



Post War Disillusionment and English Poetry

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ABSTRACT

The long shadows of two world wars of 1914-18 and 1939-45 lay across the 20th Century. The political consequences of the I World war were Communism in Russia and as a reaction against this, Totalitarianism in Germany and Italy. The Second World war split the world into two blocks- the East dominated by Russia and the West by America.

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Introduction

The period between the two World wars offered the sharpest possible contrast to the serenity and complacency of the Victorian Era. The wars came as terrific shock to the society. The brutality of the extensive devastation of life and values led to "Sense of desolation, uncertainty, futility, the groundlessness of aspiration of the vanity of endeavor and a thirst for a life giving water which seems suddenly have failed" as it was clearly reflected by T.S.Eliot in his notes on 'The Waste Land'. The established values totally broke down in the Post War period. Attempts were being made to search new values in Political thought, Psychology and Humanity. The society was in a state of degradation and poetry could become a true criticism only when it tried to express the horror and complexities of such a world. Contemporary criticism is strangely divided in the matter of its judgment on post war poetry. There are some who raise the modernist adventurers in English poetry to the heavens and hail them as the harbingers of a greater era of poetry, while there are others who cry them down as nothing more than pretentious mediocrities undeservedly much made of. The poets who had experienced the horrors of the two World wars were deeply influenced by the disillusionment and frustration. They attempted to show the reality as it was and continued their endeavor to search the values in their poetry.

C. D. Lewis, one of the younger poets, says, succinctly summing the situation:

"....Then came for poetry, in spite of Hardy and de la Mare, a period of very low vitality. The Georgian poets, a sadly pedestrian rabble, flocked along the roads their fathers had built, pointing out to each other the beauty spots...The winds blew, the floods came...one only rode the whirl wind: Wilfred Owen killed on the Sambre, spoke above the barrage and the gas cloud. The poetry is in the pity. When it was all over it was given to an American, T. S. Eliot, to pick up some of the fragments of civilization, place them end to end, and on that crazy pavement walk precariously through the waste-land. Postwar poetry was born amongst the ruins. Its immediate ancestors are Hopkins, Owen and Eliot and Yeats, the last in the aristocratic tradition, remains the most admired among living writers...a lesson to us in integrity."

The wars saw an outburst of poetry. Some poets at their initial stages expressed the patriotic fervor and heralded the romantic concept of war. The glorification of the nationalism, patriotism, freedom, liberty and martyrdom were to be seen at this stage. But as the bloodshed grew more appalling, the poets realized the reality and tried to shatter the illusion of the splendor of war by frankly projecting the realistic and devastating picture of the agony, suffering, brutality and futility of the war. They were aware of the fact that the values of the old cultivated middle class were dead beyond to recall and that it was necessary to find expression for a new sort of sensibility.

The classification of poetry, as Pre War and Post War with reference to chronological sequence is only a matter of convenience. The process of evolution in literature is one and continuous, taking colour from the environments of a particular period, and shaped or misshaped by influences to which it may be subjected.

The Georgian poets, the War poets, and the Imagist movement which was started just before the War, have all had their due share of influence in moulding the postwar poetic consciousness, and expression. The Georgians escaped into other worlds of experience with a reflex criticism implied of the existing scheme of things. Walter de la Mare slipped into the world of childhood and extra mundane forms. Sturge Moore took refuge into other ages, the Greek, the Jewish, the Persian, peculiarly perverting the sympathies of Keats or Tennyson and siding with the defeated or lost causes. Others like Rupert Brooke, rejecting modern life, tried to found a new world on the ruins of the old in which they no longer believed. Then there were others like Wilfred Gibson, John Masefield and John Drinkwater who accepted whatever good they could find in existence and strove with the stuff of life to show of what it is made and to show to what high purposes it could be turned. Lastly there were a few other poets who could give acceptance, limited, yet definite, to contemporary intellectual and spiritual movements. Alfred Noyes represented this attitude completely and saw in the earlier glories of his country or in the career of science, a basis for the future like of mankind. All this negation, this disillusionment, this struggle, this partial acceptance, seemed, however, hardly productive of great poetry. The

Imagists, then, came and charged the Georgians with flat failure and attributed their ineffectiveness to their persistence in the use of a language and imagery that had become hopelessly out of date, a circumstance which put them at one remove from the actualities of their own time. The Imagists, therefore, in direct opposition to the Georgians, set up altogether new models for poetry when they defined a poem as an image or a succession of images and an image as that which presents an intellectual or emotional complex in an instant of time. Such a conception of the subject matter of poetry to be expressed in the manner of the French Symbolists by way of association and suggestion gave birth to a strangely new kind of poetry. Started as it was on an essential misconception as to the fundamental basis of poetry, the movement, by 1917 was completely dead as a force in the literary world. But it had a profound influence upon the postwar poetry as a whole in its spirit of adventure and audacity in flying into the face of tradition and convention. It was in fact the first literary movement, to mark a complete revolt against Victorian tradition and its pale imitators, the Georgians. Then it was that the Georgians by their alleged default or inability to respond to the needs of the time, and the Imagists by their spirit of defiance and experiment supplied the postwar poetry with the necessary stimulus in its start on a career of further experiment and greater and more accentuated defiance and rejection of conventional standards.

Charles Hamilton Sorley, Siegfried Sassoon, T.S.Eliot, Miss Edith Sitwell, W.H.Auden, C.Day Lewis, Mac Neice, Stephen Spender, Lehman and other poets have written about the agony, suffering, brutality and the futility of the wars. Some of them have also tried to find the remedy for the problem.

Charles Hamilton Sorley-

His poems express new attitudes to the wars which were different from the poems written glorifying the war. These poems express the attitude of men who have known the horror and boredom of modern warfare, sense of aimlessness and frustration, a consciousness of being a part of a huge machine that functions in an inhuman and meaningless way.

*A hundred thousand miles we go
Wheeling and tacking O'er the
Eternal plain
Some black with death and some
Are white with woe
Who sent us forth? Who takes us
Home again?*

Death in his poetry is not regarded as beautiful and heroic, it is terrible and piteous. His sonnet on the 'Dead' expresses the same idea:

*When you see millions of the
Mouthless dead
Across your dreams in pale
Battalions go
Say not soft things as other men
Have said,
That you'll remember, for you need nor so,
Give them not praise, for deaf, how
Should they know
It is not curses heaped on each
Gashed head
Nor tears, Their blind eyes see not,
Your tears flow
Nor honour, it is easy to be dead*

He considered the war as a tragic cleavage between two great nations blinded by hatred.

Siegfried Sassoon

His experience in the war has been expressed in the form of poetry. Firsthand knowledge of the conditions of warfare produced in him a bitter disillusionment and he wanted to make people realize the appalling truth. Sassoon painted the horrors of life and death in the trenches, dugouts and hospitals in his poems in a satirical way. He has written against the stupidity and vulgarity of the people who shut their eyes to the horrors and atrocities associated with war.

Wilfred Owen-

He was very much inspired and impressed by Sassoon. Having served as an infantry officer he knew the realities of war. Owen set out to present the whole reality of war, the boredom, the hopelessness, the horror, the futility, occasionally the courage and self sacrifice, but above all the pity of war. He himself wrote "*I am not concerned with poetry. My subject is war and the pity of war, the poetry is in pity*". In his poem 'Strange Meeting' he imagined that in vision or dream he had met the German Soldier he had killed the previous day. The dead man complained about his death as preventing him from telling the world the truth about war. He foresaw the whole nations marching in unbroken ranks away from progress. He had sufficient courage and wisdom to refuse, had he lined to join their march and when they had learnt through bloodshed and falsity of their ideals, he could have brought them the cleansing and healing of the truths revealed to him.

T.S.Eliot:

Disillusionment and neurotic boredom in the period after the First World War have been well expressed in his most celebrated work 'The Waste Land'. Most of the critics are of the view that 'The Waste Land' is a plight of a whole generation, an expression of disillusionment of the post war generation, that it expresses better than any other poem of that decade the sense of hopeless draft which afflicted the generation after the First World War, then it is vision of Europe, mainly of London, at the end of the First World War. (I.A.Richards in Principles of Literary Criticism Page 295).

The poem expresses disgust with modern civilization and with Post War Society. Eliot has introduced various parallels with the great literature of the past and places them next to lines describing the barrenness of England. 'The Waste Land' made a tremendous impact on the post war generation. Based on the legend of the Fisher King in the Arthurian Cycle, the poem presents the contemporary London as an arid, Waste Land. The poem is built round the symbols of drought and flood representing death and rebirth. The dead or the dying civilization of England is portrayed in the poem. The people are weary, disillusioned and depressing. They feel that civilization has betrayed them. Their elders had glorified Science and Democracy, Peace and Progress. The war, they were told was fought to end all wars to make the world safe for democracy. But the war was won at the loss of peace. The peace makers have sown the seeds of another war. There is spiritual barrenness everywhere. People want to forget the past and have nothing to look forward to the future. They have no faith, no belief. The Predicament has forced them to have a good time to give themselves up to sensual pleasure. The poem gives poetic expression to the underlying spirit of the 20th Century contrasting its bitterness with richness of life in Classical and Elizabethan time.

In his earlier poems also, this sense of despair could be noticed. Disgust with the age and with life in general which might have resulted an account of war found expression in the poems like 'The Love Song of Alfred J.Prufrock', 'The Hollow Men', 'Gerontion'.

Eliot has also tried to search the remedy for the predicament of the modern age. He found faith in religion and expressed his mystical faith in 'Ash Wednesday', 'Four Quartets'. His poetry represents a kind of gradual evolution, the progress of the soul through the suffering. 'Ash Wednesday' marks the beginning of a new phase in the poet's development, in which he finds hope in the religion. In 'Four Quartets' the intensity of Eliot's search for religious truth which leads finally to a new hope in the idea of rebirth and renewal is very much seen.

Miss Edith Sitwell-

Edith Sitwell was deeply conscious of the unhappiness and spiritual emptiness of the inter war years; she sought to escape into the world of childhood and art. With her brothers Osbert and Sacheverell, she edited 'Wheels: an Annual Anthology of Modern Verse'. She had a nostalgic regret for disappearance of the culture and all her writings reflect her aristocratic background. She believed that "Poetry is the deification of reality, and one of its purposes is to show that the dimensions of man are, as Sir Arthur Eddington said, 'half way between those of an atom and a star.'"

W.H.Auden:

He was also aware of the hollowness of the disintegrating post-war civilization. He found his solution to the world's problems in left wing political ideologies. 'In September 1939' he surveys the history of Europe, analyzing the causes of the war and asserting what his own attitude to the future will be. He begins by branding the 'Thirties' as a low dishonest decade and says that Germany had adopted Hitler as its 'Psychopathic God'. "...What huge image made

A Psychopathic God"

In other poem 'Diaspora' he comments on the Nazi oppression of Jews indirectly. Jews had to scatter over Europe and other parts of the world because of the Nazi oppression. Auden finds 'Objective Co-relative' for the contemporary situation in what happened to Christ 2000 years ago. Ages ago, the Jews had oppressed Christ, in the modern age they have been paid back in their own coin. The Nazis oppressed the Jews. In this Sonnet, Auden has compressed whole ages of history. The past fuses with the present, and the oppressors are transformed into the oppressed. Oppressors like Hitler will one day suffer as the Jews are suffering today for their sins.

In the poem 'Canzone' the poet refers to the evil and wickedness rampant in the world. Dictators like Hitler and Mussolini are making a lot of noise; the cherished values of humanity are being denounced. The masses are absent minded and unreflective that are carried away by the orations of their wicked, selfish rulers and are like 'dump driven cattle' in their hands. They have become tools in the hands of dictators and Auden firmly believes that Man's salvation lies in his learning to love rightly. Thus Auden has written about the post-war situation in his poems.

Stephen Spender-

Other important poet to be considered in this regard is Stephen Spender. Spender was deeply aware of the suffering and unhappiness of the inter-war period and like Auden expressed his hopes for the future. The majority of his poems are short lyrics and he has written mostly about the pity of war and the emotions of the lovers. His interest in contemporary history—chiefly the Spanish Civil War and World War II have been reflected in his poems. His 'Two Armies' which describes enemy forces resting at night only a few yards apart describes the pity of the war.

When the machines are stilled,
A common suffering

Whitens the air with breath and
Makes both one
As though these enemies slept in

Each other's arms

Thus English Poets have reflected the horrors of war and the frustration caused by the war in their poetry. The poets who were deeply influenced by the disastrous events did not become pessimists; on the contrary, they have faced the events boldly and bravely. They have also tried to find out the remedy for the existing problems. Sense of turmoil in the widest possible varieties of expression has been sounded by the poets. They have expressed directly or in parable their present dilemmas and plight of mankind—distrust of the past, despair of the present and fear for the future.

The Predecessors In The Field

The classification of poetry, as prewar and postwar, with reference to chronological sequence is only a matter of convenience.. The present is only a continuation of the past into altered surroundings. This makes it necessary, in speaking about the present day tendencies in literature to pay some attention to the spiritual affinities which the present has with the immediate past. Moreover, no literary movement can, or ever did, start straight into the blue without affinities or associations with what has gone before. The postwar period in English poetry, is mainly a period of deliberate experiment. The nature of the experiments and the degree of success which the innovators attained are likely to be better understood when we are in possession of the actual state of poetry just before the War.

The Change

I have mentioned the Goergian revival in poetry by about 1912, and the Imagist movement in some detail so that we may be in a better position to understand the innovations and the experiments of the later period. These two movements were in fact the spiritual predecessors of the modernist movement in poetry. Then there came the war which shaped or misshaped the whole poetic consciousness of the age. The war to end war only too completely frustrated the protestations of the optimists and the treaty makers. The "decade of despair" with its bloodless war and silent revolution only made it clear that the halcyon days of tranquility which had seemed possible in 1919 had only receded in to unrealisable dreams. The prevailing spirit of general frustration and disillusionment darkened the spiritual environment of the poet and made him a bold, rebellious but soured spirit. Poetry could hardly remain cheerful and inspiring in an atmosphere impermeable to any kind of optimism or idealism. Optimism seemed impossible in the presence of the steadily deepening disillusion. Post war poetry was thus born amongst the ruins of the world catastrophe. The general attitude of questioning and scepticism weakened all faith in or respect for authority of the church, state, or the family. The new found freedom of the philosophy of free thought, the substitution of the principle of art as imitation or representation by the principle of art as communication, together with the spirit of literary individualism that had been gradually growing since the closing years of the 19th century, all contributed only to accentuate the need for renovation in poetry which the Imagists had attempted but had failed on account of their obvious misconception both as regards the matter and form of poetry. Thus, an orgy of experimentation with new words, rhythms, forms possible and impossible, followed, supported and encouraged by the audacities of the lately discovered work of G. M. Hopkins with his "spring rhythm" and grammatical eccentricities.

The New Conception

Of all the influences which changed the face of postwar poetry the acceptance of the principle that art is communication instead of representation had the most far-reaching influence. It entirely shifted the centre of activity from objective representation to the expression of subjective consciousness. The emphasis which so far rested on the "universal" was now shifted to the "personal". Poetry had been regarded great in so far as it had been able to embody or symbolise the universal in the particular. If the traditional poet represented his personal passion in his poetry, it was of such passion that he sang and in such manner that his readers found no difficulty in realising that what he had sung about was true of the poet's personal feeling as also of humanity as a whole. The modernist poet rejected the objective representation of his thoughts, feelings and passions but sought to communicate his own individual perception and strove to recreate for the reader the experience which he had in his *own unique perception* of the universe and in the *unique universe* which he had created about him, from the material out of *his own sensations*. The attempt to communicate an experience from a universe of his own creation, apart from the external world, represents in fact an infinite extension of the range of poetic consciousness. Poetry thus proceeded from the individual and particular 'worlds' of individual and particular poets. The poet became the law to himself.

Psychology And Poetry

This deliberate shifting of the centre from an expression of the imaginative apprehension of external reality, transfigured by the shaping power of a particular imagination of a poet, to the communication of the movements in the subconscious self of a particular individual and its expression in newfangled forms, was further complicated by the increased interest which the poets took in psycho-analysis. Much of the obscurity, occasional incomprehensibility, the need for annotation and "literary midwifery" in modernist poetry proceeds from this preoccupation of the poets with the movements in the obscurer regions of the human mind. There came in evidence much deliberate effort to explore the world below the surface by methods of evocation and "Free Association." Modern psychology treats the mind as an affair of layers—the topmost being the layer of consciousness and volition—then the subconscious downward below and then further and far below extends the whole realm of the unconscious. We are told that there is a constant two way traffic between the subconscious, the unconscious and the topmost plane of consciousness. Thoughts and feelings slumbering in the lumber room of the unconscious or the subconscious in the depths of the mind may float up to the surface either unbidden or deliberately evoked. One thing suggests another and the technique of evocation may bring to surface thoughts, ideas and images, between which there may not be the least logical connection or any kind of unifying community. They are just "freely associated." The modernist poet concerned himself in expressing in words these thoughts and images, faint flickers of evanescent feelings, from the present, the immediate or the remote past, all rising in a procession in the poet's mind. Poetry thus came to be the image of the phantasmal shapes and shadows rising and vanishing in his mind. There can be no lyrical outburst, no narrative interest. There can neither be the rapture of joy nor the strong cry of agony.

Here then is something quite strange and *outré* in the methods of the new poetry in its deliberate exploitation of what lies buried below the plane of consciousness. Suggestion has always been one of the recognised methods by which poetry

obtains its effects but the difference in the manner of using suggestion by the traditionalists and the modernists will be clear when we take a concrete instance and notice the manner in which it is made to work: Macbeth on the eve of Duncan's murder, standing at the window and watching the night draw on, says:

"Light thickens and the crow

Makes wings to the rooky wood..."

or Duncan on his arrival at Macbeth's castle remarks:

"This castle had a pleasant seat..."

In both these cases we feel that the whole is haunted and suffused with undertones and in either case there follows an infinite succession of associative images of the "darkness that does the face of earth entomb" in the first instance and of ironic contrast which the simple words convey in view of the fact that the "pleasant seat" is soon going to be the scene of the vile murder of the speaker himself. In T. S. Eliot's poem "Gerontion" we come across two cryptic lines:

"Vacant shuttles

Weave the wind..."

The commentators who have, always, fortunately for the average reader, been diligent in making the poems understood, tell us that a similar phantom procession of associative images musters at the gates of the mind. Those who complain that in the first two instances from Shakespeare, the lines apart from their symbolic suggestion or ironic contrast do yield some simple sense, easily comprehensible by a literal interpretation of the words, whereas the vacant shuttles weave the wind, weaving the mind literally vacant, are told, that what matters is not the literal or the surface meaning but the 'word' of associative images and thoughts which lies below in the subconscious depths of the speaker. The "Gerontion" is a sketch of the mind of an old man in reverie. Memories of his youth, of the then conflict between Religion and Desire, fragments of past and long forgotten incidents, of the Japanese gentleman he had met, of the lady who had given him a look when he was young, all are floating in his mind. It is too much trouble for the tired old brain and his thoughts wander aimlessly on:

"Vacant shuttles

Weave the wind..."

The above illustration must have made it clear that the poet is making use of a method which involves an inherent difficulty. If the words of the poet are to mean, not what the literal sense of the words used convey, but something else, then, there arises the thousandfold possibility of his utterance being understood in thousand different ways, on account of the unpredictable character of the associations which his words may evoke, unless we assume, if only to defend the process, that there is a kind of general identity in the chain of thoughts and images conjured up by those particular evocative words and phrases. The difficulty is made all the greater by the absence of any logical coherence or conscious community in the series of evocations. Mr. C. D. Lewis explains that there is a sort of emotional sequence in such evocations but he does not explain how one can lead to another. The floating procession, therefore, when reduced to words for purposes of communication, betrays a corresponding incoherence in language so that the reader has every justification to suspect whether the poet has been talking in his sleep, or whether in his haste he hastened to the nearest telegraph office and communicated his poem in a series of incoherent and unconnected ejaculations.

The Apology

All this, the apologists for the innovators tells us, was necessary to keep poetry in touch with contemporary life. The

progress of science changed the environment of life both physically and spiritually. Poetry in the established traditional manner, we are told, with all its stock-in trade of rusty epithets and conventional images could not respond to the altered character of life in the 20th century. That the Georgian revival of 1912 was only a false dawn and proved inefficient in producing poetry in perfect harmony of spirit with the age was attributed to their still fondly clinging to an outworn tradition and their consequent inability to tap the deeper resources in the movements of national mind. They tried to keep poetry "poetical" and thus cut themselves off from contemporary life. It was thus professed that new methods in poetry in direct reaction against Victorian poetic technique and diction were long overdue so that the innovators devised a form of expression which we reckless of convention and which was calculated to include within the scope of poetical treatment, things like the gasometer and the electric power station and the rest—things around which traditional poetry had not woven a halo of 'poetic' associations. The break with the past was therefore as complete as it was deliberate. The apology, however, does not satisfy the reader whose appreciation of poetry has been moulded by an age-long tradition. He remains unsatisfied not so much because of the novelty or the quaintness of the new poetry but certainly because he fails to find in it something which he has always and invariably associated with great poetry. The long and unbroken tradition behind him tells him, that poetry, which one need not try to define, is the way of writing which can be identified as common to Shakespeare, Milton or Shelley, not to speak of Aeschylus, Catullus, Ronsard or Goethe. He has therefore every justification not to feel comfortable until he has been able to fit the 'new thing' into its old geneological tree. "I very much doubt" says Mr. Young "whether there is such a thing as did and new in poetry; only, as it were, a traveling illumination passing from one area to another of continuous and indivisible surface, bringing out what a particular age wants to see, and the area upon which many of our latest poets play their beam is one that I cannot find in any map." It is difficult to be connoisseured out of oneself to admit that Poetry in order to meet the requirements of the 20th century has changed its definition.

An Intellectual Escapism

Dissatisfaction with the present always produces a reaction and the afflicted spirit takes refuge in an escape from reality. De la Mare escaped into the world of childhood and the "dream of wake" and Edith Sitwell into an enchanted world of her own making. The modernist poets on the whole seek a refuge in an intellectually apprehended past and most of the later poets are extremely learned, greater scholars than poets. An intellectual nostalgia a harking back to the peace and culture of past ages, a revival, as in the case of T. S. Eliot and his followers, of the intellectualising spirit of the declining Renaissance, are seen in evidence in the claim of the poets to be called the "New Metaphysicals". Eliot, Pound and Edith Sitwell are primarily scholars, and to a certain extent, no doubt, the metaphysical vein of poetry, dormant since the 17th century, appears to be revived with characteristic substitution of faith in the Marxist philosophy in place of the old Christian faith of Donne's School. But in the absence of the passionate and consuming imagination of Donne, which gave to his conceits a glowing ardour and vividness, the resemblance must needs remain superficial and confined to the crabbed and tortuous audacities on the formal side of poetry. But for an equivalent pre-occupation with death, the 'fever of the bone', the post-war poetic imagination must be characterised as chill and anaemic. At best it betrays an

intellectual ardour which indicates a general bent towards a sort of neoclassicism.

Poems And Personalities

It is not possible within the brief scope of this article to study individual poets. Neither is it possible to compress within any one formula, the variety of tendencies which they exhibit. But something must be said about Eliot's "Waste Land"—a highly intellectual and depressing poem, which has exercised greater influence over postwar poetry than any other single poem. Its publication in 1922 marked the decisive beginning of the new technique of indirect suggestion of the symbolists. In the reading of the poem, the ordinary reader is as much puzzled by the wealth of its innumerable literary reminiscences and references as by the ease with which the writer uses languages other than English in the body of the poem. It has been both highly praised and severely condemned. Some critics went to the extent of calling the poem "the greatest literary hoax since Adam" but that represents an extreme view. It is possible to catch the general significance of the poem without the aid of the cumbrous notes added to it. It is neither a narrative of events nor a commentary but a psychological study in poetical form of the various intellectual and emotional cross-currents in the postwar world. It is an effort to "focus the inclusive consciousness" of a joyless and gloomy age. "The criticism has to be met" says Dr. Leavis "that the poem exists and can exist only for an extremely limited public equipped with special knowledge. But that the public for it is limited is one of the symptoms of the state of culture that produced the poem. Works expressing the finest consciousness of the age are almost inevitably such as to appeal only to a tiny minority." Here is an admission of an appreciative critic which is an eloquent testimony to the restricted appeal, the coteric spirit, the intellectual obscurity of the new poetry.

If Eliot faces the modern conditions and exposes them by an unsparing contrast with a bygone past, Miss Edith Sitwell escapes into a two-dimensional world of enchantment. In her manner, direct description is replaced by a method of communicating impressions by epithets designed to revive sensations previously experienced in contact with similar circumstances. Scrupulous avoidance of traditional imagery and metaphor, and attempts at adapting poetry to modern musical and dance rhythms, all combine in giving to her poetry an air of eccentricity. Ezra Pound's 'A draft of XXX cantos' (1930) outdoes even T. S. Eliot's 'Waste Land' in its literary allusion which is bound to be the reader's despair unless he is acquainted with the literatures of Provence, 15th century Italy and China. The theme is practically the same as that of 'Waste Land' and leaves the impression that all our boasted progress of civilization is not progress at all but only a gradual decay from the fineness of former ages. "Eternal flux" is his theme, and he hopes to give the impression that all is living, that there are no edges or convexities to check the flow. Equally obscure and equally preoccupied with death and despair is W. H. Auden, but with a more excitable imagination. Of all the moderns, Auden and Spender—and in Spender we can see the happy blend of the modernist and the traditionalist who reveres "the truly great." whose "lips were touched with fire"—alone appear to have found a natural personal language in the modern idiom, and to be capable of moving with ease in the new-fangled costume without loss of their poetic individuality.

All this, however, should not blind us to the fact that these poets are capable of extremely good poetry which sometimes flashes in the midst of vast intellectual waste lands, breaking forth, in spite of them, as it were, through their deliberate

freakishness of expression, as in Eliot's "Preludes," Sitwell's "The Hambone and the heart," Pound's "Homage to Sextus Propertius," Auden's "A bird used to visit this shore once," or Spender's poem beginning "I think continually," etc.

Poetry And Politics

"Why is it," asks Hugh Walpole, "that there is not a single poet since T. S. Eliot who commands the attention of all the English-speaking people who are interested in literature? Not a single poet who is well known as 20 to 30 years ago Masfield, De la Mare and Davies were known?" And he answers the question with an accusation against the moderns that they have grown politically-minded and *nothing else*. With the darkening of the European scene during the thirties of the present century, culminating in the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, a long crescendo of protest and denunciation rose through political writings and speeches, as also through the imaginative and creative literature of the period. A conviction that, in an age when all that is dear to the human heart is imperiled in the general uncertainty of fate in an impending disaster, all forms of artistic expression should remain the handmaids of politics, gained secure ground; and, during the thirties, the poet turned politician wrote much dreary and ephemeral polemic. Though it may be admitted that the poet cannot cut himself off completely from contemporary life, it is equally true that he ceases to be a poet so far as he merely engrosses himself in transient affairs

Escapism is dubbed as undesirable only by those who forget that all poetry is a sort of escape, and that great poetry is always composed in "Ivory Towers" far from "the herd, the community, (which is) hard, selfish and, to further its own efficiency, is a traitor to the human nature which expresses itself in solitude." (E. M. Forster.) None can deny that when political shibboleths shall shrink thin and melt away with the years, and shall be long forgotten, there will remain the wind, the heath, the human spirit. None can also deny that the poet's main concern is with life, beauty, birth, love, death, the unchanging cycle.

Conclusion

Post-war poetry is thus poetry of reaction and experiment. It is the poetry of despair, gloom and pessimism. It represents a complete break with the past. It is much oppressed by psychology and its methods. It is certainly hazardous to risk any final word as to its lasting character. Shedding all that is unessential, the experiments of today may be the accredited practice of tomorrow, and the convention of a not distant future. That T. S. Eliot's 'Waste Land' has already 'dated' like the earlier plays of Shaw, to a certain extent, is a feature, however, far from assuring as to the permanence of much post-war poetry, and a sad criticism of its preoccupation with only what belongs to an age and not for all time.