Monro and Abercrombie, and, in the event of the Great War, allowed for horror rather than glory to be turned into verse. And, to return to an earlier point, the Georgian simplicity of

diction that facilitated this change is also present in Graves's poem. In *On English Poetry* (1922), not far removed in time from Graves's attack on the Georgians, he made some acknowledgement of the debt:

There is no especially poetic range of subjects, and no especially poetic group of words with which to treat them. [...] Lascelles Abercrombie has pointed out in his admirable pamphlet 'Poetry and Contemporary Speech', [that] the poet will always be best advised to choose as the main basis of his diction the ordinary spoken language of his day; the reason being that words grow richer by daily use and take on subtle associations which the artificially bred words of literary or technical application cannot acquire with such a readiness.¹⁶³

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Re-establishing a Georgian paternity is not to denigrate the war poets' achievement: the dignified simplicity or satirical directness of their work is indeed appropriate to its compassionate and corrective mission. Rather, it is to suggest that their debt to their Georgian precursors should be more fully recognised and admitted, and that when Owen wrote 'the poetry is in the pity', this is true of both his fellow soldier-poets and of the Georgians. Georgian poetry and Great War poetry are part of the same broad development: a native British poetry that is capable of both power and beauty, and that, while less adventurous in form than its Modernist counterpart, is redeemed by its social conscience and proficiency in more traditional forms.

In this context, it is worth returning briefly to Jan Marsh's comment, quoted at the beginning of this section, that 'it was not obvious that the Imagist modes could have helped [the war poets] here'. For if we want to reclaim a reputation for the Georgians, both as a parallel poetic movement to the Modernists at the time and as a formative influence in bringing about the very real achievements of the war poets, then we should recognise that the Imagism from which full-blown Modernism ultimately sprang was rather less successful in capturing and expressing war experience than its Georgian counterpart. Although Herbert Read and Davis Jones were to write major Modernist

poems, it was only in retrospect and in the context of an established Modernist poetics. As trench poets, the combatant Imagists produced a markedly less successful body of work than that deriving from within Georgianism, finding that the highly aesthetic formal principles of Imagist poetics prescribed their own range, and either could not contain brutal experience and intense emotion or were ripped apart by their inclusion. Richard Aldington is a pertinent example. One of the purest and most rarefied of the pre-war Imagists, his aesthetic detachment collapsed in the face of front-line experience. Aldington's dilemma is described in 'Proem', the introductory poem to *Images of War* (1919). Hoping to salvage something from the war – 'something of repose, / Some intuition of inalterable gods' – instead, every day, he 'See[s] the austere shape elude me, / Gaze impotently upon a thousand miseries / And still am dumb'.¹⁶⁴ Longing for the 'repose' of the aesthetic, he is aware only of 'a thousand miseries' and of his inability to express them ('still am dumb'). This becomes the subject of 'Living Sepulchres': in the trenches one night the poet was

Making for myself hokku
Of the moon and flower and snow

But the ghostly scurrying of huge rats
Swollen with feeding upon men's flesh
Filled me with shrinking dread.¹⁶⁵

The vacillation between aestheticism and horror (hokku to rats), the barely controlled hysteria, and the limitation of the myopically self-regarding sensibility are all symptoms of the failure of Aldington's Imagist vehicle. The main poetic result of his ambivalence is that he either transmutes war into aesthetic material, and so protects himself from it, or else confronts war so emotionally that his formal equipment breaks down altogether. This can be seen in 'Soliloquies I and II' which Bergonzi regards as characterising the uncomfortable 'two-way movement in Aldington's verse between brutal realism and aestheticism'.¹⁶⁶ It might be noted that J.H. Johnston, while making little reference to

Aldington, saw a strikingly similar shortcoming in Herbert Read's 'Imagist' war poetry, where 'The Happy Warrior' 'has merely been compressed to conform to the Imagist principle of verbal economy', and where 'the principle of economy has likewise arbitrarily reduced the narrative of "Liedholz" to little more than a series of laconic observations'.¹⁶⁷ It is clear that for such scholars the overwhelming reality of trench fighting exposed the deficiencies inherent in Imagism even more than those of Georgianism.

Read is a telling example, but it is Aldington's 'Soliloquies I & II' that are most revealing of this incapacity in the Imagist aesthetic. In the first of these, Aldington describes his growing callousness towards dead bodies, but slips into uncontrollable horror when he observes how they 'wobble'.¹⁶⁸ He attempts to reinstate aesthetic values by saying: 'Dead men should be so still, austere / And beautiful, / Not wobbling carrion roped upon a cart'.¹⁶⁹ In the second, Aldington succeeds in imposing just this aesthetic wish upon the actual horror: a dead man's hand is 'More subtly coloured than a perfect Goya, / And more austere and lovely in repose / Than Angelo's hand could ever carve in stone'.¹⁷⁰ In many poems, such as 'Defeat', he 'forgets' the war by invoking 'Beauty'; in others, such as 'Concert' and 'The Blood of Young Men', his emotional and poetic restraint break down, and anger and horror are diffused through formlessness. Aldington's best poems are those which are hard, clear visual 'images', detached and precisely descriptive – for example, 'Bombardment', 'Picket', parts of 'Machine Guns', 'Battlefield':

But in this fruitless land,
Thorny with wire
And foul with rotting clothes and sacks,
The crosses flourish ...¹⁷¹

Pure Imagism - as Herbert Read was later to realise fruitfully (as indicated above, many of his own war-time poems in *Naked Warriors* [1919], although more achieved, show

similar characteristics to Aldington's) - was too delicate, coldly objective and self-contained to be a viable poetic vehicle for agonising human experience. Significantly, after the war, Aldington himself rejected the limitations of such poetry, writing to Read: 'I abandon, cast off, utterly deny the virtue of "extreme compression and essential significance of every word". I say it is the narrow path that leadeth to sterility'.¹⁷² Right or wrong, it is a significant refutation of a proto-Modernist poetics which had hindered Imagist war-poets from making humane comment on the war in the way the 'Georgian' war-poets had done.

Notes to Chapter Four

- ¹ Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1927), pp.118-120.
- ² *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, ed. by W.B. Yeats (London: Oxford, 1936), p.xxxiv.
- ³ Cheltenham & Gloucester College Dymock Poets Archive, Gibson MS, [N.D.]
- ⁴ *Men who March Away: Poems of the First World War*, ed. by I.M. Parsons (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p.13.
- ⁵ John H. Johnston, *English Poetry of the First World War* (London: Oxford, 1964), p.5.
- ⁶ Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight* (London: Constable, 1965), p.68.
- ⁷ Jon Silkin, *Out of Battle* (London: Oxford, 1972), p.213.
- ⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford, 1975), p.61.
- ⁹ Patrick J. Quin, *The Great War and the Missing Muse* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994), p.21.
- ¹⁰ John Masefield, *Collected Poems* (London: Heinemann, 1926), pp.375-6.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, p.376.
- ¹² *ibid.*, p.425.
- ¹³ *The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), p.543.
- ¹⁴ Masefield, *Collected Poems*, p.405.
- ¹⁵ Johnston, *English Poetry of the First World War*, p.205.
- ¹⁶ Masefield, *Collected Poems*, p.407.
- ¹⁷ Peter Vansittart, *John Masefield's Letters from the Front 1915-17* (London: Constable, 1984), p.54.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.79.
- ¹⁹ *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. by C. Day Lewis (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), p.31.
- ²⁰ Anthony Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist* (London: Faber, 1955), p.98.
- ²¹ *The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare* (London: Faber, 1969), pp.208-9.
- ²² *ibid.*, pp.209-10.
- ²³ *The Complete Poems of W.H. Davies* (London: Cape, 1963), pp.543-4.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, p.258.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, p.260.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, p.569.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*, p.569.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*, pp.248-9.
- ²⁹ W.H. Davies, *Young Emma* (London: Cape, 1980), p.25.
- ³⁰ *ibid.*, p.104.
- ³¹ *The Complete Poems of W.H. Davies*, p.499.
- ³² Harold Monro, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Alida Monro (London: Cobden Sanderson, 1933), p.166.
- ³³ *ibid.*, p.167.
- ³⁴ *ibid.*, pp.169-70.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, p.165-6.
- ³⁶ *ibid.*, p.56.
- ³⁷ Edward Thomas, *The Last Sheaf*, ed. by Thomas Secombe (London: Cape, 1928), p.11.
- ³⁸ *ibid.*, p.221.
- ³⁹ Edward Thomas, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1979), p.viii.
- ⁴⁰ *ibid.*, viii .
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.144.
- ⁴² *ibid.*, p.6.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, p.25.
- ⁴⁴ Wilfrid Gibson, *Solway Ford and other Poems* (London: Faber, 1945), p.63.
- ⁴⁵ *Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney*, ed. by P.J. Kavanagh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.75.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.163.
- ⁴⁷ George Parfitt, *English Poetry of the First World War* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1990), pp.73-4.
- ⁴⁸ *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-century Poetry*, ed. by Ian Hamilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.70.
- ⁴⁹ *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, ed. by Gavin Ewart (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.312.
- ⁵⁰ *The Collected Poems of James Elroy Flecker* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1941), p.240.
- ⁵¹ James Elroy Flecker, *The Grecians* (London: Dent, 1910), p.139.

- ⁵² *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, p.21.
- ⁵³ *ibid.*, pp.142-3.
- ⁵⁴ Rupert Brooke, *Letters from America* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1916), p.180.
- ⁵⁵ *The Prose of Rupert Brooke*, ed. by Christopher Hassal (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957), p.199.
- ⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.199.
- ⁵⁷ *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie* (London: Oxford, 1930), p.15.
- ⁵⁸ Wilfrid Gibson, *Collected Poems 1905-1925* (London: Macmillan, 1933), p.343.
- ⁵⁹ Isaiah 2.4
- ⁶⁰ John Drinkwater, *Swords and Ploughshares* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1915), p.39.
- ⁶¹ John Drinkwater, *Pawns and Cophetua* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1926), pp.29-30.
- ⁶² *ibid.*, p.45.
- ⁶³ John Drinkwater, *This Troubled World* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1933), p.34.
- ⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.48.
- ⁶⁵ Jan Marsh, 'Georgian Poetry and the Land' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1973), pp. 203-208.
- ⁶⁶ *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie*, p.333.
- ⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pp.333-334.
- ⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.338.
- ⁶⁹ Brotherton Library, Abercrombie MS, B16846-16911
- ⁷⁰ Judith Todd's letter is illustrative of the circles in which Abercrombie was respected. Written on the SCR's own notepaper, the left margin is adorned with a long list of the society's vice presidents, among them Webb, Russell and Wells.
- ⁷¹ George Parfitt, *English Poetry of the First World War*, p.11.
- ⁷² Ian Parsons, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, ed. by Ian Parsons (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), p.250.
- ⁷³ R.K.R. Thornton, *Collected Letters of Ivor Gurney* (Northumberland: Carcanet, 1991), p.80.
- ⁷⁴ Wilfrid Gibson, *Collected Poems 1905-1925*, p.319.
- ⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.326.
- ⁷⁶ *ibid.*, pp.322-3.
- ⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.326.
- ⁷⁸ John Wilson, 'Wilfrid Gibson and the War', *Four Decades of Poetry 1890-1930*, 2 (1972), 130-140 (p.133).
- ⁷⁹ Wilfrid Gibson, *Battle*, ed. by R.K.R. Thornton (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press 1999), p. v.
- ⁸⁰ Wilfrid Gibson, *Friends* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1916) back leaf.
- ⁸¹ Wilfrid Gibson, *Collected Poems 1905-1925*, p.320.
- ⁸² *ibid.*, p.321.
- ⁸³ *ibid.*, p.110.
- ⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.267.
- ⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.162.
- ⁸⁶ Wilfrid Gibson, *The Alert* (London: Oxford, 1941), p.19.
- ⁸⁷ Wilfrid Gibson, *The Searchlights* (London: Oxford, 1943), p.7.
- ⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.10.
- ⁸⁹ Wilfrid Gibson, *The Outpost* (London: Oxford, 1944), p.19.
- ⁹⁰ Jan Marsh, 'Georgian Poetry and the Land' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1973) p.183.
- ⁹¹ G.M. Stephen, 'The Development of the Georgian Sensibility in the Poetry of the First World War' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 1975), p.409.
- ⁹² Wilfred Owen, *Collected Letters*, ed. by Harold Owen and John Bell (London: Oxford, 1967), p.521.
- ⁹³ John Masefield, *Collected Poems*, p.41.
- ⁹⁴ John Masefield's *Letters from the Front*, p.130.
- ⁹⁵ Siegfried Sassoon, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1957), p.67.
- ⁹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.93-4.
- ⁹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.82-3.
- ⁹⁸ *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, ed. by Jon Silkin (London: Penguin, 1979), pp.124-7.
- ⁹⁹ *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, p.48.
- ¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.50.
- ¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.57.
- ¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.69.
- ¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p.65.
- ¹⁰⁴ The poem refers to the war poet Charles Hamilton Sorley. Killed in France in 1915, at only twenty years of age, his poems include the angry and nightmarish 'When you see million of the mouthless

dead'.

- ¹⁰⁵ Robert Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers* (London: Heinemann, 1917), p.24.
- ¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.10.
- ¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.18.
- ¹⁰⁸ Edward Thomas, *Collected Poems*, p.64.
- ¹⁰⁹ Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (London: Cobden Sanderson, 1929), p.274.
- ¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.291.
- ¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.287.
- ¹¹² *ibid.*, p.277.
- ¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.279.
- ¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.279.
- ¹¹⁵ *Men who March Away*, ed. by I.M. Parsons (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p.65.
- ¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.65.
- ¹¹⁷ Samuel Hynes, *War Imagined* (London: the Bodley Head, 1990), p.199.
- ¹¹⁸ Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War*, p.121.
- ¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp.208-9.
- ¹²⁰ *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, pp.261-2.
- ¹²¹ Siegfried Sassoon, *Collected Poems*, p.20.
- ¹²² *ibid.*, p.18.
- ¹²³ *The Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney*, p.102.
- ¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.167.
- ¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p.173.
- ¹²⁶ Edward Thomas, *Collected Poems*, p.159.
- ¹²⁷ Robert Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers*, pp.51-2.
- ¹²⁸ *ibid.*, pp.29-32.
- ¹²⁹ *ibid.*, pp.30-31.
- ¹³⁰ *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, p.60.
- ¹³¹ *ibid.*, p.71.
- ¹³² Edward Thomas, *Walter Pater* (London: Secker, 1913), p.98.
- ¹³³ *ibid.*, p.213.
- ¹³⁴ Walter de la Mare, 'The Poetry of Barnes', in *Private View* (London: Faber, 1953), p.104.
- ¹³⁵ *The Prose of Rupert Brooke*, ed. by Christopher Hassal (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1956), p.85.
- ¹³⁶ John Drinkwater, *Prose Papers* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1917), p.15.
- ¹³⁷ Lascelles Abercrombie, *The Theory of Poetry* (London: Secker, 1924), p.142.
- ¹³⁸ Lascelles Abercrombie, *The Art of Wordsworth* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p.81.
- ¹³⁹ R.K.R. Thornton, *Collected Letters of Ivor Gurney* (Northumberland: Carcanet, 1991), p.80.
- ¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.336.
- ¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.107.
- ¹⁴² *ibid.*, p.455.
- ¹⁴³ *Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney*, p.74.
- ¹⁴⁴ In an undated letter of 1916, Rosenberg wrote to Mrs Cohen: 'The Poetry Review sent me is good – the articles are too breathless, and want more packing, I think. The poems by the soldier are vigorous but, I feel, commonplace. I did not like Rupert Brooke's begloried sonnets for the same reason. What I mean is second hand phrases 'lambent fires' etc takes from its reality and strength' (p.237). There are indications, however, that Rosenberg began to discover this 'reality and strength' elsewhere in Brooke's oeuvre. On August 1916, he wrote to a Mr Schiff, claiming that 'Town and Country' was a 'fine poem with depth' (p.240), and wrote to Edward Marsh on August 1916, saying 'Brooke's poem 'Clouds is magnificent' p.242).
- ¹⁴⁵ I have since discovered that Martin Stephen's book *The Price of Pity. Poetry, History and Myth in the Great War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996) also identifies a relationship between Abercrombie and Rosenberg. Interestingly, Stephen goes so far as to rate J.C. Squire's 'To a Bull Dog' as a 'neglected classic' (p.32) and Frank Prewett as 'a significant talent' (p.32). This extension of revision to the inhabitants of the later *Georgian Poetry* collections weakens the argument. A detailed reading will reveal that Squire's poem is simply sentimental, and Prewett's lyrics are lacklustre at best. Stephen's book is partly based on his thesis – 'The Development of the Georgian Sensibility in the Poetry of the First World War' – published under the name 'G.M. Stephen'. The doctorate is mentioned earlier in this chapter.
- ¹⁴⁶ *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, p.245.
- ¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.209.
- ¹⁴⁸ *The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie*, p.255.
- ¹⁴⁹ *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, p.100.

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- ¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.ix.
¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.ix.
¹⁵² *ibid.*, p.29.
¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p.49.
¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.109.
¹⁵⁵ *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, p.55.
¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.48.
¹⁵⁷ Siegfried Sassoon, *Collected Poems*, p.71.
¹⁵⁸ Myron Simon, 'The Georgian Infancy of Robert Graves', *Focus on Robert Graves*, 4, (1974) 49-70.
¹⁵⁹ Robert Graves, *The Meaning of Dreams* (London: Palmer, 1924), p.20.
¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.14.
¹⁶¹ Robert Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers*, pp.61-2.
¹⁶² For Graves's comments on de la Mare, see *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*, (London: Cape, 1928) p.35.
¹⁶³ Robert Graves, *On English Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1922), p.42.
¹⁶⁴ *The Complete Poems of Richard Aldington* (London: Allan Wingate, 1958), p.73.
¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.86.
¹⁶⁶ Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight* (London: Constable, 1965), p.82.
¹⁶⁷ John H. Johnston, *English Poetry of the First World War* (London: Oxford, 1964), p.257.
¹⁶⁸ *The Complete Poems of Richard Aldington*, p.95.
¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.95.
¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.96.
¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.93.
¹⁷² *Richard Aldington: an Intimate Portrait*, ed. by Alistair Kershaw and F.J. Temple (Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p.125.

Conclusion

Clive Bloom, in 'Rupert Brooke and Literary Taste' (1995), argues that 'Georgianism, which Brooke did so much to aid, is to be seen as a type of Modernism rather than an outworn, outmoded Victorianism finally defeated by the harsh *reality* of war'.¹ The present study has some sympathy with this viewpoint, although it retains reservations about the use of the word 'Modernism'. Georgian poetry, when viewed in its full context, is more *modern* than is often suggested, and might firmly be allied to the Hardyean project of a twentieth-century poetry in traditional forms. With regard to the second part of Bloom's comment, he is right to claim that the war need not be seen as rendering Georgianism untenable; rather, it simply accelerated its culmination. With the achievement of the war poets who, inspired by their trench experiences, pushed Georgian forms and figures to their limits, the pre-war Georgians were simply left with nothing more to do. This is how they came to represent a backwater, and to become an easy target for the Modernists. Brooke, Flecker, Thomas and Owen were dead, and Masefield, Gibson, Drinkwater, Bottomley and Abercrombie had written their best verse several years earlier. Those who showed some later development – de la Mare and Monro – were no longer within a Georgian context, although their work remained largely Georgian in both style and content.

It is ironic that the Georgians, modern and innovative in their era, were situated so closely to literary Modernism – a more radical development that made Georgianism seem too tentative and not modern enough. In this circumstance, a decisive sidelining – accelerated by unprecedented events and changes – was perhaps inevitable. It has been my contention throughout this thesis, however, that Georgian poetry itself is not unworthy of measured praise and reassessment, and that prevailing orthodoxies should

now be challenged. In the introduction to his brief anthology, *Georgian Poets* (1959), Alan Pryce Jones claims that 'over almost all these poets there is a certain air of fatality. Either they were killed in battle, or they died young, or they fell into understandable bitterness with the passing of years'.² The 'fatality' is most true when we read that poetry with the advantage of retrospect. The present study has argued that the Georgians had some awareness of their own shortcomings, and, consequently, that their poetry is more intelligent, self-interrogating and accomplished than it is usually credited with being. As for the 'bitterness with the passing of years', there is some truth in this, and there is no better illustration than Wilfrid Gibson. His friends, Abercrombie and Drinkwater, both died in the late 1930s after moderately successful second careers, the former as an English academic, the latter as a lecturer and man of the theatre. Gibson, however, persisted with poetry, and, in trying to continue practising the Georgian style out of its era, was ignored and belittled. Writing to Dorothy Una Ratcliffe in 1931, he bemoaned his lack of standing in the eyes of younger writers, and dwelt upon better times:

I have had no reply at all from Roy Campbell; and I cannot say that I am altogether surprised. I suspect his soul is very much like a star and dwells apart and that he felt it a deadly insult that a dull old fogey like W.G. should want to appear in his brilliant company. [...] It was different when we ran *New Numbers*, because then, there did seem to be some hope for me. But now I have neither promise nor the prestige of acknowledged accomplishment. I think you would realise this if you could see the snippets Macmillan has been sending me about *Hazards*. The book hasn't been noticed by one London daily; and it has hardly received more than a dozen lines notice anywhere else; in almost every case, it has been dismissed with a line or two of sneering disparagement. My name, at present, on any new venture would damn it from the start.³

One might reflect that, by 1931, Gibson's incompatibility with Campbell was political as well as poetical; the latter was symptomatic of a new right-wing intelligentsia, the former part of an older, liberal generation, an allegiance, which, in fact, does him much credit.

In addition to disgruntlement, Gibson also suffered badly from writer's block. The imagination that had yielded *Daily Bread*, *Fires*, and *Battle* – all good collections in their time, and worthy of rediscovery in ours – was depleted. Writing to de la Mare on 20 August 1937, he reflected:

And you still have an eager and expectant public. [...] Since my own small sales have dwindled to nothing and no editor will look at my verse I have felt a slackening of the impulse. Yet, it's not quite that: I still want to write desperately, and I am not gravelled for lack of matter, but the faculty of expression seems to have left me. It may return: it has often taken long leaves before, but never quite such a long one.⁴

It did not return. His work of the '30s - *Hazards* (1930), *Islands* (1932), *Fuel* (1934) and *Coming and Going* (1938) - is similar in tone and form to that of his Georgian years, but without the same spirit of freshness and novelty. The Second World War seemed to signal a minor renaissance in his literary fortunes. 'The Alert,' he wrote in a letter of 1942, 'has sold out the first thousand and is going into a second impression ... it may give me the chance of issuing other volumes',⁵ but this momentum was not sustained: ensuing volumes did not sell, although his 1940s war poetry, as we have seen, contains some merit. Moreover, his correspondence shows time and time again that he was unable to appreciate fully new modes of poetry – even when the message behind it was not dissimilar to the socially aware sensibility of the Georgians. In a letter to Dorothy Una Ratcliffe on 16 January 1953, he pondered:

Day Lewis is considered to be one of the most important contemporary poets, but in tackling a book of his, I find I cannot understand any of the poems at all. It is certainly bewildering in old age to meet so many poets one can't understand. In my youth, I rarely found English verse incomprehensible.⁶

Particularly in the early '40s, his frustration sometimes grew into disdain for both his past and present. In a letter of 1 February 1940, he could barely contain his disappointment:

How can anyone be cheerful in such a world? How ironically the Rupert Sonnets read now – ‘To Hearts at peace under an English Heaven!’ – and as for ‘the serene which man call age’ – well, it scarcely seems as if we were to enjoy it.⁷

This is in large contrast to his elegies on the death of Brooke, and to his commemoration of the Georgian circle in ‘The Golden Room’ (1925):

We sat there in the lamplight, while the day
Died from rose-latticed casements, and the plovers
Called from the low meadows, till the owls
Answered them from the elms, we sat and talked –

Now, a quick flash from Abercrombie; now,
A murmured dry half-heard aside from Thomas;
Now, a clear laughing word from Brooke, and then
Again Frost’s rich and ripe philosophy,
That had the body and tang of good draft-cider,
And poured as clear as stream.

’Twas in July
Of nineteen-fourteen that we sat and talked:
Then August brought the war, and scattered us.⁸

However, it is also evident that with the passing of years, Gibson fell into an error that still persists today. In seeing the 1914 ‘Rupert Sonnets’ as wholly representative of the Georgians years, he was making an idyllic interlude out of a poetic era that was actually far more complex – as Gibson’s own best verse itself attests.

Other Georgians suffered a similar fate. Abercrombie, whose fall was not as drastic, also saw himself as a man of the past, and a past that, in 1931, he too envisaged as a collapsed rustic idyll:

I have had my innings, and it was a good one while it lasted. I have lived in Gloucestershire, and I have known what it was to have Wilfrid Gibson and Robert Frost for my neighbours; and John Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke, Edward Thomas, Will Davies, Bob Trevelyan, Arthur Ransome, have drunk my cider, and talkt [sic] in my garden. I make no cider now, and I have no garden. But once I lived in Gloucestershire.⁹

Gordon Bottomley, himself a much diminished figure, wrote to Ralph Abercrombie on 28 Oct 1938, with revealing comments about Abercrombie's standing, and that of Georgianism in general:

I know you understand how great he was, but your generation has invented other ways of poetry for itself, and has done less than justice to him, as to Sturge Moore and others of the same time. I believe that all this is temporary, and when people begin to want to see English poetry in the round again, instead of looking at the one facet of it alone because it happens to be rather novel then your father's importance will be irresistible, and what he did will shine out clear and fresh and new – and all the newer in being realised afresh.¹⁰

Bottomley underestimates the impact and significance of Modernism ('rather novel') but it is interesting that he believed – even at that stage – that Georgianism would one day recover, even though he himself admits that the poetic scene had changed beyond recognition. While the present study does not profess to be anti-Modernist, it does, nevertheless, have much sympathy with Bottomley's prediction. Furthermore, it is certainly true that the impact and substantiality of Georgian poetry *is* heightened from being 'fresh and new' as a consequence of its lengthy neglect. On its own, this would be a modest point, but the present thesis argues that the poetry has genuine strengths, as well as some significant weaknesses that we must continue to acknowledge.

The reputation of Georgianism did not recover in the lifetimes of its poets, nor has it done so yet, although there are signs of renewed interest. However, even if it is accepted that Georgian poetry was not the limp, insipid and sentimental poetic reaction of conventional view, but was in fact considerably more socially relevant and formally accomplished than is usually admitted, there is still the difficult question of how to 'place' it in literary history. Perhaps the best approach in evaluating the non-canonical is indicated by Bernard Bergonzi, who, in *The Myth of Modernism* (1986), questions the hegemony of Modernism while still appreciating its achievement:

The dominance of a limited canon of unquestionably great authors is to be resisted, since it implies that non-canonical authors are not worth spending time on. It is best resisted, though, not by arguing against the idea of a canon, or even

against the idea of literature itself, as in some recent Marxist discourses, but by discovering, reading, discussing and making available other texts which may be excellent and interesting without bearing the numbing accolade 'great'. [...] The good need not be the enemy of the best.¹¹

Appropriately, the present study has not disputed the greater intellectual depth and formal experimentation of Eliot, Pound and other Modernist poets, and it is clear that Georgianism can never displace Modernism as the focal movement in twentieth-century Anglo-American poetry. But as interest rekindles, it might prove a necessary complement to it - if only in viewing the Modernists themselves, not in canonical isolation, but within the wider and richer context of the early twentieth-century scene. The non-Modernist tradition in twentieth-century literature has been neglected, but is rightly once more the object of some critical interest. I hope to have shown that this tradition should include the Georgians: as poets who value social interaction, political sensitivity, emotional honesty and an accomplished mastery of the traditional forms and metres of English verse.

Notes to Conclusion

¹ Clive Bloom, 'The Falling House that Never Falls: Rupert Brooke and Literary Taste' in *British Poetry 1900-50: Aspects of Tradition* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p.46.

² *Georgian Poets*, ed. by Alan Pryce Jones (London: Hulton, 1959), p.10.

³ Brotherton Library, Gibson MS, 1 1927-1933.

⁴ Bodleian Library, de la Mare MS, B45.

⁵ Brotherton Library, Gibson MS, 5 1941-1942.

⁶ Brotherton Library, Gibson MS, 6 1943-1945.

⁷ Bodleian Library, de la Mare MS, B45.

⁸ Wilfrid Gibson, *Solway Ford and other Poems* (London: Faber, 1945), pp.62-3.

⁹ John Gawsworth, *Ten Contemporaries* (London: Benn, 1931), pp.20-21.

¹⁰ Brotherton Library, Abercrombie MS. B16846 –16911

¹¹ Bernard Bergonzi, *The Myth of Modernism* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), pp. xiv-xvii.

An Anthology of Georgian Poetry

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Appendix to thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University
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Preface

As indicated in the introduction to the thesis, the following poems are selected with a view to displaying the underrated strength and richness of Georgian poetry. While some poems still in print are included (by Brooke and Thomas for example) the emphasis is mainly on those poets whose books are now unavailable: Abercrombie, Bottomley and Gibson to name but a few. The selection aims to show Georgianism in an authentic period light in covering the work of those poets prominent in Marsh's first two *Georgian Poetry* Collections and in *New Numbers*. I believe it offers a more comprehensive picture than that offered by James Reeves's *Georgian Poetry* (1962), which reinforces Georgian stereotypes by an unmerited emphasis on the pastoral and idyllic side of the movement, largely ignoring poems, poets and contexts that allow for a different perspective.

Where a poem from the anthology is examined in the main body of the thesis, it will be signalled by '(see Anthology, p._)'. The dates of the poems, and other contextual details, will be supplied in the actual thesis. Where poems are short enough for textual quotation to supply them nearly in their entirety – as in Gibson's war verse – they will (generally) not be duplicated in the anthology. The appendix does not include every poem dealt with in depth, nor can it be a substitute for reading the collected works or the separate volumes of the poets. Rather, its function is to provide the *flavour* of the Georgian movement at its strongest.

INDIGNATION

AN ODE

I.

THERE was an anger among men
 In the old days ; and it was as a sword
 In the hands of the Spirit then
 To hew the ambusht villainy out of his path
 And in its thievish lurking kill the fraud.
 And all the greeds of hell kept to their den
 When the Spirit in his hands took wrath.
 But lately, when there smiting should have been,
 Who has a weapon seen ?
 The Spirit stands and looks on infamy,
 And unashamed the faces of the pit
 Snarl at their enemy
 Finding him wield no insupportable light
 And no whirled edge of blaze to hit
 Backward their impudence, and hammer them to
 flight ;
 Although ready is he,

 Wearing the same righteous steel
 Upon his limbs, helmed as he was then
 When he made olden war ;
 Yet cannot now with foulness fiercely deal.
 There is no indignation among men,
 The Spirit has no scimeter.

II.

Wilt thou not come again, thou godly sword,
 Into the Spirit's hands ?
 That he may be a captain of the Lord
 Again, and mow out of our lands
 The crop of wicked men.
 O thou forged anger, sword
 Made of the holy rage
 That went out against the old sick fen
 Of being and on disorder warr'd
 And fought it into fire and white stars
 When God made Heavens out of the unwhole-
 some age
 And maladies of existence, into good
 Hunting all that liked not to be glad,—
 In what armoury art thou now uplaid,
 And is the rust upon thy blade ?
 These many years unhelp't has stood
 The Spirit, weaponless against bad,
 Having no sharpness and no heat

Of indignation wherewith to meet
 And battle with the vile banners, his great
 Beleaguerment of fiends. But to his hands
 Come thou and clear our lands.
 Let him exult to feel the weight
 Of wrath swinging with his arm abroad,
 And the air about him burn'd with a sword.
 Let there be fire, and the anger of the Lord.

III.

The Mind of Man has been a sacred place,
 And into it the evil race
 Would trespass warily, much afraid
 Of sorely-felt assaults upon them made
 By statures of great wind that came
 Terribly using a huge flame
 Intolerably white.
 But now that wrath comes never out to fight,
 The fiendish bands go lording in the day
 And openly possess the mind of man.
 With meaningless scurries of their insane feet
 They have rutted the helpless ground
 Like baggage-travell'd clay.
 And when the climate of man's thought they
 found
 Blue air, a road for immortal lights,—
 Days like the house of God, and hosted nights
 Held by the champions of eternity,—
 With evil fires the swarms began
 To make a weather they could understand
 Of yellow dusk and smoky enormous bale
 To grieve over the land
 And make the sunlight fail.
 Till a low roof of dirty storm they brought
 To hang upon the mind of man :
 Who cannot see that man's huge thought
 Is now a dark calamity ?

IV.

But how long shall the Spirit see
 The Life of Man, wherein with such delight
 He walkt his glebe, and in his ways would sing
 To do his pleasant gardening,
 How long see his own especial ground
 Vext in a season of disastrous blight,
 Trampled and staled and trodden filthily
 By troops of insolence, the beasts of hell ?
 But the Spirit now is built up narrowly,

And kept within a shameful pound,
 Walled in with folly and stupid greed
 Lest he should come to plead
 Against our ugly wickedness,
 Against our wanton dealing of distress,
 The forced defilement of humanity,
 The foundries and the furnaces
 That straddle over the human place.
 Nothing comes to rebuke us for
 The hearts we wound with laws grievously,
 The souls our commerce clutches
 Cunningly into inescapable lime,
 Embruted in wicked streets, made debase
 In villainous alleys and foul hutches,
 There trapt in vice and crime,
 And for the wrong we did, who made them poor,
 Set to pay infamous penalties in gaols ;
 Not even for this the Spirit breaks his pales.
 And shall there be no end to life's expense
 In mills and yards and factories,
 With no more recompense
 Than sleep in warrens and low styes,
 And undelighted food ?
 Shall still our ravenous and unhandsome mood
 Make men poor and keep them poor ?—
 Either to starve or work in deadly shops
 Where the damn'd wisdom of the wheels
 Fearfully fascinates men's wit and steals,
 With privy embezzlement that never stops,
 The worker's conscience into their spinning roar,—
 Until men are the dead stuff there,
 And the engines are aware ?
 Shall we not think of Beauty any more

 In our activities ?
 Or do no better than to God complain ?—
 I would that to the world would come again
 That indignation, that anger of the Lord,
 Which once was known among us men.
 For terrible and upright then
 The Spirit would stand suddenly out of his ways
 Of crouching grief and tears,
 As by a hilt handling the wrathful blaze,
 Having again a sword.
 And he would ruin all the mischievous walls
 That had been raised up of materials

Darkly quarried in hell, to hedge
 And fence him out of the life of man ;
 But he with anger's shining edge
 Would mightily cut the built iniquities,
 Commerce, and all the policies
 Of ownership and avarice ;
 And they would buckle at his stroke
 Perishing into flights of smoke.
 Then he with a dreadful song, a sound
 To put a howling fear in the bad horde,
 Would step again on his own ground,
 He and his indignant sword,
 And the golden havoc would begin.
 Those foul ghosts encampt in man
 Would run from the stabbing light of his blade.

Caught in the anger's burning wheel,
 The huge scything of the tempered zeal,
 This clumsy unlit shed we have made,
 Money, to house our being in,
 Would travel like a wind-blown thing.
 In that fanning as motes would be,
 The sword-thresht fabric of our trade,
 Our happy greed, our healthy wring,
 Our villainous prosperity.
 And ript out of its cursèd rind
 Of laidly duties, that did wring
 And clamp in ignominy man's whole mind,
 This iron scurf of labour torn away,
 Thought would walk again like a sacred king
 The shining space of immortality.
 O for that anger in the hands
 Of Spirit ! To us, O righteous sword,
 Come thou and clear our lands,
 O fire, O indignation of the Lord !

Zagreus

I AM the tortured god who lies in hell
 Imagining mankind. Before I fell
 Down to this purposeless unholy place,
 To sink in mortification and disgrace,
 On the great height of the wheeling world elate
 I dwelt, a god sublimely fortunate.
 The invisible spirit for ever passing on,
 Turning the world with thoroughfare unknown
 Of flying power, such golden mood on me
 Poured, that divine delight of fantasy
 Went forth of me creating loveliness
 Of life about me, mortal images
 Of a god's blissful mind, rejoicing throngs
 Enchanting me as may its own sweet songs
 The heart of music. Even so now in hell
 My tortured mind lives indestructible
 Imagining mankind, the busy insane
 Detested dream wherein my helpless pain

Beholds itself. For now the slow world's weight,
 Eternally disturbed in circular fate,
 To depths that like malignant waters drown
 The joyful use of being, has borne me down ;
 And still I must create, and make my night
 Of darkness and dishonor quick and alight
 With spectacle of life, the swarming fire
 Of a god's imagination, a god's desire
 Blazing forth in impotent mutiny.
 Thus in perpetual vision I must see
 Man's life enact itself : that life accurst
 Which knows the best and must achieve the worst—
 Creature and symbol of my anguish here !
 He thinks of beauty and freedom, and there appear
 His towns, his factories, his furnaces,
 His squalidly elaborate wretchedness.
 With power to shape his fate I see him stand ;
 He who can out of ancient stone command
 Metals and secret forces, and make these
 His marvellous intelligent slaveries,
 Gleaming obedient demons, exquisite skill
 And thundering strength, as sensitive to his will
 As his own joints to thrilling of his nerves ;

He whom the very nature of things serves,
 Man who has made Machines, he is my dream
 Of the power I have lost—my impotent dream,
 Man who has made himself a misery
 With his Machines, and still the more must be,
 The more his power, the idiot of his fate :
 And hating my dream of man, myself I hate.

But this is not my master : stifled here,
 Even my own self-hatred I can bear,
 Nay, for myself have still insatiable
 Desire, knowing there burns within me still
 The sleepless virtue of the mind divine
 That feeds on all event and makes it mine,
 The manner of my life ; and can abide
 Even in agony strangely satisfied.

And I am not to end in hell :
 It has been before, in the world's change,
 That tides of darkness over me fell,
 To make remember'd heaven as strange
 As to the waters buried deep
 In bitter darkness of the sea,
 Their fresh delighted springs must be

That down the sunny hills would leap.
 And it has been that at the last
 The night of waters past :
 For still the changing world went round,
 Out of the depth where I lay vile and drowned
 Lifting me on high again
 To shine above forgotten pain.
 Then in a smooth and sapphire floor,
 Firm beneath my feet and bright,
 The perilous waters of existence bore
 Courteously the journeying of my restored delight.
 Out of that favorable sea
 Arose like an enchanted land
 The fortune that awaited me,
 In noble heights where I might stand
 Surveying my prosperity.
 Thence a delicious welcome came
 From forests that, in fragrant flame
 Of scarlet blossoming, hung between
 Pinnacled splendour of carven snow
 And ocean luminous below
 With purple depth and shallows green.
 Forth for my feet in curving bays

The beaches spread their golden ground,
 Inviting me up to grassy ways
 And meadows of pleasant summer beyond :
 And I ran over the light of the sea,
 And took the world prepared for me.
 Sauntering inland as I went,
 In floods of flowers I must wade,
 Held in many a sweet delay
 To hear the birds such joy invent,
 Or note the whispering shiver made
 In spinneys of willow silver-grey,
 Their delicate bright leaves answering
 The stirring airs like flying away
 Of sunlit smoke. But I must climb
 Above the warm bewitching leas,
 Above the droning of the bees
 And silvery crickets' throbbing ring ;
 Above the slopes of vetch and thyme,
 Past broom and birches shadowing
 Green mountain water in fall and pool
 Where musing air dwelt moist and cool ;
 Towards where from out dark fell of pine
 Towering peaks raised sharp and fine
 Their gleaming speculation high :
 And with my rocks I stood to share
 The heavenly space of light and air ;
 And once again in lonely glee,
 Soared out of joy's perplexity
 The pure immortal ecstasy,
 Perfection of the god in me.
 I knew my radiance of joy
 Like flame that knows the light it makes :
 My joy was round me in winds and seas,
 Shone over earth in grass and trees,
 And ran in rivers ; with fiery flakes
 Of infinite joy I starred the night ;
 And in high clouds my joy was white,
 And stately joy beneath them stood
 Mountainous in great attitude :
 Everywhere colour and shape and sound
 Of joy divinely mine, my own,
 I knew encompassing me round.
 But in the midst of this,
 Distinct in singular central bliss,
 I to myself was known,
 The maker of joy, the flame within :
 My soul erect and burning keen
 In supreme spire of consciousness

Uttering its own marvellous place,
 The world that round about it glowed,
 As a flame in light makes its abode.

Then was I in that ecstasy
 Such music of intelligence,
 That uncontainable beauty thence
 Went out in power ranging free ;
 And sang itself forth circling sweet and clear
 To shape, like mastery of sound in air,
 Life in my world—energies numberless
 Formed in one perfect chime of happiness.

This was : and what has been, will be again.
 The god that has no power but in vain
 To dream of power : himself a hated thing,
 Bound down to hate in turn the posturing
 Procession of his creatures round about
 His darkness—that old story of long drawn out
 Pretentious blundering in a mystery,
 The life of man : this very god is he
 Whose bliss its own excess shall contemplate
 In the image of beautiful life it must create,
 And thereby crown himself once more sublimely
 fortunate.

Ham and Eggs

A SKY like a dirty canvas tilt
 Close on the earth hangs weighing down,
 Where water heavy with inland silt
 And filth of many a factory town,
 Brown river mingling with drab sea,
 Laps on the grey sand lazily :
 The tide far out on the flat shore,
 Slack sea and current come to terms.
 A pier of a quarter mile or more,
 On stilted footing splayed out wide—
 Like a giant kind of those hated worms
 With a fringe of legs on either side—
 Steps wading through the soft mud-banks
 On a hundred iron spindle-shanks
 To the fairway where the ferries ply.
 The listed boats, nigh toppling
 With the press at the gangways, begin to bring
 The Saturday-afternoon parade,

With a few free hours and wages paid,
 Jostling ashore on its way to buy
 Some hasty pleasure. It throngs the pier
 And mobs the turnstiles, crammed as tight
 As bolting fish shoaled in a weir ;
 Then out through the clicking brasswork jets,
 Twitching its rumpled jackets aright,
 And a dozen ways the current sets,
 Everyone for his fancy bound :
 Dancing, switchback, giddy-go-round,
 Or to buy good luck at the gypsies' tent,
 Or to muse, with a lordly blank content,
 Upon three mangy slouching bears
 In the dank bucket of their pound,
 Padding the round they've padded for years.

But most of the holiday troops decide
 For the coastwise pathway. On one side
 They have, as they take their sauntering ways,
 An endless reach of shallow tide ;
 And sunlight filtering through fawn haze
 Draws streaks and knots of glistening pale
 Slippery lustre of mother-of-pearl

On the paved expanse of airless sea :
 Like the vagaries of loop and curl,
 The faint bright varnish aimlessly
 Tracks on a flagg'd walk by a snail.
 But on the left side the path goes
 Past tumble-down and shabby rows
 Of sheds and booths and old marquees,
 For dealing in stale gaieties :
 Where a giggling crowd for a penny stares
 At an oily nigger saying his prayers ;
 Or in the clanging shooting-stalls
 They fire skew rifles at little balls
 Jumping about on water jets ;
 Or cheer their glee when a girl upsets
 Head-over-heels at end of her ride
 Down the slope of the taut wire, slung
 For the trolley to race its headlong glide,
 She like a sack on her pull'd arms hung.

But eating-shops are commonest ;
 And whether there be a special zest
 In ham and eggs, their only fare,
 Or some more potent trade thrive there,

These flourish more than all the rest.
 Frowsy within, dingy without ;
 But mouldy finery litter'd about
 On mantel-piece and table-top—
 Knacks on fancy mats, and a crop
 Of tufted grass dyed yellow and pink,
 Busts of the King, and glass hand-bells—
 With plush-framed panels of glued sea-shells
 Pinn'd to the walls, seem meant to make
 The munching customer rather think
 He eats in a parlour than a shop.
 At every door a girl, to take
 Her daily gossip, lolls at ease,
 Painted to make a parson blink,
 And scented to make a foxhound sneeze.
 Soon, when the loitering crowds begin,
 With female clamour the air will shake,
 Harsh as the sound of beaten tin,
 Announcing tea and plates of fry ;
 Lest heedless hunger ramble by
 And lust for harm should not awake,
 Let a young man one instant give
 Notice to these fierce syllables,

A wench will have him by the sleeve,
 Whisper seriously in his ear,
 And deftly show her petticoat frills.

But there is no trade yet come near.
 The girls, posted to draw it in,
 Lile awhile, and akimbo lean
 Against the jambs of the doors, and throw
 Cheerful scandalous banter about
 In a reedy metallic effortless shout ;
 Or vacantly watch the steamships go,
 That forth into empty oceans glide
 Like gods on placid grand affairs,
 No more aware they coast beside
 Small gazes at the water's edge
 Than any thoughtful traveller cares
 For ants and beetles in the hedge.

The girl, though, of the meanest shanty there,
 Was late to lounge on duty, and the shop
 Open'd without her its crazy blister'd door
 Wide and inviting to the table laid,
 Already news of frying ham crept out

Hissing and savoury rank, and a slut bustled
 In and out of the lean-to den at back
 That served as kitchen. Even the music now
 Struck up a jaunty racket : this was a neat
 Black-drest black-bonneted meagre upright old lady,
 With grey shawl tight across her shoulders scrumpt,
 Sitting, straight as a rod and iron-stiff,
 Her back towards the door (" 'Tisn't your face,
 I'm hiring," she'd been told ; " turn on the tunes
 And keep your face turned off : mind that.") She
 held

The rigid corner of her skinny knees
 As fixt as limbs fetter'd together ; and straight
 As her spine was, her head was always leant
 A little sideways, and one shoulder shrugged
 Immovably up to it ; even her elbows prest
 Firm on her waist as they'd been lasht there close ;
 But nimble were her wrists and spry her fingers,
 Never a moment flagging in their chase
 Of imbecile gaiety. To and fro her hands
 Went jangling wolfish chords and tinkling out
 Silly flourishing airs ; while she herself,
 Fast in her stiff black trance, her tilted head

Held up in an unchanging muse to stare
Six inches over the piano-top at nothing,
Took from her wiry busily trifling hands
Not so much as a shiver.

A door bounced
Clattering open beside her at the back ;
It gave upon a flight of upward stairs.
The wench came flurrying in and slammed it to :
A plump pert rattling merry-hearted thing,
Bright with her own good fortune ; and that was,
To be alive. She skipt across and laid
Firm hold on the old lady's bony shoulders
And shook her stubborn pose ; but the gay hands
Went playing on. So the wench screwed her round ;
Those faithfully frivolous hands were only stopt
When the lean body they were jointed to,
But hardly seemed belonging to, was slued
Right from the key-board ; then they lay in her lap
And twitched uneasy fingers, as a dog
That lately hunted sleeps with jerking paws.

The Wench : The bone of you !—Remind me, the
next time

I tickle in the small of my back, to take
Your shoulder-blade for a scratching-post.—Come
round,
Bombasine !—I'd to hurry ; I was kept.
Look me over and tell me, is my face
Done all to rights ?—What's to do, Missis Eyes ?
Whatever's the scare about ? It's only paint.

The Old Lady : You ought to be ashamed.

The Wench : The same to you.

The Old Lady : A painted face disgusts me.

The Wench : That's because

You couldn't paint your dry old prune of a face,
Not if you were a house-painter.—Have sense,
And don't be a cross-patch : tell me how I look.

The Old Lady : How should you look ? You look
like what you are.

The Wench : You don't ; you look respectable.

The Old Lady : You know

I've got to be here.

The Wench : And you know I want to.

We can cry quits.

The Old Lady : Oh, but my dear, my dear,
If I could help myself, I would help you.

The Wench : It would be somebody else if it
wasn't me :

I said, have sense.

The Old Lady : Will you never have sense
How this painting your face and dressing up
Makes your life, that should be your very own,
Common as open ground ?—When workmen cut
A short way to their jobs over a field,
It's very soon the grass is trodden dirt.

The Wench : You skeleton ! Calling me dirt !
And who

Keeps the procession brisk with rousing tunes ?

The Old Lady : No need for that taunt : hot
and bitter to me

As scalding poison to be doing this.

The Wench : O look ! Tribes already !—While
we're in talk

Good money's slipping past us, running to waste
Round you go and vamp us a spanking piece.

A slap and a twisting push left the old lady
Instantly stiffen'd into her posture again,
Her thin back turned severe against the door

With canted head and slightly lifted gaze,
And arms tuckt in ; her diligent weaving hands
Might never have paused : back in their dainty pace
Off tript her fingers impudently jingling
Tinsel music to brighten the seduction
The wench was hoarsely busy with outside,
Snatching at likely passengers and shrugged
Laughingly off a dozen times before
She found her game. A young man, cap awry
To show his grease-lickt forelock, let her grasp
Stay a few seconds on his arm, and felt
Somehow a vague and pleased importance from it.

She knows him hers before he is sure
Himself what his mind is ; and towards the door
She has him dragged, and is whispering,
Hugging him down some cockering thing.
The delicate bloom of her bared arm greeting
His skin with its fine warm youth, her scent,
Her side against him, her merriment,
Set his heart dizzily beating
Burning blood through every vein ;
And, startling along his nerves, delight

Flashes trembling into his brain.
 Flesh clothes his spirit in flame star-white
 One lightning moment—flame of the fire
 That carries splendour of worlds like flakes
 Of darkening slag ; and swift as it came
 The brightness dulls—a moment slakes
 Flesh that wrapt him in thrilling flame
 To flesh that is earth and mere desire.
 Now it is easy work, and she
 May bend as she likes his waxen will ;
 He yields, but he goes sulkily,
 And makes her seem to hale him still.

The Wench : Come along, innocent.

The Youth : I'm not innocent.

The Wench : You won't be so stand-offish after
 tea.

The Youth : I don't want any tea.

The Wench : You'll want plenty
 Once you have bitten into our ham.

The Youth : I don't

Fancy your fry.

The Wench : Are you in dread of thirst ?

The Youth : Ay, in a teashop.

The Wench : You wait till you

The tea I'll brew you, and see if you don't wish
 You'd shipwreckt in the tropics and brought home
 The thirst of it undamaged. And the thing is,
 What's cooking in the kitchen now is just
 The image of that thirst, the spitting image.

The Youth : Tea's not my style.

The Wench : O, I can size you up.—
 How's that ?

The Youth : Whatever have you put in it ?

The Wench : Look in the milk-jug.

The Youth : Whisky !

The Wench : You didn't think
 To meet your old friend here !—Now for the fry :
 Chew it up well and get the good of it !

The Youth : By God ! The good you call it !

Brim me my cup,
 Sharp, with the whisky, for a cool long drink.

The brine in deep-sea shrimps were sweet
 To the smart pickle of that meat ;
 The thirst of labour in blazing sun

Were cool and smooth to the rage begun
 With the first bite, in gullet and mouth ;
 And soon a tingling parching drouth
 Flayed his throat as though it had been
 Dried with quicklime, raspt by shagreen.
 And cup after cup laced generously
 Liquor'd his nettled palate, till he
 Grew easy-minded and talkative,
 And often sprawled aside to give
 The wench a fondling slack caress,
 Twixt mouthfuls of his salty mess.

And still that gaunt demure old lady, set
 In visionary rigour, kept her mind
 Averted, and her awkward figure still
 As ebony carving, while her active hands
 Danced lightly over the notes in trivial airs.

The Youth : Does she go by steam ?

The Wench : She's a curio.

But she can play.

The Youth : Pretty well, pretty well.

Who put the poker down her back ?

The Wench : She's daft.

She's hazed herself with hours of sitting still
 And strumming in black clothes. If I slid out
 And left the lights full on she'd play till morning—
 And where do you work ?

The Youth : I'm in a builder's yard.
 I'm in the joinery-sheds, where saws and planes
 And moulders and the rest spin the whole day,
 Chattering and growling and squalling.

The Wench : Are they machines ?
 I thought such things were tools you carry about.

The Youth : We're all machinery in the sheds.
 The roof

Is full of rumbling axles, and you walk
 Dodging the flapping criss-cross of the belts
 That bring the power slanting to the benches.
 I run a morticing machine myself.

The Wench : Are any Jews in your shop ?

The Youth : Ay, there's one.

I'm down on Jews ; I owe them something bitter.
 This one cuts wood-blocks at a circular saw ;
 A dirty Jew ! Dirt ? There is just one spot
 That he keeps clean. Where do you think it is ?

The Wench : I shouldn't like to say.

The Youth : The end of his nose.
And not because he means it : but it dips
Into his tea at every drink he takes,
And washes itself pale as the white of his eyes
In his brown visnomy, just the fat tip.
I paid him out, though.

The Wench : How ?

The Youth : To make his blocks
He pushes the wrought scantling to a stop
And guides it past the humming saw ; and slice
It goes like cutting cheese, and a howling yelp
At every slice like thrashing a puppy-dog.

The Wench : Who is it yelps ? The Jew ?

The Youth : He did yelp once ;
For I was strolling by, and right in the nick
Nudged the beast's elbow, and his hand just grazed
The screaming teeth. O, Mister Jew screamed then ;
It sheared his thumb off, clean as you could wish.

The Wench : There's a smart daring lad. And
was there trouble ?

The Youth : The whole shop swore him down,
gaffer and all ;

Swore black was white, that I was at my bench.

The Wench : Well, shall we go upstairs ?

The Youth : Here's to free love

For tipsy enough she reckoned him by this
To let her sneaking hands unheeded go
Ransacking through his pockets while he bent
In earnest all his mind on fuddled lust.
She steadied him across the floor and steered
His lurches to the stairs, cuddling so close
That her embrace, before they were half-way,
Learnt the likely pockets for her to rummage.
They had a giggling scuffle to get through
The doorway ; and for all she clipt him firm
And braced herself to hold him, he reeled off
So wide, he nearly stagger'd in her chair
That wistfully unalterable old lady
Keeping her tunes cheerily jiggling along
Like clockwork ; but no flicker changed her gaze
Yonderly upward at the wallpaper,
No muscle for the scrimmage at her side
Slackened a moment in her angular
Steadfast unconcern. And still she sat

In the same empty unmoving speculation,
 And still her fingers went the same glib gait,
 Pouncing delicately, after the wench
 Had hauled her sot upstairs.

A little girl
 Ran frighten'd from outside into the shop,
 Calling as she ran, "Miss Cissy! Miss Cissy!"
 Her breath, from racing there, caught in her throat,
 And her voice hardly shrilled above the old lady's
 Never-ending trickle of giddy noise.
 But the wench heard and hurried down; the youth
 Came lungeing after her, tripping himself
 At every step, and loutishly stood by.
 And still the serene old lady prettily played.

The Wench : Didn't I tell you never to come
 again?

The Child : But it's your mother, miss.

The Wench : Now you trot back :
 Tell her from me I'll not be harried here.
 I've had enough of her to-day.

The Child : But, miss,
 She's dead.

The Wench : What?—Stop that tinkling shindy
 do!

She leant across, and struck those flippant hands
 Down from the keys. The old lady settled back
 Unruffled in her chair, grave and ignoring;
 And blandly waited to begin again.

The Wench : Now what's this story?

The Child : When my aunty called,
 There was your mother lying along the floor
 As if she'd sprung out of bed—stiff as a crutch
 And flat as a flounder, aunty said she was.

The Wench : Nay, I should think hardly as flat
 as that.

She studied her own thoughts a moment. Then,
 Pleasantly brisking round on the old lady,
 She said a thing to pierce that distant mind.

The Wench : I'm finisht here : I shan't come
 back again.
 Nobody now swallowing all I can earn!

I'll pick up easy money on my own.
Keep up your heart and give them lovely tunes.

And she and the child were gone. But looking like
Bewilder'd terror now the old lady gaped
After them, and a gleam of frantic passion
Leapt to her eyes swift as a spark from steel ;
Then quencht. And gently to herself she said,
" So she's the one to escape. She would, of course."

The young man suddenly roused out of his daze :
Where was free love?—He'd lost his chance somehow !
He shoved himself upright away from the wall
Where he had propt his swimming shoulders, stood
Quavering, and then propt himself again
With arms in front, leaning over a table.
He shouted, " Do you mean to swindle me ?
She'd made me pay her, up there on the stairs.
I'll tell the police ! I'll have the law on you ! "

Then the old lady, clenching her lips, and staring
With wide pale eyes at him, slowly stood up,
Decent and black, and very lean and tall.
She must have clutcht her head, for, if it was

The first time in her life, her bonnet now
Tipt ridiculously awry. She reacht
Her hand out for a pot of scarlet grasses,
And poised it ready to shy. " Get out ! " she said,
Very quietly. But 'twas the look of her
That startled him like drenching icy water :
" God love me ! I've lit among the maniacs ! "
He stumbled out, anxiously eyeing her.

So she sat down again. As if she had been
A puppet carefully lower'd on to the chair,
Her limbs folded themselves precise and stiff
Back into her strict attitude again :
With shoulders huncht a little, leaning head,
And elbows squeezed tight in against a waist
Straight as a plank. Unmoving she sat on,
Lonely and prim, lost in a gaze at nothing.

" Another one will come to take her place ;
And I shall still be here, luring them in."

Her hands strayed to the keyboard, hesitated,
Fumbled softly, and then ran off in trills
And graces of a skipping flighty tune.

TO IRON-FOUNDERS AND OTHERS

WHEN you destroy a blade of grass
You poison England at her roots :
Remember no man's foot can pass
Where evermore no green life shoots.

You force the birds to wing too high
Where your unnatural vapours creep :
Surely the living rocks shall die
When birds no rightful distance keep.

You have brought down the firmament
And yet no heaven is more near ;
You shape huge deeds without event,
And half made men believe and fear.

Your worship is your furnaces,
Which, like old idols, lost obscenes,
Have molten bowels ; your vision is
Machines for making more machines.

O, you are busied in the night,
Preparing destinies of rust ;
Iron misused must turn to blight
And dwindle to a tettered crust.

The grass, forerunner of life, has gone,
But plants that spring in ruins and shards
Attend until your dream is done :
I have seen hemlock in your yards.

The generations of the worm
Know not your loads piled on their soil ;
Their knotted ganglions shall wax firm
Till your strong flagstones heave and toil.

When the old hollowed earth is cracked,
And when, to grasp more power and feasts,
Its ores are emptied, wasted, lacked,
The middens of your burning beasts

Shall be raked over till they yield
Last priceless slags for fashionings high,
Ploughs to wake grass in every field,
Chisels men's hands to magnify.

ATLANTIS

What poets sang in Atlantis ? Who can tell
 The epics of Atlantis or their names ?
 The sea hath its own murmurs, and sounds not
 The secrets of its silences beneath,
 And knows not any cadences enfolded
 When the last bubbles of Atlantis broke
 Among the quieting of its heaving floor.

O, years and tides and leagues and all their billows
 Can alter not man's knowledge of men's hearts—
 While trees and rocks and clouds include our being
 We know the epics of Atlantis still :

A hero gave himself to lesser men,
 Who first misunderstood and murdered him,
 And then misunderstood and worshipped him ;
 A woman was lovely and men fought for her,
 Towns burnt for her, and men put men in bondage,
 But she put lengthier bondage on them all ;
 A wanderer toiled among all the isles
 That fleck this turning star of shifting sea,
 Or lonely purgatories of the mind,
 In longing for his home or his lost love.

Poetry is founded on the hearts of men :
 Though in Nirvana or the Heavenly courts
 The principle of beauty shall persist,
 Its body of poetry, as the body of man,
 Is but a terrene form, a terrene use,
 That swifter being will not loiter with ;
 And, when mankind is dead and the world cold,
 Poetry's immortality will pass.

BABEL: THE GATE OF THE GOD

LOST towers impend, copeless primeval props
 Of the new threatening sky, and first rude digits
 Of awe remonstrance and uneasy power
 Thrust out by man when speech sank back in his
 throat :

Then had the last rocks ended bubbling up
 And rhythms of change within the heart begun
 By a blind need that would make Springs and
 Winters ;

Pylons and monoliths went on by ages,
 Mycenae and Great Zimbabwe came about ;
 Cowed hearts in This conceived a pyramid
 That leaned to hold itself upright, a thing
 Foredoomed to limits, death and an easy apex ;
 Then postulants for the stars' previous wisdom
 Standing on Carthage must get nearer still ;
 While in Chaldea an altitude of god
 Being mooted, and a saurian unearthed
 Upon a mountain stirring a surmise
 Of floods and alterations of the sea,
 A round-walled tower must rise upon Senaar

Temple and escape to god the ascertained.
 These are decayed like Time's teeth in his mouth,
 Black cavities and gaps, yet earth is darkened
 By their deep-sunken and unfounded shadows
 And memories of man's earliest theme of towers.

Space—the old source of time—should be undone,
 Eternity defined, by men who trusted
 Another tier would equal them with god.
 A city of grimed brick-kilns, squat truncations,
 Hunched like spread toads yet high beneath their
 circles

Of low packed smoke, assemblages of thunder
 That glowed upon their under sides by night
 And lit like storm small shadowless workmen's toil.
 Meaningless stumps, upturned bare roots, remained
 In fields of mashy mud and trampled leaves ;
 While, if a horse died hauling, plasterers
 Knelt on a flank to clip its sweaty coat.

A builder leans across the last wide courses ;
 His unadjustable unreaching eyes
 Fail under him before his glances sink
 On the clouds' upper layers of sooty curls
 Where some long lightning goes like swallows
 downward,
 But at the wider gallery next below

Recognise master-masons with pricked parchments :
 That builder then, as one who condescends
 Unto the sea and all that is beneath him,
 His hairy breast on the wet mortar, calls
 "How many fathoms is it yet to heaven !"
 On the next eminence the orgulous king
 Nimroud stands up conceiving he shall live
 To conquer god, now that he knows where god is :
 His eager hands push up the tower in thought . . .
 Again, his shaggy inhuman height strides down
 Among the carpenters because he has seen
 One shape an eagle-woman on a door-post :
 He drives his spear-beam through him for wasted
 day.

Little men hurrying, running here and there,
 Within the dark and stifling walls, dissent
 From every sound, and shoulder empty hods :
 "The god's great altar should stand in the crypt
 Among our earth's foundations" — "The god's
 great altar
 Must be the last far coping of our work" —
 "It should inaugurate the broad main stair" —
 "Or end it" — "It must stand toward the East !"
 But here a grave contemptuous youth cries out
 "Womanish babblers, how can we build god's altar
 Ere we divine its foreordained true shape ?"

Then one "It is a pedestal for deeds" —
 "'Tis more and should be hewn like the king's
 brow" —
 "It has the nature of a woman's bosom" —
 "The tortoise, first created, signifies it" —
 "A blind and rudimentary navel shows
 The source of worship better than horned moons."
 Then a lean giant "Is not a calyx needful?" —
 "Because round grapes on statues well expressed
 Become the nadir of incense, nodal lamps,
 Yet apes have hands thad but and carved red
 crystal" —
 "Birds molten, touchly talc veins bronze buds
 crumble
 Ablid ublai ghan isz rad eighar ghauri. . . ."
 Words said too often seemed such ancient sounds
 That men forgot them or were lost in them ;
 The guttural glottis-chasms of language reached,
 A rhythm, a gasp, were curves of immortal thought.

Man with his bricks was building, building yet,
Where dawn and midnight mingled and woke no
birds,

In the last courses, building past his knowledge
A wall that swung—for towers can have no tops,
No chord can mete the universal segment,
Earth has not basis. Yet the yielding sky,

Invincible vacancy, was there discovered—
Though piled-up bricks should pulp the sappy
balks,

Weight generate a secrecy of heat,
Cankorous charring, crevices' fronds of flame.

A HYMN OF IMAGINATION

IMAGINATION'S towers appear,
 And every tower is a steep prolonging
 Of the earth's radius dark and sheer.
 Like swart birds thronging
 Into a sunset safe and near—
 Or down horizons shimmering hence,
 Swift precipices of radiance, baffling wings—
 Or gleaming white against the dense
 And thunderous presences of immortal things—
 Imagination's measureless towerings
 Bear down upon the beds of reality,
 Accede to gravity for inmost law
 Where the earth's radius and their cores agree
 To raise externes of awe.

Baseless Invention is the newer god,
 A liquorous and incontinent quality,
 The blind men's fingering upon the veil.
 Here intellect intrudes, the mode
 Of building wonders mentally ;
 And in this stypical, this pale
 And secondary blindness of the brain
 The limits of experience decide.

Mental immoderation is in vain ;
 It closes up, where sympathy makes wide
 Man's comprehension of dissimilar things ;
 It sets man to believe himself his guide,
 His standard too ; ay, and it has denied
 Imagination's murmurings
 (The only conscience that is not pride)
 Because Imagination hath dissension
 From brain-wrought marvellings.
 The nourishing of religions is Invention,
 Wonders and furbishings ;
 There merchants of the incredible, in contention,
 Postulate Divinity apart
 From knowledge or perception ; crude desire
 Seeks an Unknown for gaping at, a mart
 Where virtue whips God's first debentures higher :
 Nor may Imagination's shining
 Reveal in them the mirror where
 God shines reply most heavenly fair—
 Divinity dawns through passions of divining ;
 Who yearns for God will seek Him in the heart.

Imagination does not thus devise
 Wilful and rootless miracles :
 It works by still and inward symmetries ;
 Sounds, when resolved into clear harmonies,
 Achieve such bright coincidence

As shakes man's spirit in its wells
 When something borne becomes a sense
 Of understanding, yet something else
 Than understanding—
 A hushed commanding
 Of destinies
 Beyond our eyes,
 Ability to conceive the nature
 Of every creature, every stature,
 Ability to live in every form,
 To know the passions that have passed,
 Stillness or storm,
 In nobler hearts or hearts of sin—
 All things without at last
 Answering to things within.

Imagination is acceptance wrought
 When things beyond ourselves with faint sounds
 press
 Upon the limits of our consciousness ;
 Man is not loftier by taking thought,
 By domination, by knotting hard and straining
 Upon the convolutions of his will
 As one who tests a cable though remaining
 Heedless of what it stays or binds—
 The qualities of tense cables, to such minds,
 Being sufficient for salvation's thrill.

A little princess dawning through a mist ;
 An old, old horn
 In forests forlorn ;
 An ageless crying
 When night and rains have kissed
 And dark wide wings are vying
 With clouds' and the earth-shadow's flying ;
 The fragile proud and passive shapes
 That bear the burden of all men's love for ever ;
 Legend, faëry, enchantments of each weaver
 Of glimmering romance (escapes
 From blinding customary sights),
 Of shadows that forecast
 Man's implication with the earth—
 Sea, fire, and mountain, and their sprites
 Of danger, tempting, warning, mirth,
 Which signified that kinship in the past ;
 Dead inventions these remain
 In the rigid sinuous brain,
 Unless tuned sympathy shall twin
 Things without to things within—
 Then Imagination sheer
 Makes them intimate and near,
 And their essences appear.

It is the knowledge of responsibility.
 It is the permeant air that spirits breathe,

The high pure ether where appearances
 And other tricks of shadow-casting substance must
 unwreath

And only essences can be :
 It can inform all wonder, all degrees
 Of lean ideal virtue, and all charm
 Of haunting far-off lights and low
 Lost murmurs ; and with power it can endow
 The gods that bless or harm :
 But in man's common impacts here and now
 Its fierce illumination is most plain—
 Man's deeds are seen to work in him again ;
 Though done in secret they must change his
 brow.

To look upon the things that must be borne
 Has, by Imagination, no less pain ;
 But, if the looking be without men's scorn
 Of all they deem they understand,
 We have our revelation close at hand.
 We see new harmony advance,
 We need no promise of continuance ;
 By life and nature, earth and man,
 Our indicated destiny we scan ;
 We are advised to spend no breath
 In echoing heaven from walls raised up by death ;
 By flower and beast is it not clear
 To be resumed in God we ripen here ?

Rupert Brooke

THE HILL

Breathless, we flung us on the windy hill,
Laughed in the sun, and kissed the lovely grass.
You said, 'Through glory and ecstasy we pass;
Wind, sun, and earth remain, the birds sing still,
When we are old, are old. . . .' 'And when we die
All's over that is ours; and life burns on
Through other lovers, other lips,' said I,
'Heart of my heart, our heaven is now, is won!'

'We are Earth's best, that learnt her lesson here.
Life is our cry. We have kept the faith!' we said;
'We shall go down with unreluctant tread
Rose-crowned into the darkness!' . . . Proud we were,
And laughed, that had such brave true things to say.
—And then you suddenly cried, and turned away.

FINDING

From the candles and dumb shadows,
 And the house where love had died,
 I stole to the vast moonlight
 And the whispering life outside.
 But I found no lips of comfort,
 No home in the moon's light
 (I, little and lone and frightened
 In the unfriendly night),
 And no meaning in the voices. . . .
 Far over the lands, and through
 The dark, beyond the ocean,
 I willed to think of *you* !
 For I knew, had you been with me
 I'd have known the words of night,
 Found peace of heart, gone gladly
 In comfort of that light.

Oh ! the wind with soft beguiling
 Would have stolen my thought away
 And the night, subtly smiling,
 Came by the silver way ;
 And the moon came down and danced to me,
 And her robe was white and flying ;
 And trees bent their heads to me
 Mysteriously crying ;
 And dead voices wept around me ;
 And dead soft fingers thrilled ;
 And the little gods whispered. . . .

But ever

Desperately I willed ;
 Till all grew soft and far
 And silent . . .

And suddenly

I found you white and radiant,
 Sleeping quietly,
 Far out through the tides of darkness,
 And I there in that great light
 Was alone no more, nor fearful ;
 For there, in the homely night,
 Was no thought else that mattered,
 And nothing else was true,
 But the white fire of moonlight,
 And a white dream of you.

THE NIGHT JOURNEY

Hands and lit faces eddy to a line ;
 The dazed last minutes click ; the clamour dies.
 Beyond the great-sprung arc o' the roof, divine,
 Night, smoky-scarv'd, with thousand coloured eyes

Glares the imperious mystery of the way.
 Thirsty for dark, you feel the long-limbed train
 Throb, stretch, thrill motion, slide, pull out and sway,
 Strain for the far, pause, draw to strength again. . . .

As a man, caught by some great hour, will rise,
 Slow-limbed, to meet the light or find his love ;
 And, breathing long, with staring sightless eyes,
 Hands out, head back, agape and silent, move

Sure as a flood, smooth as a vast wind blowing ;
 And, gathering power and purpose as he goes,
 Unstumbling, unreluctant, strong, unknowing,
 Borne by a will not his, that lifts, that grows,

Sweep out to darkness, triumphing in his goal,
 Out of the fire, out of the little room. . . .
 —There is an end appointed, O my soul !
 Crimson and green the signals burn ; the gloom

Is hung with steam's far-blowing livid streamers.
 Lost into God, as lights in light, we fly,
 Grown one with will, end-drunken huddled dreamers.
 The white lights roar. The sounds of the world die.

And lips and laughter are forgotten things.
 Speed sharpens ; grows. Into the night, and on,
 The strength and splendour of our purpose swings.
 The lamps fade ; and the stars. We are alone.

W.H. Davies

The Fog

I saw the fog grow thick,
Which soon made blind my ken;
It made tall men of boys,
And giants of tall men.

It clutched my throat, I coughed;
Nothing was in my head
Except two heavy eyes
Like balls of burning lead.

And when it grew so black
That I could know no place,
I lost all judgment then,
Of distance and of space.

The street lamps, and the lights
Upon the halted cars,
Could either be on earth
Or be the heavenly stars.

A man passed by me close,
I asked my way, he said,
'Come, follow me, my friend' -
I followed where he led.

He rapped the stones in front,
'Trust me,' he said, 'and come';
I followed like a child -
A blind man led me home.

Thunderstorms

My mind has thunderstorms,
That brood for heavy hours:
Until they rain me words,
My thoughts are drooping flowers
And sulking, silent birds.

Yet come, dark thunderstorms,
And brood your heavy hours;
For when you rain me words,
My thoughts are dancing flowers
And joyful singing birds.

The Heap of Rags

One night when I went down
Thames' side, in London Town,
A heap of rags saw I,
And sat me down close by.
That thing could shout and bawl,
But showed no face at all;
When any steamer passed
And blew a loud shrill blast,
That heap of rags would sit
And make a sound like it;
When struck the clock's deep bell,
It made those peals as well.
When winds did moan around,
It mocked them with that sound.

When all was quiet, it
Fell into a strange fit;
Would sigh, and moan and roar,
It laughed, and blessed, and swore.
Yet that poor thing, I know,
Had neither friend nor foe;
Its blessing or its curse
Made no one better or worse.
I left it in that place -
The thing that showed no face.
Was it a man that had
Suffered till he went mad?
So many showers and not
One rainbow in the lot;
Too many bitter fears
To make a pearl from tears?

The Den

They sleep together in one den,
 Ten in a row – ten beds, ten men;
 Three dying men are in that room,
 Whose coughs at night will soon become
 Death's rattle: drunkards in bed
 Sound as they worried things half dead.

Jim Lasker dreamt, when in that den,
 He saw ten beds that had ten men;
 One sleeper in a sack was sewn,
 With nothing of his features shown:
 Jim felt that face he could not see –
 'This face is mine, I'm dead,' said he.

James Lasker, you're the last to rise;
 Wake up, wake up!' the master cries.
 'You've not paid me for daylight's sleep –
 Suppose you had some kids to keep?
 Ah, now I see: this man of mine
 Came here to die, not sleep – the swine!

Saturday Night in the Slums

Why do I stare at faces, why,
 Nor watch the happy children more?
 Since Age has now a blackened eye,
 And that grey hair is stained with gore.

For an old woman passed, and she
 Would hide her face when I did stare,
 But when she turns that face from me,
 There's clotted blood in her grey hair.

Aye, here was hell last night to play,
 The scream of children, murder cries;
 When I came forth at early day,
 I saw old Age with blackened eyes.

Why do I stare at people so,
 Nor watch the little children more,
 If one such brutal passions show,
 And joy is all the other's store?

O for the shot in some fierce land,
 A sword or dagger firmly held:
 No brutal kick, no mauling hand,
 No horrors of the partly killed.

There is the man with brutal brow,
 The child with hunger's face of care:
 The woman — it is something now
 If she lose pride to dress her hair.

I will give children my best hours,
 And of their simple ways will sing:
 Just as a bird heeds less old flowers
 And sings his best to buds in spring.

Walter de la Mare

IN THE DOCK

Pallid, mis-shapen he stands. The World's grimed thumb,
Now hooked securely in his matted hair,
Has haled him struggling from his poisonous slum
And flung him, mute as fish, close-netted there.

His bloodless hands entalon that iron rail.
He gloats in beastlike trance. His settling eye:
From staring face to face rove on — and quail.
Justice for carrion pants; and these the flies.

Voice after voice in smooth impartial drone
Erects horrific in his darkening brain
A timber framework, where agape, alone,
Bright life will kiss good-bye the cheek of Cain.

Sudden like wolf he cries; and sweats to see
When howls man's soul, it howls inaudibly.

MOTLEY

Come, Death, I'd have a word with thee;
 And thou, poor Innocency;
 And Love — a Lad with broken wing;
 And Pity, too:
 The Fool shall sing to you,
 As Fools will sing.

Ay, music hath small sense,
 And a tune's soon told,
 And Earth is old,
 And my poor wits are dense;
 Yet have I secrets, — dark, my dear,
 To breathe you all. Come near.
 And lest some hideous listener tells,
 I'll ring my bells.

They are all at war! —
 Yes, yes, their bodies go
 'Neath burning sun and icy star
 To chaunted songs of woe,
 Dragging cold cannon through a mire
 Of rain and blood and spouting fire,
 The new moon glinting hard on eyes
 Wide with insanities!

Ssh! . . . I use words
 I hardly know the meaning of;
 And the mute birds
 Are glancing at Love
 From out their shade of leaf and flower,
 Trembling at treacheries
 Which even in noonday cower.
 Heed, heed not what I said
 Of frenzied hosts of men,
 More fools than I,
 On envy, hatred fed,
 Who kill, and die —
 Spake I not plainly, then?
 Yet Pity whispered, 'Why?'

And Death — no ears hath. He hath supped where
 creep

Eyeless worms in hush of sleep;
 Yet, when he smiles, the hand he draws
 Athwart his grinning jaws —
 Faintly the thin bones rattle, and — there, there!
 Hearken how my bells in the air
 Drive away care! . . .

Nay, but a dream I had
 Of a world all mad.
 Not simple happy mad like me,
 Who am mad like an empty scene
 Of water and willow tree,
 Where the wind hath been;
 But that foul Satan-mad,
 Who rots in his own head,
 And counts the dead,
 Not honest one — and two —

But for the ghosts they were,
Brave, faithful, true,
When, head in air,
In Earth's clear green and blue
Heaven they did share
With beauty who bade them there. . . .

There, now! Death goes —
Mayhap I've wearied him.
Ay, and the light doth dim;
And asleep's the rose;
And tired Innocence
In dreams is hence. . . .
Come, Love, my lad,
Nodding that drowsy head,
'Tis time thy prayers were said!

THE MARIONETTES

Let the foul Scene proceed:
 Minere's laughter in the wings;
 'Tis sawdust that they bleed,
 Only a box Death brings.

How rare a skill is theirs —
 These extreme pangs to show,
 How real a frenzy wears
 Each feigner of woe!

Gigantic dins uprise!
 Even the gods must feel
 A smarting of the eyes
 As these fumes upsweel.

Strange, such a Piece is free,
 While we Spectators sit,
 Aghast at its agony,
 Yet absorbed in it!

Dark is the outer air,
 Coldly the night draughts blow,
 Mutely we stare, and stare
 At the frenzied Show.

Yet heaven hath its quiet shroud
 Of deep, immutable blue —
 We cry 'An end!' We are bowed
 By the dread, 'It's true!'

While the Shape who hoofs applause
 Behind our deafened ear,
 Hoots — angel-wise — 'the Cause!'
 And affrights even fear.

John Drinkwater

The Carver in Stone

HE was a man with wide and patient eyes,
 Grey, like the drift of twitch-fires blown in June,
 That, without fearing, searched if any wrong
 Might threaten from your heart. Grey eyes he had
 Under a brow was drawn because he knew
 So many seasons to so many pass
 Of upright service, loyal, unabased
 Before the world seducing, and so, barren
 Of good words praising and thought that mated his.
 He carved in stone. Out of his quiet life
 He watched as any faithful seaman charged
 With tidings of the myriad faring sea,
 And thoughts and premonitions through his mind
 Sailing as ships from strange and storied lands
 His hungry spirit held, till all they were
 Found living witness in the chiselled stone.
 Slowly out of the dark confusion, spread
 By life's innumerable venturings
 Over his brain, he would triumph into the light
 Of one clear mood, unblemished of the blind
 Legions of errant thought that cried about
 His rapt seclusion: as a pearl unsoiled,

Nay, rather washed to lonelier chastity,
 In gritty mud. And then would come a bird,
 A flower, or the wind moving upon a flower,
 A beast at pasture, or a clustered fruit,
 A peasant face as were the saints of old,
 The leer of custom, or the bow of the moon
 Swung in miraculous poise—some stray from the
 world

Of things created by the eternal mind
 In joy articulate. And his perfect mood
 Would dwell about the token of God's mood,
 Until in bird or flower or moving wind
 Or flock or shepherd or the troops of heaven
 It sprang in one fierce moment of desire
 To visible form.

Then would his chisel work among the stone,
 Persuading it of petal or of limb
 Or starry curve, till risen anew there sang
 Shape out of chaos, and again the vision
 Of one mind single from the world was pressed
 Upon the daily custom of the sky
 Or field or the body of man.

His people
 Had many gods for worship. The tiger-god,

The owl, the dewlapped bull, the running pard,
 The camel and the lizard of the slime,
 The ram with quivering fleece and fluted horn,
 The crested eagle and the doming bat
 Were sacred. And the king and his high priests
 Decreed a temple, wide on columns huge,
 Should top the cornlands to the sky's far line.
 They bade the carvers carve along the walls
 Images of their gods, each one to carve
 As he desired, his choice to name his god. . . .
 And many came ; and he among them, glad
 Of three leagues' travel through the singing air
 Of dawn among the boughs yet bare of green,
 The eager flight of the spring leading his blood
 Into swift lofty channels of the air,
 Proud as an eagle riding to the sun. . . .
 An eagle, clean of pinion—there's his choice.

Daylong they worked under the growing roof,
 One at his leopard, one the staring ram,
 And he winning his eagle from the stone,
 Until each man had carved one image out,
 Arow beyond the portal of the house.
 They stood arow, the company of gods,
 Camel and bat, lizard and bull and ram,

The pard and owl, dead figures on the wall,
 Figures of habit driven on the stone
 By chisels governed by no heat of the brain
 But drudges of hands that moved by easy rule.
 Proudly recorded mood was none, no thought
 Plucked from the dark battalions of the mind
 And throned in everlasting sight. But one
 God of them all was witness of belief
 And large adventure dared. His eagle spread
 Wide pinions on a cloudless ground of heaven,
 Glad with the heart's high courage of that dawn
 Moving upon the ploughlands newly sown,
 Dead stone the rest. He looked, and knew it so.

Then came the king with priests and counsellors
 And many chosen of the people, wise
 With words weary of custom, and eyes askew
 That watched their neighbour face for any news
 Of the best way of judgment, till, each sure
 None would determine with authority,
 All spoke in prudent praise. One liked the owl
 Because an owl blinked on the beam of his barn.
 One, hoarse with crying gospels in the street,
 Praised most the ram, because the common folk
 Wore breeches made of ram's wool. One declared

The tiger pleased him best,—the man who carved
 The tiger-god was halt out of the womb—
 A man to praise, being so pitiful.
 And one, whose eyes dwelt in a distant void,
 With spell and omen pat upon his lips,
 And a purse for any crystal prophet ripe,
 A zealot of the mist, gazed at the bull—
 A lean ill-shapen bull of meagre lines
 That scarce the steel had graved upon the stone—
 Saying that here was very mystery
 And truth, did men but know. And one there was
 Who praised his eagle, but remembering
 The lither pinion of the swift, the curve
 That liked him better of the mirrored swan.
 And they who carved the tiger-god and ram,
 The camel and the pard, the owl and bull,
 And lizard, listened greedily, and made
 Humble denial of their worthiness,
 And when the king his royal judgment gave
 That all had fashioned well, and bade that each
 Re-shape his chosen god along the walls
 Till all the temple boasted of their skill,
 They bowed themselves in token that as this
 Never had carvers been so fortunate.

Only the man with wide and patient eyes
 Made no denial, neither bowed his head.
 Already while they spoke his thought had gone
 Far from his eagle, leaving it for a sign
 Loyalloy wrought of one deep breath of life,
 And played about the image of a toad
 That crawled among his ivy leaves. A queer
 Puff-bellied toad, with eyes that always stared
 Sidelong at heaven and saw no heaven there,
 Weak-hammed, and with a throttle somehow twisted
 Beyond full wholesome draughts of air, and skin
 Of wrinkled lips, the only zest or will
 The little flashing tongue searching the leaves.
 And king and priest, chosen and counsellor,
 Babbling out of their thin and jealous brains,
 Seemed strangely one; a queer enormous toad
 Panting under giant leaves of dark,
 Sunk in the loins, peering into the day.
 Their judgment wry he counted not for wrong
 More than the fabled poison of the toad
 Striking at simple wits; how should their thought
 Or word in praise or blame come near the peace
 That shone in seasonable hours above
 The patience of his spirit's husbandry?
 They foolish and not seeing, how should he

Spend anger there or fear—great ceremonies
 Equal for none save great antagonists ?
 The grave indifference of his heart before them
 Was moved by laughter innocent of hate,
 Chastising clean of spite, that moulded them
 Into the antic likeness of his toad
 Bidding for laughter underneath the leaves.

He bowed not, nor disputed, but he saw
 Those ill-created joyless gods, and loathed,
 And saw them creeping, creeping round the walls,
 Death breeding death, wile witnessing to wile,
 And sickened at the dull iniquity
 Should be rewarded, and for ever breathe
 Contagion on the folk gathered in prayer.
 His truth should not be doomed to march among
 This falsehood to the ages. He was called,
 And he must labour there ; if so the king
 Would grant it, where the pillars bore the roof
 A galleried way of meditation nursed
 Secluded time, with wall of ready stone
 In panels for the carver set between
 The windows—there his chisel should be set,—
 It was his plea. And the king spoke of him,
 Scorning, as one lack-fettle, among all these

Eager to take the riches of renown ;
 One fearful of the light or knowing nothing
 Of light's dimension, a witling who would throw
 Honour aside and praise spoken aloud
 All men of heart should covet. Let him go
 Grubbing out of the sight of these who knew
 The worth of substance ; there was his proper trade.

A squat and curious toad indeed. . . . The eyes,
 Patient and grey, were dumb as were the lips,
 That, fixed and governed, hoarded from them all
 The larger laughter lifting in his heart.
 Straightway about his gallery he moved,
 Measured the windows and the virgin stone,
 Till all was weighed and patterned in his brain.
 Then first where most the shadow struck the wall,
 Under the sills, and centre of the base,
 From floor to sill out of the stone was wooed
 Memorial folly, as from the chisel leapt
 His chastening laughter searching priest and king—
 A huge and wrinkled toad, with legs asplay,
 And belly loaded, leering with great eyes
 Busily fixed upon the void.

All days.

His chisel was the first to ring across

The temple's quiet ; and at fall of dusk
 Passing among the carvers homeward, they
 Would speak of him as mad, or weak against
 The challenge of the world, and let him go
 Lonely, as was his will, under the night
 Of stars or cloud or summer's folded sun,
 Through crop and wood and pastureland to sleep.
 None took the narrow stair as wondering
 How did his chisel prosper in the stone,
 Unvisited his labour and forgot.
 And times when he would lean out of his height
 And watch the gods growing along the walls,
 The row of carvers in their linen coats
 Took in his vision a virtue that alone
 Carving they had not nor the thing they carved.
 Knowing the health that flowed about his close
 Imagining, the daily quiet won
 From process of his clean and supple craft,
 Those carvers there, far on the floor below,
 Would haply be transfigured in his thought
 Into a gallant company of men
 Glad of the strict and loyal reckoning
 That proved in the just presence of the brain
 Each chisel-stroke. How surely would he prosper
 In pleasant talk at easy hours with men

So fashioned if it might be—and his eyes
 Would pass again to those dead gods that grew
 In spreading evil round the temple walls ;
 And, one dead pressure made, the carvers moved
 Along the wall to mould and mould again
 The self-same god, their chisels on the stone
 Tapping in dull precision as before,
 And he would turn, back to his lonely truth.

He carved apace. And first his people's gods,
 About the toad, out of their sterile time,
 Under his hand thrilled and were recreate.
 The bull, the pard, the camel and the ram,
 Tiger and owl and bat—all were the signs,
 Visibly made body on the stone,
 Of sightless thought adventuring the host
 That is mere spirit ; these the bloom achieved
 By secret labour in the flowing wood
 Of rain and air and wind and continent sun. . . .
 His tiger, lithe, immobile in the stone,
 A swift destruction for a moment leashed,
 Sprang crying from the jealous stealth of men
 Opposed in cunning watch, with engines hid
 Of torment and calamitous desire.
 His leopard, swift on lean and paltry limbs,

Was fear in flight before accusing faith.
 His bull, with eyes that often in the dusk
 Would lift from the sweet meadow grass to watch
 Him homeward passing, bore on massy beam
 The burden of the patient of the earth.
 His camel bore the burden of the damned,
 Being gaunt, with eyes aslant along the nose.
 He had a friend, who hammered bronze and iron
 And cupped the moonstone on a silver ring,
 One constant like himself, would come at night
 Or bid him as a guest, when they would make
 Their poets touch a starrier height, or search
 Together with unparsimonious mind
 The crowded harbours of mortality.
 And there were jests, wholesome as harvest ale,
 Of homely habit, bred of hearts that dared
 Judgment of laughter under the eternal eye :
 This frolic wisdom was his carven owl.
 His ram was lordship on the lonely hills,
 Alert and fleet, content only to know
 The wind mightily pouring on his fleece,
 With yesterday and all unrisen suns
 Poorer than disinherited ghosts. His bat
 Was ancient envy made a mockery,
 Cowering below the newer eagle carved

Above the arches with wide pinion spread,
 His faith's dominion of that happy dawn.

And so he wrought the gods upon the wall,
 Living and crying out of his desire,
 Out of his patient incorruptible thought,
 Wrought them in joy was wages to his faith.
 And other than the gods he made. The stalks
 Of bluebells heavy with the news of spring,
 The vine loaded with plenty of the year,
 And swallows, merely tenderness of thought
 Bidding the stone to small and fragile flight ;
 Leaves, the thin relics of autumnal boughs,
 Or massed in June. . . .
 All from their native pressure bloomed and
 sprang
 Under his shaping hand into a proud
 And governed image of the central man,—
 Their moulding, charts of all his travelling.
 And all were deftly ordered, duly set
 Between the windows, underneath the sills,
 And roofward, as a motion rightly planned,
 Till on the wall, out of the sullen stone,
 A glory blazed, his vision manifest,
 His wonder captive. And he was content.

And when the builders and the carvers knew
Their labour done, and high the temple stood
Over the cornlands, king and counsellor
And priest and chosen of the people came
Among a ceremonial multitude
To dedication. And, below the thrones
Where king and archpriest ruled above the throng,
Highest among the ranked artificers
The carvers stood. And when, the temple vowed
To holy use, tribute and choral praise
Given as was ordained, the king looked down
Upon the gathered folk, and bade them see
The comely gods fashioned about the walls,
And keep in honour men whose precious skill
Could so adorn the sessions of their worship,
Gravely the carvers bowed them to the ground.

Only the man with wide and patient eyes
Stood not among them ; nor did any come
To count his labour, where he watched alone
Above the coloured throng. He heard, and looked
Again upon his work, and knew it good,
Smiled on his toad, passed down the stair unseen,
And sang across the teeming meadows home.

IN LADY STREET

ALL day long the traffic goes
 In Lady Street by dingy rows
 Of sloven houses, tattered shops—
 Fried fish, old clothes and fortune-tellers—
 Tall trams on silver-shining rails,
 With grinding wheels and swaying tops,
 And lorries with their corded bales,
 And screeching cars. "Buy, buy!" the sellers
 Of rags and bones and sickening meat
 Cry all day long in Lady Street.

And when the sunshine has its way
 In Lady Street, then all the grey
 Dull desolation grows in state
 More dull and grey and desolate,
 And the sun is a shamefast thing,
 A lord not comely-housed, a god
 Seeing what gods must blush to see,
 A song where it is ill to sing,
 And each gold ray despiteously
 Lies like a gold ironic rod.

Yet one grey man in Lady Street
 Looks for the sun. He never bent
 Life to his will, his travelling feet
 Have scaled no cloudy continent,
 Nor has the sickle-hand been strong.
 He lives in Lady Street; a bed,
 Four cobwebbed walls.

But all day long
 A time is singing in his head
 Of youth in Gloucester lanes. He hears
 The wind among the barley-blades,
 The tapping of the woodpeckers
 On the smooth beeches, thistle-spades
 Slicing the sinewy roots; he sees
 The hooded filberts in the copse
 Beyond the loaded orchard trees,
 The netted avenues of hops;
 He smells the honeysuckle thrown
 Along the hedge. He lives alone,
 Alone—yet not alone, for sweet
 Are Gloucester lanes in Lady Street.

Aye, Gloucester lanes. For down below
 The cobwebbed room this grey man plies
 A trade, a coloured trade. A show
 Of many-coloured merchandise
 Is in his shop. Brown filberts there,
 And apples red with Gloucester air,
 And cauliflowers he keeps, and round
 Smooth marrows grown on Gloucester ground,
 Fat cabbages and yellow plums,
 And gaudy brave chrysanthemums,
 And times a glossy pheasant lies
 Among his store, not Tyrian dyes
 More rich than are the neck-feathers;
 And times a prize of violets,
 Or dewy mushrooms satin-skinned

And times an unfamiliar wind
Robbed of its woodland favour stirs
Gay daffodils this grey man sets
Among his treasure.

All day long

In Lady Street the traffic goes
By dingy houses, desolate rows
Of shops that stare like hopeless eyes.
Day long the sellers cry their cries,
The fortune-tellers tell no wrong
Of lives that know not any right,
And drift, that has not even the will
To drift, toils through the day until
The wage of sleep is won at night.
But this grey man heeds not at all
The hell of Lady Street, His stall
Of many-coloured merchandise
He makes a shining paradise,
As all day long chrysanthemums
He sells, and red and yellow plums
And cauliflowers. In that one spot
Of Lady Street the sun is not
Ashamed to shine and send a rare
Shower of colour through the air ;
The grey man says the sun is sweet
On Gloucester lanes in Lady Street.

Elizabeth Ann

THIS is the tale of Elizabeth Ann,
Who went away with her fancy man.

Ann was a girl who hadn't a gown
As fine as the ladies who walk the town.

All day long from seven to six
Ann was polishing candlesticks,

For Bishops and crapulous Millionaires
To buy for their altars or bed-chambers.

And youth in a year and a year will pass,
But there's never an end of polishing brass.

All day long from seven to six—
Seventy thousand candlesticks.

So frail and lewd Elizabeth Ann
Went away with her fancy man.

You Bishops and crapulous Millionaires,
Give her your charity, give her your prayers.

OXFORD CANAL

WHEN you have wearied of the valiant spires of this
 County Town,
 Of its wide white streets and glistening museums, and
 black monastic walls,
 Of its red motors and lumbering trams, and self-sufficient people,
 I will take you walking with me to a place you have not seen —
 Half town and half country — the land of the Canal.

It is dearer to me than the antique town: I love it more than the
 rounded hills:

Straightest, sublimest of rivers is the long Canal.

I have observed great storms and trembled: I have wept for fear
 of the dark.

But nothing makes me so afraid as the clear water of this idle
 canal on a summer's noon.

Do you see the great telephone poles down in the water, how
 every wire is distinct?

If a body fell into the canal it would rest entangled in those wires
 for ever, between earth and air.

For the water is as deep as the stars are high.

One day I was thinking how if a man fell from that lofty pole

He would rush through the water toward me till his image was
 scattered by his splash,

When suddenly a train rushed by: the brazen dome of the engine
 flashed: the long white carriages roared;

The sun veiled himself for a moment, and the signals loomed in
 fog;

A savage woman screamed at me from a barge: little children
 began to cry;

The untidy landscape rose to life; a sawmill started;

A cart rattled down to the wharf, and workmen clanged over the
 iron footbridge;

A beautiful old man nodded from the first story window of a
 square red house,

And a pretty girl came out to hang up clothes in a small delightful
 garden.

O strange motion in the suburb of a county town: slow regular
 movement of the dance of death!

Men and not phantoms are these that move in light.

Forgotten they live, and forgotten die.

THE BURIAL IN ENGLAND

THESE then we honour: these in fragrant earth
 Of their own country in great peace forget
 Death's lion-roar and gust of nostril-flame
 Breathing souls across to the Evening Shore.
 Soon over these the flowers of our hill-sides
 Shall wake and wave and nod beneath the bee
 And whisper love to Zephyr year on year,
 Till the red war gleam like a dim red rose
 Lost in the garden of the Sons of Time.
 But ah what thousands no such friendly doom
 Awaits — whom silent comrades in full night
 Gazing right and left shall bury swiftly
 By the cold flicker of an alien moon.

Ye veiled women, ye with folded hands,
 Mourning those you half hoped for Death too dear,
 I claim no heed of you. Broader than earth
 Love stands eclipsing nations with his wings,
 While Pain, his shadow, delves as black and deep
 As he e'er flamed or flew. Citizens draw
 Back from their dead awhile. Salute the flag!
 If this flag though royally always borne,
 Deceived not dastard, ever served base gold;

And side by side troop up the old partisans,
 The same laughing, invincible, tough men
 Who gave Napoleon Europe like a loaf,
 For slice and portion, — not so long ago!
 Either to Alsace or loved lost Lorraine
 They pass, or inexpugnable Verdun
 Ceintured with steel, or stung with faith's old cry
 Assume God's vengeance for his temple stones.
 But you maybe best wish them for the north
 Beside you 'neath low skies in loamed fields,
 Or where the great line hard on the duned shore
 Ends and night leaps to England's sea-borne flame.
 Never one drop of Lethe's stagnant cup
 Dare dim the fountains of the Marne and Aisne
 Since still the flowers and meadow-grass unmown
 Lie broken with the imprint of those who fell,
 Briton and Gaul — but fell immortal friends
 And fell victorious and like tall trees fell.

But young men, you who loiter in the town,
 Need you be roused with overshouted words,
 Country, Empire, Honour, Liège, Louvain?
 Pay your own Youth the duty of her dreams.
 For what sleep shall keep her from the thrill
 Of War's star-smiting music, with its swell
 Of shore and forest and horns high in the wind,

(Yet pierced with that too sharp piping which if man
 Hear and not fear he shall face God unscathed):
 What, are you poets whose vain souls contrive
 Sorties and sieges spun of the trickling moon
 And such a rousing ghost-catastrophe
 You need no concrete marvels to be saved:
 Or live you here too lustily for change:
 Sail you such pirate seas on such high quests,
 Hunt you thick gold or striped and spotted beasts,
 Or tread the lone ways of the swan-like mountains:
 Excused. But if, as I think, breeched in blue,

Stalled at a counter, cramped upon a desk,
 You drive a woman's pencraft — or a slave's,
 What chain shall hold you when the trumpets play,
 Calling from the blue hill behind your town,
 Calling over the seas, calling for you!
 'But' — do you murmur? — 'we'd not be as those.
 Death is a dour recruiting-sergeant: see,
 These women weep, we celebrate the dead.'
 Boys, drink the cup of warning dry. Face square
 That old grim hazard, 'Glory-or-the-Grave.'
 Not we shall trick your pleasant years away,
 Yet is not Death the great adventure still,
 And is it all loss to set ship clean anew
 When heart is young and life an eagle poised:
 Choose, you're no cowards. After all, think some,
 Since we are men and shrine immortal souls
 Surely for us as for these nobly dead
 The Kings of England lifting up their swords
 Shall gather at the gate of Paradise.

SOLWAY FORD

HE greets you with a smile from friendly eyes,
 But never speaks nor rises from his bed :
 Beneath the green night of the sea he lies,
 The whole world's waters weighing on his head.

The empty wain made slowly over the sand,
 And he with hands in pockets by the side
 Was trudging, deep in dream, the while he scanned
 With blue, unseeing eyes the far-off tide,
 When, stumbling in a hole, with startled neigh
 His young horse reared and, snatching at the rein,
 He slipped : the wheels crushed on him as he lay ;
 Then, tilting over him, the lumbering wain
 Turned turtle, as the plunging beast broke free
 And made for home ; and, pinioned and half-dead,
 He lay and listened to the far-off sea
 And seemed to hear it surging overhead
 Already, though 'twas full an hour or more
 Until high-tide when Solway's shining flood
 Should sweep the shallow firth from shore to shore.
 He felt a salty tingle in his blood
 And seemed to stifle, drowning : then again
 He knew that he must lie a lingering while
 Before the sea might close upon his pain,
 Although the advancing waves had scarce a mile
 To travel, creeping nearer inch by inch
 With little runs and sallies over the sand.
 Cooped in the dark, he felt his body flinch
 From each cold wave as it drew nearer hand.
 He saw the froth of each oncoming crest
 And felt the tugging of the ebb and flow
 And waves already breaking over his breast—
 Though still far-off they murmured faint and low,

Yet creeping nearer inch by inch, and now
 He felt the cold drench of the drowning wave
 And the salt cold of death on lips and brow,
 And sank and sank . . . while still, as in a grave,
 In the close dark beneath the crushing cart
 He lay and listened to the far-off sea.
 Wave after wave was knocking at his heart
 And swishing, swishing, swishing ceaselessly
 About the wain—cool waves that never reached
 His cracking lips to slake his hell-hot thirst . . .
 Shrill in his ears a startled barn-owl screeched . . .
 He smelt the smell of oil-cake . . . when there burst
 Through the big barn's wide-open door the sea—
 The whole sea sweeping on him with a roar . . .
 He clutched a falling rafter dizzily . . .
 Then sank through drowning deeps to rise no more.

Down, ever down, a hundred years he sank
 Through cold green death, ten thousand fathom deep.
 His fiery lips deep draughts of cold sea drank
 That filled his body with strange icy sleep
 Until he felt no longer that numb ache,
 The dead-weight lifted from his legs at last—
 And yet he gazed with wondering eyes awake
 Up the green glassy gloom through which he passed,
 And saw far overhead the keels of ships
 Grow small and smaller, dwindling out of sight,
 And watched the bubbles rising from his lips,
 And silver salmon swimming in green night,
 And queer big golden bream with scarlet fins
 And emerald eyes and fiery-flashing tails,

Enormous eels with purple-spotted skins,
And mammoth unknown fish with sapphire scales
That bore down on him with red jaws agape
Like yawning furnaces of blinding heat ;
And when it seemed to him as though escape
From those hell-mouths were hopeless, his bare feet
Touched bottom, and he lay down in his place
Among the dreamless legion of the drowned,
The calm of deeps unsounded on his face
And calm within his heart, while all around

Upon the midmost ocean's crystal floor
The naked bodies of dead seamen lay,
Dropped sheer and clean from hubbub brawl and roar
To peace too deep for any tide to sway.

The little waves were lapping round the cart
Already when they rescued him from death.
Life cannot touch the quiet of his heart
To joy or sorrow as, with easy breath
And smiling lips, upon his back he lies
And never speaks or rises from his bed,
Gazing through those green glooms with happy eyes
While gold and sapphire fish swim overhead.

THE TRAMCAR

HUMMING and creaking, the car down the street
 Lumbered and lurched through thunderous gloam,
 Bearing us, spent and dumb with the heat,
 From office and counter and factory home—

Sallow-faced clerks, genteel in black ;
 Girls from the laundries, draggled and dank ;
 Ruddy-faced labourers slouching slack ;
 A broken actor, grizzled and lank ;

A mother with querulous babe on her lap ;
 A schoolboy whistling under his breath ;
 An old man crouched in a dreamless nap ;
 A widow with eyes on the eyes of death ;

A priest ; a sailor with deep-sea gaze ;
 A soldier in scarlet with waxed moustache ;
 A drunken trollop in velvet and lace—
 All silent in that tense hush . . . when a flash

Of lightning shivered the sultry gloom :
 With shattering brattle the whole sky fell
 About us—and, rapt to a dazzling doom,
 We glided on in a timeless spell

Unscathed through deluge and flying fire
 In a magical chariot of streaming glass,
 Cut off from our kind and the world's desire,
 Made one by the awe that had come to pass.

THE FURNACE

A room in tenements. JOSEPH PRINGLE, a stoker, his head and body swathed in bandages, lies on the bed unconscious and moaning incessantly. ELEANOR PRINGLE, his wife, with her young baby at her breast, stands in the doorway talking to BESSIE PURDHAM, a neighbour. Her other two children, aged three years and two years, stand silent by the bed, gazing wonderingly at their father.

BESSIE. I heard the doctor go, and so I've come
To see if I can be of any use.

ELEANOR. There's nothing more to do.

BESSIE. I thought, perhaps . . .

ELEANOR. There's nothing more . . . the doctor and the nurse
Did all that could be done before they went :
They only left when they could do no good
By staying. They said they'd come again to-night
If he . . . if he . . .

BESSIE. Nay, don't take on so, woman :
Your husband soon will be himself again.

ELEANOR. Himself !

BESSIE. Keep a brave heart.

ELEANOR. The doctor says
There's little hope.

BESSIE. 'Twas strange to bring him here.

ELEANOR. Here—to his home ? Where would you have him
taken ?

They brought him home. . . . Ah God !

BESSIE. The hospital. . . .

ELEANOR. It was too far, the doctor said, too far . . .
'Twasn't worth while to take him such a journey,
When there was little hope for him ; and so
They didn't carry him past his own door
To bear him among strangers, but brought him in
And laid him on the bed. 'Twasn't worth while. . . .

BESSIE. How did it happen ?

ELEANOR. No one seems to know :
They found him on his face at the furnace-door,
The life wellnigh burnt out of him : his head
And breast and hands . . . Oh, it's too terrible
To think of, neighbour !

BESSIE. He must have fainted, then.

ELEANOR. No one will ever know unless he should . . .
But he's not spoken since : he only moans.
The doctor swears he's certain he's not conscious
And cannot feel it much ; he's too far gone,
And mayn't come to himself again. If he
Should never speak !

BESSIE. Gey queer the lad should faint—
He always seemed so strong.

ELEANOR. They say his shovel
Had tumbled in the furnace and the heat
Had crumpled it like paper—almost melted :
And he, himself—he'd only fallen short :
His head and breast and hands. . . . Oh, how he moans !
He hasn't spoken. . . . If he shouldn't speak . . .
If he should not come to himself . . . if he . . .
Ah God, and he so young !

BESSIE. How old's your husband ?

ELEANOR. Just twenty-three come March.

BESSIE. So young ! And you ?

ELEANOR. I'm twenty, turned.

BESSIE. Why, you are only bairns,
The pair of you.

ELEANOR. Yet Jacob is a father,
And I'm a mother . . . a father . . . and his bairns,
What will become of them if he should leave them—
And they just babes ; and winter coming on ?

BESSIE. He may be well by then, and they have you.

ELEANOR. What can I do without him, think you,
woman ?

BESSIE. You can but do your best : none can do more.
 If only they'd been boys to make a fend. . . .
 But keep a brave heart : surely at the worst
 The masters will do something : there'll be money :
 You'll not fare badly . . .

ELEANOR. Money . . . woman . . . money !
 I want naught with their money. I want my husband :
 The children want their father. Money . . . money !
 Let them pitch all their money in the furnace
 Where he . . . where he . . . I wouldn't touch a farthing—
 Not a brass farthing : 'twould burn my fingers. Money—
 For him !

BESSIE. You wouldn't have your children starve ?
 Money is bread.

ELEANOR. Nay, but I'll work for them :
 They shall not want while I can lift a finger.
 He loves them, and has slaved so hard for them.
 If he can work no more for them, am I
 Not strong to work ? He is so fond of them,
 And always when he comes home . . . They brought him home,
 And he has never spoken—not a word
 He has for them ; and he was always cheery,
 And picked them up, and dandled them and danced them,
 And tossed them to the ceiling. Look, how they wait,
 Poor bairns ; they cannot understand at all
 Why he should say no word, but only moan. . . .
 Ah, how he moans ! If he would only speak. . . .
 The last thing I said to him as he went out
 Was : " Lad, you talk too much : your tongue's too slack."
 For he was chaffing me—" You talk too much,"
 I said—and now ! If he should never speak !

BESSIE. He's muttering now.

JACOB. The big red gaping mouth !

ELEANOR. He's wandering !

BESSIE. Ay, he thinks he's at the furnace.

JACOB. I feed and feed and feed it,
 And yet it's never full,
 But always gaping, gaping,
 And licking its red lips.
 I feed it with my shovel all night long :
 I shovel without ceasing,
 But it just licks the coke in in a twinkling,
 And roars and roars for more.
 I cannot feed it faster,
 And it's angry.
 I shovel all night long
 Till I can hardly stand ;
 The sweat pours out of me,
 And then it licks the sweat up with its breath,
 And roars more fiercely.
 My eyes are coals of fire :
 My arms can scarcely lift
 Another shovelful. . . .
 Oh, how it roars !

It's angry
 Because I cannot feed it faster.
 The red tongue licks the shovel
 As though it would devour it :
 The shovel is red-hot . . .
 It melts . . . it melts . . .
 It's melting in my hands . . .
 I cannot drop it . . .
 My hands are full of molten iron !
 Water . . . Ah God !
 My hands . . . my hands . . .
 Oh !

ELEANOR. And there is nothing I can do for him !
I am his wife and yet I can do nothing :
The doctor said there was no more to do :
They left me naught to do for him.

BESSIE. Nay, lass,
There's nothing to be done. He's quiet now.
Happen he'll sleep.

JACOB. The great red eyes—
They burn me through and through :
They never sleep,
But always glower at me :
They never even blink,
But stare and stare. . . .
I cannot look on them a minute longer—
I cannot face them. . . .
Still, ah God !
I cannot shut them out . . .
They burn right through my eyelids,
And set my eyes afire. . . .
My eyelids are red-hot
And scorch my eyes . . .
My eyes, my eyes !
Oh, I would tear them out . . .
But I—I cannot lift my hands—
They're full of molten iron. . . .
My hands !
Oh !

BESSIE. He seems quite spent: happen the worst is
over.

ELEANOR. Oh, would to God . . .

JACOB. The big red gaping mouth . . .
It gapes
And licks its lips,
And roars and roars for food.
I cannot breathe . . .
Its hot breath stifles me,
And tries to suck me in—
Into that roaring hell.
It gapes . . . it gapes . . .
For me !
I cannot feed it fast enough. . . .
It's angry
And roars and roars with hunger.
Some night the red tongue will shoot out and lick me
Into that blazing hell-mouth—
Will lick me to a cinder,
A handful of white ash.
It will shoot out . . .
Ah God, the fiery tongue
Is all about me now . . .
It wraps me round and round,
And licks me in. . . .
At last the furnace has me—
The furnace I have feared :
I burn . . . I burn . . .

ELEANOR. That he should suffer so ! I cannot bear . . .
Ah God, that he . . .

JACOB. A handful of white ash !

THE ELDEST CHILD. Mother, what is a furnace ?

ELEANOR. My poor bairn,

That you should hear ! I scarcely knew you listened.
A furnace is the mouth of . . . nay, my lass,
A furnace is a big, big fire.

CHILD. A fire ?

But why is daddy scared ? I'm not afraid
Of the fire ; I sit quite close and warm my hands.
I'd love a big, big fire and wouldn't be
Afraid of it, so why is daddy frightened ?
I've often sat on his knee quite close and watched
The pretty dancing flames. If he'd let on
He was frightened, I'd have held his hand, I would.

ELEANOR. And he will nevermore sit by his hearth,

His bairns on his knee, and listen to their prattle.
He was so proud . . .

BESSIE. He doesn't moan so much,
And hardly moves. I think . . . But hark, he tries
To speak again. His voice is weaker now,
And he can scarcely whisper.

JACOB. O mother, do you see the little flame
Leaping above the bars,
And dancing in and out?
Look, how he dances, dances—
Dances on the red-hot coals!
Oh, now he's gone—
He must have heard me talking. . . .
But there he is again,
And laughing at me,
And waving his red cap.

BESSIE. The worst is over: he's easier now.

ELEANOR. His mind
Is wandering back to his old home: he's heard
The bairn, and fancies he's a bairn again.

JACOB. I love to watch the fire:
And when I am a man
I'll mind a furnace, mother,
And feed it all day long
And watch it blaze
And listen to its roaring.
Look, mother, do you see the little flame
Running right down into that deep red hollow,
And waving me to follow after?
I'd like to follow him
And run right down—
Right down that golden lane
Among the dancing flames,
And dance with them.
Ah, there he is—
And laughing at me,
And waving his red cap . . .
And dancing . . . dancing . . .

(A pause.)

CHILD. O mother, look—the fire has gone black out!

BESSIE. He doesn't moan now.

ELEANOR. He's more easy—

He doesn't stir. . . . How quiet he has grown! . . .
It's strange he lies so still so suddenly. . . .
If he would speak to me!

BESSIE. He's easy now:
But he will never stir again, nor speak.

ELEANOR. Jacob, one word!

CHILD. He isn't frightened now.

MATES

A pit-village. The living-room of CHARLOTTE AYNSLEY'S cottage. CHARLOTTE AYNSLEY and GRACE HARDY (betrothed to CHARLOTTE'S son, MARTIN) stand by the fire talking together.

CHARLOTTE. Nay, lass, I cannot turn him from his bent :
He pays no heed to me ; he'll have his way,
For all I can urge, though I should talk till doomsday.
He's just his father over.

GRACE. But have you said . . .

CHARLOTTE. Haven't I said to him all a mother's heart
Can say—a heart left . . . Could I leave a word
Unsaid to save the only son that's spared me—
To save him from the death that overtook
His father and his brothers that night, when I—
I slumbered sound, and never dreamt of danger,
While they, my husband and my sons . . . and Martin,
Though only by a hair's breadth he escaped,
And came to me again—yet he'll not quit
The mine for all my pleading. Happen if you . . .

GRACE. Nay, but I've talked and talked, and couldn't get
A word from him. Will you not try again ?

CHARLOTTE. What is there left to try ? How could I leave
A stone unturned ? Do I not lie awake
The livelong night, thinking of way and means
To keep him from the pit ? I've scarcely slept
Since . . . since that night I slept so sound. . . . It seems
He cannot break with it—the pit that all
His folk have worked so long in. It is said
That Martin's father's grandfather was born

At the pit-bottom—ay, lass, born and died there :
For two days after he was wed they found him,
Crushed by a fall ; ay, in the selfsame level
His mother bore him, and he met his death :
For womenfolk worked in the pits in those days—
Young girls and wives, and mothers near their time,
And little children naked.

GRACE. There's naught else
He cares to try his hand at ?

CHARLOTTE. Nay, already
I've offered to set him up in any trade
Might take his fancy. Why, this very morning,
When he came in from work, I said I'd buy
A horse and cart with stock-in-trade to hawk—
For hawking hardly seems the kind of job
Needs a man brought up to it—at least a lad
With Michael's gumption . . . though I've heard folk say
Hawkers are born, not made, and my old father
Would always have it folk are little good
At jobs they take up. "It's the wrong way round,"
He used to say : "the job should take the man up."
And father knew . . .

GRACE. But what did Martin say ?

CHARLOTTE. He only laughed at first, but when I
pressed,
He shrugged his shoulders and, turning, looked me straight
Between the eyes—you know the way he has—
Looked at me with his father's eyes, and said :
"Nay, mother, I'm a pitman." Martin's just
His father over.

GRACE. That was all ?

CHARLOTTE. All, daughter ?
And wasn't it enough ? There's nothing more
To say : the Aynsleys are a stubborn breed,
And Martin always knows his mind : his right
Is right ; and he will never leave the pit,
Although his father and brothers . . . and he, himself . . .
I never shall sleep soundly any more—
Though sound enough I slept that night when they
Were dying. . . . I . . .

GRACE. I'll speak with him again.
Perhaps . . .

CHARLOTTE. He'll hark to you if he'll pay heed
To any one.

GRACE. O Charlotte, do you think
He cares so much for me?

CHARLOTTE. Ay, lass, he cares.

GRACE. If I could only . . . yet if he'll not heed
His mother . . .

CHARLOTTE. Seemingly she's lost her hold :
He's long since broken from her apron-strings.
It's your turn now, and you must try your strength
With him. He's stubborn, but he's fond of you ;
And when his heart is set on anything
He's just his father over. When Stephen first
Walked out with me, his mother used to try . . .
But Martin's stirring : I must get his bait :
Ay, even while we talk of him, he's dressing
To go on the night-shift ! Talk !

GRACE. Yes, I must try
My hand. If I could turn . . .

CHARLOTTE. Pray God you may !
There's still a chance though I . . . It's your turn now :
I'm only Martin's mother. When Stephen wooed
I was more to him than any, and you'll be more . . .
Hark how he whistles ! his heart's light enough :
And in another moment he'll be out.
I'll leave you here to speak with him alone.
If he asks, just say I'm fetching coals—coals ! coals !
God knows their cost, though we get them free ! Sometimes
I can hardly bear to see a fire, and think
Of all the burning lives. . . . We get them free,
Or so they tell us, free ! He'll soon be out :
His bait's on the table, though happen I'll be back
Before he leaves.

GRACE. Nay, Charlotte, don't go now.
What can I say to him ? What can I say ?

CHARLOTTE. Your heart will tell you, if you love him, lass.
But here he comes.

*(She picks up the scuttle and shovel and hurries out. MARTIN
Aynsley enters from the inner room.)*

MARTIN. Mother, this button . . . Grace !
I heard my mother's voice, but little guessed
Who talked with her or, rather, listened to her :

When her tongue's going no other's got a chance :
You couldn't slip a knife betwixt her words,
They throng so quickly on each other's heels.
Has she gone out ? I wanted her to sew . . .

GRACE. Come, lad, I'll stitch the button on.

MARTIN. You, Grace ?
Well, you've got nimble fingers : but mother, lass . . .

GRACE. She'll not be long. Come nearer to the window.
Nay, but you must stand quietly or you'll feel
My needle, Martin.

MARTIN. Then I'd best be quiet,
For I'll be wanting you often enough—I play
The very deuce with buttons. You're not afraid
When you think of all . . .

GRACE. Nay, I'll not mind the buttons ;
They'll be the least . . .

MARTIN. The least ?

GRACE. If wives had naught
To do for men but sew their buttons on,
They'd thank their stars. But, happen, some one else
Than I will sew yours on for you.

MARTIN. Why, Grace,
Who else ?

GRACE. Dear knows ! but, as things go just now,
It seems the chance is you'll go buttonless,
For any stitch I'll do.

MARTIN. What ails you, lass ?
You surely wouldn't have your husband go . . .

GRACE. My husband ? Nay, I'll tend my man. 'Twas you
I was speaking of.

MARTIN. Well, lass, I give it up ;
I cannot make out what you're driving at ;
But, if you keep your husband's buttons on,
Then I'll go snug and decent anyway.

GRACE. Lad, don't you be too sure.

MARTIN. Too sure? Why, Grace,
But you can't help yourself : I've set my heart
On you, and mother says I'm stubborn.

GRACE. Ay—
And if I'm stubborn too ?

MARTIN. You stubborn, Grace ?
But you don't know me !

GRACE. And are you so sure
You've nothing to learn of me ?

MARTIN. I'm sure you're mine
Beyond all help, my lass : you're true to me.

GRACE. God knows I'm true : but still it's not too late . . .

MARTIN. Come, woman, more than enough of foolishness.
You're stitched to me as firmly as this button
You've just sewn on so strongly.

GRACE. As firmly—yes,
I've sewn it on, but I can snip it off
With much less labour.

MARTIN. Not if I hold the scissors.

(*Snatches them up.*)

Nay, you may tug and tug—your work will stand it ;
'Twill not give way, though you should tug my shirt off ;
Your work's too good : and you are mine as surely.
But, lass, enough of this. If I'd only known
You were here I should—but you and mother seemed
To have enough to talk about without me.

GRACE. We'd much to talk of.

MARTIN. Only half-awake,
I heard her at it with some one ; and I lay
And wondered what the deuce 'twas all about.
You womenfolk must always chatter, chatter :
You've got such restless tongues.

GRACE. Yet it's the men
Who keep them at it.

MARTIN. The men ?

GRACE. Foolhardy men
Who don't care how they wreck the women's peace.

MARTIN. Now I catch on : there's more than buttons—ay !
I little need to ask what kept you clacking :
You've put your heads together, but it's useless :
I cannot leave the pit, though you and mother
Should talk till doomsday : so that's all about it.

GRACE. For my sake, Martin ?

MARTIN. Little I'd not do
For your sake, as you know, lass, but not this.
You wouldn't have me cowardly for your sake ?
How should I face my mates if I forsook them ?
You wouldn't have me go the rest of my days,
A mongrel cur with tail between his legs,

And always slinking round the nearest corner
Whenever my old mates went by to take
Their usual shift ? Nay, but I'll hold my head up
A man among the men for your sake—ay,
For your sake.

GRACE. Who would dare to call you coward—
And knowing all you'd been through ?

MARTIN. Lass, there's one
Knows all I've been through who would call me coward.

GRACE. Who, Martin ?

MARTIN. Can you ask ? One Martin Aynsley.

GRACE. Ay, lad . . . and yet if you care naught for me,
Think of your mother, Martin. You know she's lost
Her man and all her sons but you, and cannot
Rest while you're in the pit.

MARTIN. You know I care
For you and think of her, and yet I'm sure
Of one thing, though you'll not believe it now—
If I forsook the pit, the time would come
You'd both despise me in your hearts.

GRACE. Nay, lad!

MARTIN. As sure as death. I cannot leave the pit:
My father died, and I must die, a pitman.
You surely wouldn't have me chuck the work
I was born and bred to, and throw over my mates,
The lads I went to school with—lads I've had
Such games and larks with? Not too many left . . .
But all there are went through that night with me:
Before that night, happen I might have left them:
But now, how could I? Nay, I'll take my chance.

GRACE. Then some one else must sew . . .

MARTIN. Hark!

GRACE. What do you hear?

MARTIN. I thought I heard him whistling.

GRACE. Who?

MARTIN. Nick Dodd:

But that's not him. He always whistles for me
At Jackson's corner, and we go to work
Together.

GRACE. Ay, he'd whistle you to death,
And you—you'd follow him.

MARTIN. Shame on you, lass!

How can you talk like that, when you know well
That, but for him, I'd be a dead man now?
'Twas Nick alone who dragged me from the death
That overtook my father and my brothers:
He didn't leave me in the lurch. Shall I
Forsake him now, lass? At the first alarm
He sought me, and together we made back
Along the main seam in the pitchy dark
Before the chokedamp, till it gained on us,
And I was overcome and dropped to die,
When Nicholas picked me up and carried me
Half-senseless in his arms—at every step
Stumbling and staggering over dead and dying—
Along the stifling galleries, though he,
Himself, could scarcely struggle against the damp.
He bore me into safety, and kept the spark
Of life in me till we were rescued.

GRACE. Yet

You'd go through that again?

MARTIN. With Nick I would,

If need be, Grace.

GRACE. He's more to you than I?

MARTIN. Nay, lass, you know!

GRACE. Yet you'd not leave the pit

For my sake, while you'd go to death for his?

MARTIN. I'd go to death for Nick's sake, and I'd not be
A coward even for your sake.

GRACE. You must choose

Betwixt us.

MARTIN. Grace!

GRACE. Ay, you must choose, and now.

I cannot lead the life your mother leads,
Or my own mother's either. You know that night
My father and brothers were lost with yours, and I,
Who saw them brought in one by one and laid
On their beds with faces covered—how could I rest
At all with that remembrance in my heart,
While you were in the pit, always afraid
You too at any moment might be brought . . .
Or never come to me again at all?
How could I live with ears for ever listening
To hear that awful rumbling underground,

Dreading to see the flames shoot up the shaft?
How could I sleep . . .

(A shrill whistle sounds.)

He whistles you, your mate—
And who am I to keep you? Leave me now
For him—and I . . . and I . . .

MARTIN. Grace!

GRACE. Martin . . . Nay,
But you must make your choice. He whistles louder:
He's losing patience. Hark! Nay, you must choose
Between . . .

MARTIN. The choice is made, lass: I choose him—
And you!

[He takes her in his arms, snatches a kiss, and goes out.]

GRACE *(gazing after him)*. The choice is made? And I . . .
He knows

I cannot break with him. And I must sew . . .

(Calling after him.)

You've gone without your bait, Martin!

[She picks up the basket and can from the table and runs out after him.]

Ralph Hodgson

BABYLON

If you could bring her glories back !
 You gentle sirs who sift the dust
 And burrow in the mould and must
 Of Babylon for bric-a-brac ;
 Who catalogue and pigeon-hole
 The faded splendours of her soul
 And put her greatness under glass—
 If you could bring her past to pass !

If you could bring her dead to life !
 The soldier lad ; the market wife ;
 Madam buying fowls from her ;
 Tip, the butcher's bandy cur ;
 Workmen carting bricks and clay ;
 Babel passing to and fro
 On the business of a day
 Gone three thousand years ago—
 That you cannot ; then be done,
 Put the goblet down again,
 Let the broken arch remain,
 Leave the dead men's dust alone—

Is it nothing how she lies,
 This old mother of you all,
 You great cities proud and tall
 Towering to a hundred skies
 Round a world she never knew,
 Is it nothing, this, to you ?
 Must the ghoulish work go on
 Till her very floors are gone ?
 While there's still a brick to save
 Drive these people from her grave.

The Jewish seer when he cried
 Woe to Babel's lust and pride
 Saw the foxes at her gates ;
 Once again the wild thing waits.
 Then leave her in her last decay
 A house of owls, a foxes' den ;
 The desert that till yesterday
 Hid her from the eyes of men
 In its proper time and way
 Will take her to itself again.

A CONSECRATION

NOT of the princes and prelates with periwigged—
 charioteers
 Riding triumphantly laurelled to lap the fat of the years,—
 Rather the scorned—the rejected—the men hemmed in with
 the spears ;

The men of the tattered battalion which fights till it dies,
 Dazed with the dust of the battle, the din and the cries,
 The men with the broken heads and the blood running into
 their eyes.

Not the be-medalled Commander, beloved of the throne,
 Riding cock-horse to parade when the bugles are blown,
 But the lads who carried the koppie and cannot be known.

Not the ruler for me, but the ranker, the tramp of the road,
 The slave with the sack on his shoulders pricked on with
 the goad,
 The man with too weighty a burden, too weary a load.

The sailor, the stoker of steamers, the man with the clout,
 The chantyman bent at the halliards putting a tune to the
 shout.

The drowsy man at the wheel and the tired look-out.

Others may sing of the wine and the wealth and the mirth,
 The portly presence of potentates goodly in girth ;—
 Mine be the dirt and the dross, the dust and scum of the
 earth !

THEIRS be the music, the colour, the glory, the gold ;
 Mine be a handful of ashes, a mouthful of mould,
 Of the maimed, of the halt and the blind in the rain and
 the cold—

Of these shall my songs be fashioned, my tales be told.

AMEN.

FEVER-CHILLS

He tottered out of the alleyway with cheeks the colour
of paste,
And shivered a spell and mopped his brow with a clout
of cotton waste :

“ I’ve a lick of fever-chills,” he said, “ ’n’ my inside it ’s
green,
But I’d be as right as rain,” he said, “ if I had some
quinine,—

But there ain’t no quinine for us poor sailor-men.

“ But them there passengers,” he said, “ if they gets
fever-chills,
There ’s brimmin’ buckets o’ quinine for them, ’n’ bulgin’
crates o’ pills,
’N’ a doctor with Latin ’n’ drugs ’n’ all—enough to sink
a town,
’N’ they lies quiet in their blushin’ bunks ’n’ mops their
gruel down,—

But there ain’t none ’o them fine ways for us poor
sailor-men.

“ But the Chief comes forrard ’n’ he says, says he, ‘ I
gives you a straight tip :
Come none o’ your Cape Horn fever lays aboard o’ this
yer ship.

On wi’ your rags o’ duds, my son, ’n’ aft, ’n’ down the
hole :

The best cure known for fever-chills is shovelling bloody
coal.’

It ’s *hard*, my son, that ’s what it is, for us poor sailor-
men.”

Harold Monro

RUMOUR

SOMEbody is whispering on the stair.
 What are those words half spoken, half drawn back?
 Whence are those muffled words, some red, some black?
 Who is whispering? Who is there?

Somebody is sneaking up the stair,
 His feet approaching every doorway,
 Yet never a moment standing anywhere.

Now many whisper close outside some door.
 O suddenly push it open wide.
 You see: whoever said he heard them, he has lied.

And yet words are left dark like heavy dust
 In many rooms, or red on iron like rust:
 And who contrives to leave them? Some one must.

In every street, this noisy town of ours
 Has stealthy whispering watchers walking round,

Recording all our movements, every sound,
 Hissing and shuffling, and they may have found
 To-day my name: to-morrow they'll find yours.

UNKNOWN COUNTRY

HERE, in this other world, they come and go
 With easy dream-like movements to and fro.
 They stare through lovely eyes, yet do not seek
 An answering gaze, or that a man should speak.
 Had I a load of gold, and should I come
 Bribing their friendship, and to buy a home,
 They would stare harder and would slightly frown:
 I am a stranger from the distant town.

Oh, with what patience I have tried to win
 The favour of the hostess of the Inn!
 Have I not offered toast on frothing toast
 Looking toward the melancholy host;
 Praised the old wall-eyed mare to please the groom;
 Laughed to the laughing maid and fetched her broom;
 Stood in the background not to interfere
 When the cool ancients frolicked at their beer;
 Talked only in my turn, and made no claim
 For recognition or by voice or name,
 Content to listen, and to watch the blue
 Or grey of eyes, or what good hands can do?

Sun-freckled lads, who at the dusk of day
 Stroll through the village with a scent of hay
 Clinging about you from the windy hill,

Why do you keep your secret from me still?
 You loiter at the corner of the street:
 I in the distance silently entreat.
 I know too well I'm city-soiled, but then
 So are to-day ten million other men.
 My heart is true: I've neither will nor charms
 To lure away your maidens from your arms.
 Trust me a little. Must I always stand
 Lonely, a stranger from an unknown land?

There is a riddle here. Though I'm more wise
 Than you, I cannot read your simple eyes.
 I find the meaning of their gentle look
 More difficult than any learned book.
 I pass: perhaps a moment you may chaff
 My walk, and so dismiss me with a laugh.
 I come: you all, most grave and most polite,
 Stand silent first, then wish me calm Good-Night.
 When I go back to town some one will say:
 "I think that stranger must have gone away."
 And "Surely!" some one else will then reply.
 Meanwhile, within the dark of London, I
 Shall, with my forehead resting on my hand,
 Not cease remembering your distant land;
 Endeavouring to reconstruct aright
 How some treed hill has looked in evening light;
 Or be imagining the blue of skies
 Now as in heaven, now as in your eyes;
 Or in my mind confusing looks or words
 Of yours with dawnlight, or the song of birds:
 Not able to resist, not even keep
 Myself from hovering near you in my sleep:
 You still as callous to my thought and me
 As flowers to the purpose of bee.

THE STRANGE COMPANION
(A Fragment)

THAT strange companion came on shuffling feet,
Passed me, then turned, and touched my arm.

He said (and he was melancholy,
And both of us looked fretfully,
And slowly we advanced together)
He said: "I bring you your inheritance."

I watched his eyes; they were dim.
I doubted him, watched him, doubted him . . .
But, in a ceremonious way,
He said: "You are too grey:
Come, you must be merry for a day."

And I, because my heart was dumb,
Because the life in me was numb,
Cried: "I will come. I *will* come."

So, without another word,
We two jaunted on the street.
I had heard, often heard,
The shuffling of those feet of his,
The shuffle of his feet.

And he muttered in my ear
Such a wheezy jest
As a man may often hear—
Not the worst, not the best
That a man may hear.

Then he murmured in my face
Something that was true.
He said: "I have known this long, long while,
All there is to know of you."
And the light of the lamp cut a strange smile
On his face, and we muttered along the street,
Good enough friends, on the usual beat.

We lived together long, long.
We were always alone, he and I.
We never smiled with each other;
We were like brother and brother,
Dimly accustomed.

Can a man know
Why he must live, or whether he should go?

He brought me that joke or two,
And we roared with laughter, for want of a smile,
As every man in the world might do.

He who lies all night in bed
Is a fool, and midnight will crush his head.

When he threw a glass of wine in my face
One night, I hit him, and we parted;
But in a short space
We came back to each other melancholy hearted,
Told our pain,
Swore we would not part again.

One night we turned a table over
The body of some slain fool to cover,
And all the company clapped their hands;
So we spat in their faces,
And travelled away to other lands.

I wish for every man he find
A strange companion so
Completely to his mind
With whom he everywhere may go.

FRAGMENT

WHO talked of God? Who talked of peace?
 Or the great next Great War to come?
 Who talked of times when war shall cease,
 And men walk slowly home?

I heard a jabbering mass of tongues
 Expending words on brilliant air;
 Through flashing lips I heard great lungs
 Proclaiming courage mighty fair.

Gigantic vanities low sprang
 And captured by the flimsy hair
 That innocence whose quick cries rang
 To nowhere through enormous air.

The Vast Directors growled and spumed,
 The sirens from the Factories shrieked,
 And all the Earth was vaguely fumed
 Drenched with calm smoke, and coned, and streaked.

I held my hands back to my heart
 And watched like someone at a show
 Who waits dispassionately apart
 For what the unknown dice may throw.

Then suddenly from out my dreams
 A great God furiously appeared.
 "The World is not," he said, "what seems;
 "This World is not what you have feared."

Then cosily I settled down,
 Thinking: An idle dream I've had,
 Yet all my body waxed in frown;
 Are dreams so mad? Are dreams so mad?

I spring to life from out the dark.
 Is new illumination sent?
 Some God is—if all men could hark—
 Through private vision vaguely blent.

He will not visit me to-night,
 To-morrow, or another day;
 But He, thank Him, will re-appear
 In all I do, or think, or say.

I'm stupid, yet I'm better far
 Than He, and He will never know
 This all consuming avatar
 In which I am, and live, and grow.

I'm worried, God, by your pale voice.
 You are unlike us. We to-day
 In our own anxious flesh rejoice,
 Deaf to whatever you can say.

Ring your old thunder: we won't hear.
String lightning: we have got that down.
It is no good if you draw near.
We're settled in our final town.

No wireless you can now contrive,
Old Patriarch, will make us seem
More than we are, that is, alive,
Dependent on an anxious dream.

THE POETS ARE WAITING

TO what God
Shall we chant
Our songs of Battle?

The professional poets
Are measuring their thoughts
For felicitous sonnets;

They try them and fit them
Like honest tailors
Cutting materials
For fashion-plate suits.

The unprofessional
Little singers,
Most intellectual,
Merry with gossip,
Heavy with cunning,
Whose tedious brains are draped
In sultry palls of hair,
Reclining as usual
On armchairs and sofas,
Are grinning and gossiping,
Cake at their elbows—
They will not write us verses for the time;
Their storms are brewed in teacups and their wars
Are fought in sneers or little blots of ink.

To what God
Shall we chant
Our songs of Battle?

Hefty barbarians,
Roaring for war,
Are breaking upon us;
Clouds of their cavalry,
Waves of their infantry,
Mountains of guns.
Winged they are coming,
Plated and mailed,
Snorting their jargon.
Oh, to whom shall a song of battle be chanted?

Not to our lord of the hosts on his ancient throne,
Drowning the ages out in Heaven alone.
The celestial choirs are mute, the angels have fled:
Word is gone forth abroad that our lord is dead.

To what God
Shall we chant
Our songs of battle?

YOUTH IN ARMS

I

HAPPY boy, happy boy,
David the immortal willed,
Youth a thousand thousand times
Slain, but not once killed,
Swaggering again to-day
In the old contemptuous way;

Leaning backward from your thigh
Up against the tinselled bar—
Dust and ashes! is it you?
Laughing, boasting, there you are!
First we hardly recognised you
In your modern avatar.

Soldier, rifle, brown khaki—
Is your blood as happy so?
Where's your sling, or painted shield,
Helmet, pike, or bow?
Well, you're going to the wars—
That is all you need to know.

Greybeards plotted. They were sad.
Death was in their wrinkled eyes.
At their tables, with their maps
Plans and calculations, wise
They all seemed; for well they knew
How ungrudgingly Youth dies.

At their green official baize
They debated all the night
Plans for your adventurous days
Which you followed with delight,
Youth in all your wanderings,
David of a thousand slings.

II

SOLDIER

Are you going? To-night we must all hear your laughter;
We shall need to remember it in the quiet days after.
Lift your rough hands, grained like unpolished oak.
Drink, call, lean forward, tell us some happy joke.
Let us know every whim of your brain and innocent soul.
Your speech is let loose; your great loafing words roll
Like hill-waters. But every syllable said
Brings you nearer the time you'll be found lying dead
In a ditch, or rolled stiff on the stones of a plain.
(Thought! Thought go back into your kennel again:
Hound, back!) Drink your glass, happy soldier, to-night.
Death is quick; you will laugh as you march to the fight.
We are wrong. Dreaming ever, we falter and pause:
You go forward unharmed without Why or Because.
Spring does not question. The war is like rain;
You will fall in the field like a flower without pain;
And who shall have noticed one sweet flower that dies?
The rain comes; the leaves open, and other flowers rise.

The old clock tolls. Now all our words are said.
 We drift apart and wander away to bed.
We dream of War. *Your* closing eyelids keep
 Quiet watch upon your heavy dreamless sleep.
 You do not wonder if you shall, nor why,
 If you must, by whom, for whom, you will die.
 You are snoring. (The hound of thought by every breath
 Brings you nearer for us to your foreign death.)

Are you going? Good-bye, then, to that last word you
 spoke
 We must try to remember you best by some happy joke.

III

RETREAT

That is not war—oh it hurts! I am lame.
 A thorn is burning me.
 We are going back to the place from which we came.
 I remember the old song now:

*Soldier, soldier, going to war,
 When will you come back?*

Mind that rut. It is very deep.
 All these ways are parched and raw.
 Where are we going? How we creep!
 Are you there? I never saw—

Damn this jingle in my brain.
 I'm full of old songs—Have you ever heard this?

*All the roads to victory
 Are flooded as we go.*

*There's so much blood to paddle through,
 That's why we're marching slow.*

Yes sir; I'm here. Are you an officer?
 I can't see. Are we running away?
 How long have we done it? One whole year,
 A month, a week, or since yesterday?

Damn the jingle. My brain
 Is scragged and banged—

*Fellows, these are happy times;
 Tramp and tramp with open eyes.
 Yet, try however much you will,
 You cannot see a tree, a hill,
 Moon, stars, or even skies.*

I won't be quiet. Sing too, you fool.
 I had a dog I used to beat.
 Don't try it on me. Say that again.
 Who said it? *Halt!* Why? Who can halt?
 We're marching now. Who fired? Well. Well.
 I'll lie down too. I'm tired enough.

IV

CARRION

It is plain now what you are. Your head has dropped
 Into a furrow. And the lovely curve
 Of your strong leg has wasted and is propped
 Against a ridge of the ploughed land's watery swerve.

You are swayed on waves of the silent ground;
 You clutch and claim with passionate grasp of your fingers

The dip of earth in which your body lingers;
 If you are not found,
 In a little while your limbs will fall apart;
 The birds will take some, but the earth will take most
 your heart.

You are fuel for a coming spring if they leave you here;
 The crop that will rise from your bones is healthy bread.
 You died—we know you—without a word of fear,
 And as they loved you living I love you dead.

No girl would kiss you. But then
 No girls would ever kiss the earth
 In the manner they hug the lips of men:
 You are not known to them in this, your second birth.

No coffin-cover now will cram
 Your body in a shell of lead;
 Earth will not fall on you from the spade with a slam,
 But will fold and enclose you slowly, you living dead.

Hush, I hear the guns. Are you still asleep?
 Surely I saw you a little heave to reply.
 I can hardly think you will not turn over and creep
 Along the furrows trenchward as if to die.

Edward Thomas

The Other

The forest ended. Glad I was
 To feel the light, and hear the hum
 Of bees, and smell the drying grass
 And the sweet mint, because I had come
 To an end of forest, and because
 Here was both road and inn, the sum
 Of what's not forest. But 'twas here
 They asked me if I did not pass
 Yesterday this way. 'Not you? Queer.'
 'Who then? and slept here?' I felt fear.

I learnt his road and, ere they were
 Sure I was I, left the dark wood
 Behind, kestrel and woodpecker,
 The inn in the sun, the happy mood
 When first I tasted sunlight there.
 I travelled fast, in hopes I should
 Outrun that other. What to do
 When caught, I planned not. I pursued
 To prove the likeness, and, if true,
 To watch until myself I knew.

I tried the inns that evening
 Of a long gabled high-street grey,
 Of courts and outskirts, travelling
 An eager but a weary way,
 In vain. He was not there. Nothing
 Told me that ever till that day
 Had one like me entered those doors,
 Save once. That time I dared: 'You may
 Recall'—but never-foamless shores
 Make better friends than those dull boors.

Many and many a day like this
 Aimed at the unseen moving goal

And nothing found but remedies
 For all desire. These made not whole;
 They sowed a new desire, to kiss
 Desire's self beyond control,
 Desire of desire. And yet
 Life stayed on within my soul.
 One night in sheltering from the wet
 I quite forgot I could forget.

A customer, then the landlady
 Stared at me. With a kind of smile
 They hesitated awkwardly:
 Their silence gave me time for guile.
 Had anyone called there like me,
 I asked. It was quite plain the wile
 Succeeded. For they poured out all.
 And that was naught. Less than a mile
 Beyond the inn, I could recall
 He was like me in general.

He had pleased them, but I less.
 I was more eager than before
 To find him out and to confess,
 To bore him and to let him bore.
 I could not wait: children might guess
 I had a purpose, something more
 That made an answer indiscreet.
 One girl's caution made me sore,
 Too indignant even to greet
 That other had we chanced to meet.

I sought then in solitude.
 The wind had fallen with the night; as still
 The roads lay as the ploughland rude,
 Dark and naked, on the hill.
 Had there been ever any feud
 'Twixt earth and sky, a mighty will

Closed it: the crocketed dark trees,
 A dark house, dark impossible
 Cloud-towers, one star, one lamp, one peace
 Held on an everlasting lease:

And all was earth's, or all was sky's;
 No difference endured between
 The two. A dog barked on a hidden rise;
 A marshbird whistled high unseen;
 The latest waking blackbird's cries
 Perished upon the silence keen.
 The last light filled a narrow firth
 Among the clouds. I stood serene,
 And with a solemn quiet mirth,
 An old inhabitant of earth.

Once the name I gave to hours
 Like this was melancholy, when
 It was not happiness and powers
 Coming like exiles home again,
 And weaknesses quitting their bowers,
 Smiled and enjoyed, far off from men,
 Moments of everlastingness.
 And fortunate my search was then
 While what I sought, nevertheless,
 That I was seeking, I did not guess.

That time was brief: once more at inn
 And upon road I sought my man
 Till once amid a tap-room's din
 Loudly he asked for me, began
 To speak, as if it had been a sin,
 Of how I thought and dreamed and ran
 After him thus, day after day:
 He lived as one under a ban
 For this: what had I got to say?
 I said nothing. I slipped away.

And now I dare not follow after
Too close. I try to keep in sight,
Dreading his frown and worse his laughter.
I steal out of the wood to light;
I see the swift shoot from the rafter
By the inn door: ere I alight
I wait and hear the starlings wheeze
And nibble like ducks: I wait his flight.
He goes: I follow: no release
Until he ceases. Then I also shall cease.

Roads

I love roads:
The goddesses that dwell
Far along invisible
Are my favourite gods.

Roads go on
While we forget, and are
Forgotten like a star
That shoots and is gone.

On this earth 'tis sure
We men have not made
Anything that doth fade
So soon, so long endure:

The hill road wet with rain
In the sun would not gleam
Like a winding stream
If we trod it not again.

They are lonely
While we sleep, lonelier
For lack of the traveller
Who is now a dream only.

From dawn's twilight
And all the clouds like sheep
On the mountains of sleep
They wind into the night.

The next turn may reveal
Heaven: upon the crest
The close pine clump, at rest
And black, may Hell conceal.

Often footsore, never
Yet of the road I weary,
Though long and steep and dreary,
As it winds on for ever.

Helen of the roads,
The mountain ways of Wales
And the Mabinogion tales
Is one of the true gods,

Abiding in the trees,
The threes and fours so wise,
The larger companies,
That by the roadside be,

And beneath the rafter
Else uninhabited
Excepting by the dead;
And it is her laughter

At morn and night I hear
When the thrush cock sings
Bright irrelevant things,
And when the chanticleer

Calls back to their own night
Troops that make loneliness
With their light footsteps' press,
As Helen's own are light.

Now all roads lead to France
And heavy is the tread
Of the living; but the dead
Returning lightly dance:

Whatever the road bring
To me or take from me,
They keep me company
With their pattering,

Crowding the solitude
Of the loops over the downs,
Hushing the roar of towns
And their brief multitude.

This is No Case of Petty Right or 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.

Words

Out of us all
 That make rhymes,
 Will you choose
 Sometimes—
 As the winds use
 A crack in a wall
 Or a drain,
 Their joy or their pain
 To whistle through—
 Choose me,
 You English words?

I know you:
 You are light as dreams,
 Tough as oak,
 Precious as gold,
 As poppies and corn,
 Or an old cloak:
 Sweet as our birds
 To the ear,
 As the burnet rose
 In the heat
 Of Midsummer:
 Strange as the races
 Of dead and unborn:
 Strange and sweet
 Equally,
 And familiar,
 To the eye,
 As the dearest faces
 That a man knows,
 And as lost homes are:
 But though older far
 Than oldest yew,—
 As our hills are, old,—
 Worn new
 Again and again:
 Young as our streams
 After rain:
 And as dear
 As the earth which you prove
 That we love.

Make me content
 With some sweetness
 From Wales
 Whose nightingales
 Have no wings,—
 From Wiltshire and Kent
 And Herefordshire,
 And the villages there,—
 From the names, and the things
 No less.
 Let me sometimes dance
 With you,
 Or climb
 Or stand perchance
 In ecstasy,
 Fixed and free
 In a rhyme,
 As poets do.

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